TRANSCRIPTION RE:

CSUMB Founding Faculty
Oral History Project 1995-98
Rina Benmayor, Project Director

Interview with John Ittelson
Professor of Multimedia and Instructional Technology
Science, Technology and Information Resources Center
College of Science

Interviewer, Rina Benmayor, Professor Emerita
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Benmayor: Okay. Today is October 10, 2019 and this is Rina Benmayor. I am here with John Ittelson for the CSUMB Founding Faculty Oral History Project. John, do we have your permission to record this interview?

Ittelson: Yes, you do. And it’s like old times. This is great fun.

Benmayor: Yes. Thank you. Okay, can we start by asking you to state your name and what position you held at CSUMB? And something about your background, but just very briefly.

Ittelson: Okay. The name is John Ittelson. I was a faculty member at CSUMB, one of the I think twenty seven founding faculty members. I taught our classes and for a while I also directed what was called the DOL Project, which was the Distance and Online Learning. So this was in the early days of CSU Monterey Bay. We were trying to develop new and exciting ways of providing instruction not only for our students on campus but for people who could not make it to campus.

Benmayor: I heard a little noise in the background. Is that your computer?

Ittelson: I’m a tech guy. Yeah, that was one of my alarms letting me know that somebody walked in front of the house.

Benmayor: Oh, my goodness. Okay. [Laughs] All right. I want to take you back to the very first moment when you heard about CSUMB. Where were you? And how did that happen?

Ittelson: Well, it was actually two moments that come to mind. The first being part of the California State University system, because I was a faculty member at CSU Chico or Chico State. So we knew that a new campus was in the works. But I first found out about it when a colleague of mine that I had been teaching asked me to write a letter of recommendation for him. He and I worked at the American Film
Institute for Sony doing workshops in L.A. He was living in Monterey because SONY had moved some of their operations to doing CD ROM’s, that tells you how long ago it was. He asked if I would write a recommendation. I said, “Sure, I’d be glad to write you a recommendation.” I did that. Then the next time was a more chance one. I was dating a woman who I’d worked with in the cable industry. She was the Executive Director of Cable in the Classroom and there was a conference in L.A. She was flying from Washington, D.C. to San Francisco to go to the conference. I was flying from Chico to San Francisco to go on to L.A. And we decided we’d connect on the plane and go together. This was early in our relationship. As we were flying from San Francisco down to L.A. we passed the beautiful Monterey Bay and pointed out Santa Cruz and pointed out Monterey. I said, “See that big pile of sand? That’s going to be the next CSU campus on the former Fort Ord.” She said, “Why don’t you transfer there?” I said, “It doesn’t work that way. They’re gonna hire new faculty members.” She said, “Why don’t you just apply?” And I said, “Well, I could apply but I’ve been at Chico for 17 years. I’m one of the old guard. They’re not gonna want the old guard, they’re gonna want new guard. A friend of mine is applying and I’m writing him a recommendation.” She said, “Well, you’re not trying to date him.”

Benmayor: [Laughs]

[3:50] Ittelson: So I thought if this is gonna make someone I’m trying to date happy and at that time I think stamps were 48-cents. So I said, “Sure, I’ll apply.” I did apply. Of course the next thing I heard was late May when they said you are invited for an interview. But that was the first moment when I pointed out the window of that United Airline and said, “See that big pile of sand?”

Benmayor: Wow. That’s a lovely story. What year was that?

Ittelson: That was 1995.

Bobbi Ittelson: Four.

Ittelson: No, 1995. The campus … my wife is in the room so she’ll make sure I’m correct. No, the campus opened in ’95 and so the founding faculty were there for the year in ’94. Then they started doing
interviews during that summer. My interview was in May. I didn’t get to meet the President at that interview because he was still not even on campus. In fact, the term campus is sort of a misnomer. There was no campus at that point. Then I met Peter, and after I was offered the job then I met Peter Smith [President]. I wasn’t going to give up a position at Chico and go to this crazy new campus if I didn’t at least know who was going to be leading it. And then after that I accepted the position.

**Benmayor:** Um hmm. So you and I were in the same cohort, then.

**Ittelson:** We were part of the first cohort. I think the term we used was pioneers. Some of my colleagues at other campuses referred to us as the crazy faculty but we were definitely pioneers.

**Benmayor:** A-hah. Okay. Can you remember what you thought or your impressions were when you first drove onto Fort Ord for this interview?

**Ittelson:** Actually I can give you the impressions I got in anticipation of going onto it. I got the invite and then I said, “Well, I should prepare for this.” I wanted to make a presentation and I wanted to get a little bit more information about the campus and who would be in the committee. You know, being an academic you want to be prepared. So I said, “Well, where on campus are we meeting?” And they said, “Well, we’re really not meeting on campus. It’s still being worked on.” There are some former buildings, in this case it was the old dental facility that was one of the better buildings. They said we were going to be holding interviews there. And since it was a position involving technology and multimedia I said, “Well, will you have a computer and a screen or a television set so I can give examples of some of the student projects that I do and some of the activities?” And they actually said, “Well, we don’t know whether there is even a television or screen there.”

**Benmayor:** [Chuckles]

[6:50] **Ittelson:** So being the “be prepared” I came down with my own projector, my own screen, my own computer and it was very strange driving in. The gate was still there but clearly not manned. The sign that normally said “Welcome to Fort Ord,” you could see where the letters had been removed. [There was]
almost no signage. We wound our way and finally found the building. We were there early and of course. The interview is important and driving all the way from Chico, we didn’t know how long it would take so we got there considerably before the interview. And then we said, “Well, we’ll just find someplace near. A coffee shop or something.” It turns out there’s not a lot near there. There was still the Commissary and there was I think a Burger King but it was run by the remaining army groups there. So we just sort of wandered around what looked like a deserted movie set until our appointed interview.

**Benmayor:** And tell me about that interview. Do you remember who was on your committee and what that was like?

**Ittelson:** Oh, I should. Gee. Now I should remember all.

**Bobbi Ittelson:** Marsha Moroh.

**Ittelson:** Yeah, I should remember who it is. I know Marsha Moroh who later became Dean was there. She was representing the department. She was a founding faculty member. Bob van Spyk was on the committee because he was also a faculty member. There were a number of other people there I should remember.

**Benmayor:** That’s okay. It doesn’t [matter].

**Ittelson:** From Sociology… No, I should know because I ran into his brother recently. [Chuckles] Anyway, but so it was a very informal setting. It was a little different because I think I was the only committee member who walked in with a cart of equipment. I think that helped because I was able to demonstrate the sort of projects I do with my students. I’ve always been interested in having hands on experience for my students and having them work on projects that had an impact off the campus. I did that in Chico. We did public service announcements for the schools. We recorded basketball games. Essentially what the students were doing in my classes in Chico were trying to figure out how to apply their skills to the community. That had resonated with the committee and the best way to show it was to show other students’ work that I directed before.
Benmayor: Now, coming from Chico I was curious, were you offered a position with tenure?

Without tenure? How did that work?

Ittelson: Well, you may recall that none of the faculty, the 27 faculty were hired with tenure. So at Chico, I had been there 17 years and never had had a sabbatical and those are fairly hard to get. So I’d managed to get a sabbatical from Chico for the ’95-96 academic year. I was going to have a sabbatical with CNN News. They had a student programming show called CNN Newsroom. So my sabbatical was going to be looking at that program. In addition to the on-air show they had a web portion to it. So already I was scheduled to be gone for a year’s leave. And then I had the opportunity for this position. So that worked out well. So I went back to Chico and said, “Rather than doing the leave at CNN, I’d like to take the leave to do one year at CSU Monterey Bay.” I figured that’s sort of a safe way of trying it out. Plus, Peter Smith originally had indicated he was trying to have a campus that did not have tenure. So yeah, I did not have to give up my tenured position until I was granted tenure at Monterey Bay. But when I joined I was just like the rest of us 27, ready to take on a grand adventure.

Benmayor: Right, right. So were you in the first group that went up for tenure? I don't remember.

Ittelson: Oh, okay. So I guess you want the little secrets of it all.

Benmayor: [Laughs] Well, whatever you want to talk about is fine.

[pause]

Ittelson: Okay. I didn’t know we were going to get into issues of tenure and RTP.

Benmayor: Oh, I’m just curious. That’s all.

Ittelson: Well, it’s an interesting story and it’s fun because, you know, tenure for academics is such a sensitive subject. So the first 27 faculty were hired without tenure. Peter Smith made a decision that he was going to try to have an alternative to tenure on our new campus. When I interviewed with Peter, when I was given the job offer I was told that no one was granted tenure. When I interviewed with Peter he explained how they were going to try to have a campus that was an alternative to the traditional tenure
model. In those discussions at that point the woman who had suggested that I, apply, Bobbi, my wife was now my fiancé. The little challenge that we had was I proposed to her when I lived in Chico but she didn’t agree to marry me till I moved to Monterey! She was a Washington woman. So Chico and the rural community was not going to work for her.

[13:31] So when I went to interview with Peter, get to know him and for him to get to know me, in the discussion about tenure it came up. I said, “Are you going to have tenure?” And he said, “No we’re not.” I said, “Well, look, I’ve got tenure. I have the sabbatical that I’m taking now, so I don’t need to worry about it.” But I basically said, “If you’re going to have tenure I want to have tenure. He said, “Well, I’m not hiring anybody with tenure.” I said, “Well, you don't have to hire anybody.” With the coaching of my wife, who has known the academic community, she said, “Why don’t you use your sabbatical application as your tenure application?” And so, I said, “Peter, I’ll take the job but on the condition. I don't have to be granted tenure, but I want to be reviewed for tenure as soon as it’s determined that we’re not going to have tenure.” And that’s what happened. The campus opened up. Those early crazy meetings, where we were all meeting at once, and then the decision came from HR that all the tenured faculty were going to meet to decide the tenure process and the untenured faculty were going to meet to figure out how we’re going to apply. At that point it was going to be the twelve tenured faculty members, which were the founding faculty. But they had reviewed my application and decided to grant me tenure, so I was the 13th tenured faculty member. So I was tenured before the first crew, the 27. A number of my colleagues go, “How did you do that?” I said, “I put it in my contract.” Because a number of people said, “Why didn’t I think of that?” But that’s how I got tenure in probably the first round.

**Benmayor:** Right. I remember there were eight of us who presented our stuff to the committee of 12, the founding faculty who had tenure. That was I think in January? February? Of ’96? And Ken Nishita, who was our union rep was encouraging all of us to go for it even though it wasn’t in our contract.

**Ittelson:** Right.
Benmayor: Anyway. So tell me about your first assignments. What center were you in? What were you hired to do? And what did it really turn out to be?

Ittelson: You know, there were [chuckles]. We had so many different things going on there. I was at the MLC, the Media Learning Center. And we had Information Technology and Communication Design. So it was sort of a computer science-like and a multimedia and design [program]. The campus was trying to do things differently. It was trying to be integrated. There was a Center for Online Learning that eventually disappeared. That’s when the distance online learning program started which eventually the DOL Department, which luckily they changed the name but eventually became our Extended Ed. At the beginning, you know, in some disciplines if you have a faculty member, a log and students you’re in business. You can sit and talk. You can converse. You can ponder the great issues of the day. But if you are in a technology program where you have to teach people networking or you need to be able to create a multimedia experience, do a video recording, you need labs and you need those facilities. I mentioned when I came for the interview there weren’t even televisions to look at things. So I remember showing up a few days before class opened and we were in one of our what seemed to be continuous faculty meetings and ad hoc meetings. You know, there was seven in the morning until seven at night. Somebody said, “How do I get a television and VCR to play a videotape in the classroom?” And there were blank looks all over the place and we didn’t have any. Luckily at that time my wife, who worked Cable in the Classroom and they provide VCR’s and television sets for schools across the U.S. that were getting free educational programming from the cable system and they were being distributed through the Home Shopping Channel, I said, “Peter, I could maybe seen if I could get that price because it’s discounted and they know how to deal with schools.” At which point Peter handed me his credit card and we went on the Home Shopping Channel and ordered VCR’s and television monitors and a cart. It came with a cart. So that was the start of the audiovisual support at CSUMB. But, so the early days, you know, in our classes where we were teaching how to do computer programming for multimedia, how to set up networks, those students, the true
pioneers, learned about the technology through setting up the labs. I remember the classes, we had a syllabus, I had the goals of what I wanted to do. I taught very similar classes at Chico. But I had a lab full of 20 computers. I had monitors. I had a network. And I remember going to that class and saying, “You are really going to learn this from the ground up.” There were piles of boxes in the back of the room. And I said, “Okay, each one of you get a box. You’re gonna open it up. You need to save all the paperwork. We need to make sure that we don’t confuse things from other things.” Our campus was a campus of convenience. It was never on the California masterplan. So it wasn’t in the budget. And it happened so quickly that we were actually purchasing furniture and computer equipment using GE financing.

Benmayor: GE. GE meaning General Education?


Benmayor: Oh. GE!

Ittelson: GE. You know, like you buy a car or you buy a refrigerator you get financing. You know, it was borrowing on credit. So we were putting in orders for the equipment. The founding faculty and then the new faculty as we came in started making lists of things that we needed to teach with. The strange thing is that all the hardware was showing up but none of the software to operate it. We finally went to Purchasing and said, “You know, we’re getting close. You know, we finally got it all hooked up but now I need to get some software so that we can teach the students.” And they said, “Well, that’s on hold.” I said, “What do you mean?” Well, the GE, and that’s when I learned GE finances, was willing to buy the hardware because it could be repossessed but the software has no value so they, you know, once you crack that seal on the software. . . . So then we started realizing that we had to put a little software on every hardware order so that it sort of got blended in. But I remember waiting almost a week to get some of the first applications that we wanted to run in the labs for our students because had the hardware but none of the software yet.
Benmayor: Wow. [Chuckles] And were you always in the MLC or did you have to teach classes in a temporary building somewhere?

Ittelson: No, the Media Learning Center was one of the first open buildings. You know, we – [chuckles]. There was one class that we had, it was not a technology based class and since there were a limited number of classrooms and maybe you had some of them. I think it was Fitch Middle School.

Benmayor: Um hmm.

Ittelson: So I remember going there and trying to explain to the students that were attending this class that this was higher education because they were sitting in chairs that were designed for elementary school children.

Benmayor: [Laughs] I remember that.

Ittelson: Well, you know, one of the sort of amazing things, I think amazing for us as faculty but I think even more amazing for the students and I question their parents’ value system, we didn’t get to set foot on campus until literally three days after the campus was supposedly open. Any other time you want on campus, and some of us had to go there to look at some technology things and cabling, you had to put on shoes and a hard hat to go around the buildings because the buildings were being worked on literally up till the day we opened and still worked on through most of the first three years.

Benmayor: I think they were preparing for Clinton’s inauguration of the campus, right?

[23:25] Ittelson: Well, that’s an interesting event. I don't know if you got to talk to Hank Hendrickson. Hank was the former Base Commander and then he became Peter Smith’s sort of Executive Assistant. The dedication of the campus was going to be done by Clinton because the campus exists because of the Base Closure Act. And Leon Panetta was the Chief of Staff of Bill Clinton at the time. Literally instrumental in getting the campus here. So the opening of our campus was also going to be the announcement of his running for his next term. It was originally scheduled to be held in the playing field, the football field on Fort Ord. That was a nice little stadium. We use it for graduation. But it became obvious that the numbers
that were going to attend were going to be much larger. So they decided to hold it on the Quad of the campus where there the Media Learning Center was. There was the building that was the cafeteria or Food Services. There were the dorms that had been converted to housing. They were the old Viet Nam era volunteer Army dorms but they were being upgraded. But it was just sand and dirt. When they decided to move from the stadium to that Quad, the Secret Service had come by and there were drainage ditches along Inter Garrison and they were filling those full of sand bags because they couldn’t let that gulley be there. The next thing I see, there’s fencing coming up. They were fencing in the whole Quad. I’m seeing these people putting up all the fencing around here and I walked outside the Media Learning Center and there was Hank Hendrickson. And they’re painting the buildings at the same time that they are leveling the dirt with all the dust blowing! I said to Hank, “This is crazy.” Luckily the color of the paint, which Sally Smith I think helped Peter Smith pick, I said, “It’s lucky the paint looks pretty close to the color of sand but isn’t it a little crazy painting with all this dust?” And he said, “Well, we got the bulldozers leveling out the Quad.” I looked at him and said, “Well, Hank, I guess you need to do that. When is the Astroturf coming in.” And I thought I was joking. At which point Hank said, “That should be arriving around six tomorrow.”

Benmayor: [Laughs]

[26:14] Ittelson: I guess in oral histories you want the little clever notes! So as Hank’s telling me this he takes a phone call and then I said, “Go ahead, take it.” He got off the phone and he goes, “Damn CIA. I mean FBI,” or … [chuckles]. And the next morning Bobbi and my son, Brendan and Sara came down and we watched them roll the Astroturf like a movie set for the Quad for the opening of the campus.

Benmayor: [Chuckles] That’s a wonderful story, John. I remember that very vividly but nobody else has told us the story, so you have a great memory.

Ittelson: Well, and the Media Learning Center was where Bill Clinton and his team were. The Secret Service brought them there. And then moved them to where the podium was. My office was one of the offices closest to the door. So one of the Secret Service came in at some point and had a dog and
smelled my office. It was a crazy time. And of course if you think of what it takes for a campus to do any
of that and I have to say….

Well, another funny story, okay, on this. The faculty and staff were excited that President was going
to open the campus. So we thought, “Wouldn’t it be great? We’re going to get to meet the President, the 27
of us. He’s going to come meet the faculty because we’re opening the University.” Well, it turns out we
weren’t all gonna get to meet the President. So they said, “Go to the Administration Office and there is a
big bowl and you are to put your business card in the bowl.” I don't know if you did that.

**Benmayor:** No.

**Ittelson:** No? But they said if you want a chance to get the meet and greet with the President prior,
because 200 of his close personal friends who were contributing to his campaign . . . But they said,
“We’re going to select a number of faculty. It will be done by lottery.” So I went over to the President’s
office, I dropped my business card, there was somebody from the President’s advance team. As I dropped
my business card in I get, “You know, the last lottery I entered sent me to Viet Nam!” I figured that ought
to get my card taken out and ripped up. It turns out my card was drawn so I did get to go to that reception.
And there were about I think 150 people. Prior to coming to campus. . . . It was held…I’m not sure where it
was. It was one of the parts of the military base that the military still had. They had a reception line and I
got to shake hands with Clinton. It was an amazing experience. Anybody who has met him says, “You
know you feel like you are the only person in the room.” I was wearing a tie, he commented on my tie.
Then two weeks later I had a picture of me shaking hands with Bill Clinton.

**[29:49] Benmayor:** That’s lovely. That’s a wonderful story. Yeah, we were all very envious, I’ll have to
say. I don't remember about putting the business card. Maybe I did. But yeah, we were envious. I think
Richard Bains also got to go.

**Ittelson:** Richard was there.

**Benmayor:** A-huh. Yeah.
Ittelson: And we were trying to figure out how we got it. Neither of us were very lucky at things.

So. [Chuckles]

Benmayor: So, switching a little bit, you told a story about how you learned about the campus. But the campus also had a particular Vision and I was curious about how you connected with that Vision and what in the Vision Statement did you see as pertaining to you?

Ittelson: Yeah, the interesting thing about the Vision Statement is it really existed prior to the campus. When we applied, the founding faculty and the community had worked on “Who should this campus serve and how should it serve it?” So you had to respond to that in your application. So it, was a conscious decision. But it’s not one I made just for this campus. Actually all my degrees are from Northwestern University. Even a high school summer program. I went to a high school summer program and then that convinced me to go there as an undergrad. I went as an undergrad and then I went off to Viet Nam. I went back and did a master’s and ended up staying and doing my doctorate. My doctorate was in Industrial Engineering. My master’s was in Educational Television. And my undergraduate was in Broadcasting. But when I was working on my doctorate in Industrial Engineering, I got involved in this new trend, this amazing thing, the potential of using computers for teaching. It was called CAT. Computers and Teaching. So that started my, you know, career really involved in instructional technology and using technology to teach. But being at Northwestern, a research institution, I think the assumption was I would go off to some research institution and teach the way you do at research institutions. I actually had a job offer at Chapel Hill in their Instructional Technology program. Then they put a freeze on all hiring that year because there had been some discrimination issues. So they said we’re postponing, literally three days before I went out for the interview, they said “We’re putting all on hold for a year.” I had one more year left in my contract at Northwestern but one of my best friends at Northwestern’s wife was from Pasadena and they were not going to stay in the Midwest. They were going to go to California. When I made my resumé for Chapel Hill, I printed 100 of them so I had 98 of them left. So to appease my California friend,
every Friday we’d go have a hot fudge sundae in Chicago, which is hard to do because most ice cream places aren’t open, look through the Chronicle of Higher Ed for positions in California, and as a ritual, he [33:23] would send off his applications and I’d send off mine. A week after I had the notice from Chapel Hill that the search was on hold for a year, I got a letter from CSU Chico, Chico State. Would I be interested in an interview? I did the interview. Got offered the job. I went to my mentor -- you know everybody who has a positive doctoral experience has a mentor within the field --, Claude Mathis. He was a Southern gentleman. I joke that I didn’t really get a Ph.D. in Instructional Psychology but I got one in trying to be a Southern gentleman and failed. I remember Claude saying, “You know, you’ve really worked hard. You could stay here but it’s not going to teach you anything new. Why don’t you go out to California for a year? Then Chapel Hill will be available or you could see what you want to do?” So I took the position at Chico. I always knew I liked teaching but I really loved teaching. I loved the small community. I got to learn more. . . I was from the Midwest so I had the vision of California as all the crazies, you know, California on the edge, that nuts and fruits went there. I found out it wasn’t quite as crazy as I thought although I did arrive the year Prop 13 passed.

So it was really the direct teaching experience... Chico, not to the extent that we were able to pull off at CSUMB, had a lot of first generation students graduating from Chico. Chico had been around for much longer. It was an ag [agricultural] community. But it drew a lot of students from the San Francisco Bay Area and from the L.A. area that wanted to get out of Southern California. So I also have a learning disability. I don’t consider it a disability but how it was defined. I’m dyslexic. The arrangements of letters on a printed page don’t mean a lot to me. I do stay up at night and wonder, “Is there is a Dog?”

Benmayor: [Chuckles]

Ittelson: And so I ended up doing a lot of work with the students for Disabled Services at Chico and again working with students who had been disenfranchised or didn’t have opportunities. So when a campus really said its theme is to provide the broadest educational experience to underserved Californians
with a focus in teaching and equity I said, “This is great! What better place to be?” It’s sort of like my experiences at Chico had really helped prepare me to take on what was a challenge. The CSU was not as strong as it needed to be to provide access. We had students who were ill prepared to take the challenges of college courses not through any fault of their own but through an educational system that did not provide equity in schools, so you had some kids from really great schools that prepared them for college and you had other kids who graduated from high school and they could not get through a freshman math class or do the Freshman Comp. So the fact that there was a campus that was going to serve the Central Valley. . . . It’s an incredible microcosm we have here. We have some of the wealthiest members of the state and some of the poorest underserved within Monterey County. [Phone rings] So, you know, having that inequity staring right in our face and saying this is something we are going to solve, and our Service Learning which became an early theme of CSU Monterey Bay. . . . When I was at Chico we had our own little Service Learning but it was sort of indirect. I would get a call from a community group that needed to create a multimedia experience for a charity event. I mentioned that my students did Public Service Announcements for the local television station. In Chico there were student groups that served the community but there wasn’t really an active push from the faculty. And there clearly wasn’t a curricular experience. So when we actually had the Service Learning courses both at the lower division and the upper division, so our lower division students could get involved and learn about the community and in the upper division they could apply what they learned to a need in the community. . . . I still think of a Capstone project that I supervised where my students ended up as their Capstone project creating an internet network for a halfway house that gave those individuals access to the internet. These were two boys that did a joint – two men, as I get older, but anyway --, two men who did this project for this not for profit organization. I think they at one point envisioned they were going to go off to Silicon Valley and get tech jobs for the big networking companies. They ended up staying engaged with community organizations and there are so many of the Capstone projects that we worked on where students changed their career, changed their
attitudes based on the Service Learning requirements, and that Service Learning requirement comes out of our Vision Statement. The Vision of who we serve and how we use our skills and knowledge to serve those communities.

Benmayor: So you taught Service Learning all the time?

Ittelson: No, no. I actually did participate. Service Learning grew. We eventually had an individual faculty member who taught the Service Learning course. I believe I taught it a couple of terms. You know, we rotated courses. But eventually we had certain faculty who ended up being more permanent because it’s a lot to learn, a lot of moving parts. But I taught the Capstone classes for a number of years. And the number of Capstone projects that were either an outcome from a Service Learning course or became a theme of a Service Learning project that our students did . . . . I think just like our campus early on said teaching writing is not the purview of the English Department or whatever we called it at that point, that Service Learning is just not the purview of those faculty in the Service Learning Center or a Service Learning faculty member. It’s part of the thread intertwining of our campus activity.

Benmayor: The Vision Statement also had a pretty important part on technology. You know, the campus is going to be very technologized and do things, new things and differently. Did you have some input in that?

Ittelson: Well, the Vision Statement existed. I had input in that our department ended up teaching the Tech Tools, which was the course that we created to help meet the goals of the Service Learning. Boy, if we had any idea of what technology would do! We were ahead of the time but behind the potential. What is it, that people predict much quicker at adoption of technology, so we predict technology changes will happen faster than they really do. But we also minimize how much the effect will be over time. I know with Tech Tools our goal was to make sure our students had the skills to be able to take advantage of the technology. If they were going to be writing papers, many of our students did not have access to computers, they didn’t have experience with mobile media, and writing, for example, the ability to do a
first draft. To cut and paste. So we wanted to make sure that our students had the power that technology was at that time primarily just being offered to business and industry. But the challenges were … When the campus opened there was a story that it was not going to have a library. I believe it was Newsweek that [43:42] talked about the new high tech campus in the CSU for the 21st Century. And at some point somebody said it was not going to have a library. In fact, we really didn’t have a traditional library. It was going to have books but the difference with our library is it was focusing on access rather than acquisition. So we may not have the biggest library but because of technology and Inter Library Loan and PDF’s we could get access. And that theme of access carries through with our campus. Our campus was the idea of access. People who didn’t have access to higher education for whether it’s socioeconomic, cultural, whatever those issues, we were going to provide that access.

Technology helps facilitate that access. So I think the Tech Tools was a goal of making sure that the students had the basic skills to be able to use technology to continue their education. It used to be part of GE [General Education requirements]. It’s not now part of GE. But at that time it was a Learning Requirement. The hope was that the Tech Tools rather than being in one center with our Technology, that every program would eventually have faculty who had the same level of technical skills so that you could be teaching technology skills at the same time you are teaching your subject matter. So in the World Languages and Cultures the lab director was helping students learn how to videotape what they were doing, learning how to make multimedia presentations but doing it in the target language that they were learning. In what used to be ESSP --Every Simple Science Possible --, they’ve now got different divisions, but ESSP was a unified science program. But they were very active in the early days of GPS. Again, a technology, we know the GPS technology now is driving all our maps, making us incapable of finding our way on our own because we rely so much on technology. So there were lots of discussions around tech tools and I’m not sure it was universally loved as some of us in the tech side of the house. But I think the goal behind the emphasis on technology was again one of access, just like the library wasn’t collecting objects, it [47:02]
was making access. And think back to ’95. We still had newspapers. We were still buying magazines.

Digital photography had not taken off. Cable was thousands of channels of useless programming. Social media -

**Benmayor:** It still is.

**Ittelson:** Yeah, it still is. Social media didn’t exist. On our campus we really didn’t have a Student Union. In fact, they are just dedicating a Student Union now after 25 years. So I know somebody came to our program early on and they were looking for interns. And they said, “Where do you post things? Where’s the Student Center?” The people they were sending out to try to recruit students were used to going to a campus where there was a Student Center and there would be a Jobs Board. And there would be a Ride Board. Well, we never had that on our campus. That was our, you know, electronic bulletin boards. We never had a physical space like that. So technology really became the backbone of a lot of our communications. I do remember early on, I don't know if any of the 27 founding faculty ever slept because I remember teaching all day, we would be having dinner, and then we would be having various committee meetings afterwards. And during the first semester right when classes were supposed to get out we would get in our cars, drive to the Quad and pull in and turn our lights on because they didn’t have electricity to lights in the Quad. And I just remember driving down there and then coming back and being tired and going to sleep and then waking up the next morning and realize that my colleagues had been up till two or three sending emails.

**Benmayor:** Yeah. I was going to ask you about the workload and how that was for you. Compared to, for example, your workload at Chico.

**Ittelson:** Well, at Chico I had been there 17 years. At the time that I left I was the Faculty Coordinator for the Master’s in Instructional Technology. I was a senior faculty member. And we had a four-course-per-term teaching load because we had three unit courses there. But typically I had one course load release for the graduate program which actually took more time than teaching a class. But I usually
had some sort of grant or contract. So I had a very reasonable life. I was able to get things done. When the
 campus opened up, part of the discussion at the interview was this is a start-up. This is gonna be new. And I
 had started a startup. At Chico I left for a couple of years to start a software firm in San Francisco. I had
 just gotten tenure, so I went down to San Francisco, I took a leave from the university to start this company
 with a colleague at Northwestern. When I joined the firm we moved it from his living room to an office. As
 we were looking for offices we couldn’t find any that we could really afford. We found one that we could
 afford but we couldn’t afford the custodial service. So I remember Jim and I on a regular basis waiting till
 everybody left for the day and then we’d go down to the custodial closet, get the vacuum cleaner, get the
 dusters and clean the office. [Chuckles] We didn’t want our staff to realize we were too broke to afford
 somebody to service the office.

[50:56] When you’re in a startup you do everything. So I remember the interview. They said, “Do you
 know that startups are crazy and have a lot of work?” And I explained, “Yeah, I didn’t think in a startup I
 would be the one vacuuming the office after hours!” The other thing I didn’t realize is that I’d be paying
 employees more money than I was earning and they would be coming in two hours later and leaving two
 hours earlier. I said, “I think I’ve got an idea that a startup is all hands on deck and every day is a different
 day.” I said I really enjoyed that and I sort of feel at Chico I was doing startups because every time we took
 on a project. . . . We did some satellite video conferences as part of the outreach and each one of those
 was like a different company because each videoconference was a different theme. So I think naively I had
 a good idea of what a startup was going to be. I think when I came here I’d had no idea what it would be
 like. Literally unpacking boxes, driving on the campus so the students could see, and I think the chaos that
 happens. . . . This was so much different than a startup because with a startup, you’re starting a company
 or you are starting an organization, it has a theme. It has a limited number of people and you are growing
 on it. We were like 27 startups. Every faculty member was starting up their academic program. We were
 nine centers. I remember a faculty meeting, I think it was late November, it might even be early December
and somebody said, “How do we turn in grades?” [Chuckles] And I remember another faculty member go, “Oh, no. We’re like Santa Cruz. We’re not doing grades.” And somebody said, “Oh yeah, we’re doing grades.” And somebody said, “Well, who put a grading thing in their syllabus?” I wanted to say, “Gee, we don’t even know whether we are giving letter grades or not? We don’t know how to turn them in. This is clearly a startup! Peter Smith – I’m not sure if this was just his personality or this was a thought out plan--,” but his [approach] was “Let a thousand flowers bloom and run until you are tackled.” I remember talking to Hank Hendrickson because I was trying to get some technology stuff hooked up and it was going to involve a satellite dish and some other things. Hank was explaining all the procedures and processes. He says, “Then again, you know you are on a campus where you run until you get tackled!” [Chuckles] He sort of gave me permission. I said, “Okay, Hank. I’m running. Chase after me.” Because, you know, it was herding cats. It was herding cats.

**Benmayor:** Yeah.

[54:16] **Ittelson:** And to go back to the Vision Statement, so many of the discussions were centered around the Vision Statement. Where on most campuses you are dealing with your own faculty in your own discipline, you know. Is this important or is that important? Should we teach that or not? But with us, I remember those faculty meetings, having the discussion [about] should Tech Tools be required or not required? Should it be taught within the discipline? Who is responsible for the introductory writing classes? How do we deal with the students who need math remediation? We had a common language around what the goals and objectives of the campus were. It was good because I think that’s part of the reason the campus is as strong as it is today. But also you have to listen to people with a lot of different opinions and ideas and see different perspectives. Not that I worry, because I think CSUMB is going to do fine, but I do miss that “we’re one group fighting the battle of meeting the Vision Statement.”

**Benmayor:** Yeah. That’s very well put. There were also conflicts on the campus around all sorts of issues. Did any of those affect you in any direct way? How do you remember them?
Ittelson: There were considerable conflicts. Whenever you have a group of people who are motivated and have a goal and an objective that is not universally understood by everyone there’s gonna be conflict. Peter Smith was not one to shy away from conflict. There were staff that were here before Peter came on. So there were administrative conflicts. There were academic conflicts. There were limited resources even though just even “Can I find a classroom?” I tried to avoid the conflicts as much as I could where I didn’t feel I could be either a facilitator for reconciliation or if the conflict was going to impact my ability to connect with my students. I think, luckily, I think most of the time the conflicts that we had we really never brought the students into the conflicts and the battles, which I’ve seen on some campuses, where the faculty members are upset and then they get their students upset. It’s not a positive experience typically. I would say that I think some of the people who came to the campus and left, I’m really sorry they left because they had conflicts with the administration. I thought their voices were reasonable and [58:03] should be heard. I don't think it’s possible to not have conflict when things are moving so fast. Particularly when you have a faculty that cares about their students. I have to say I think there weren’t any conflicts that I felt were personal vendettas. I think they were philosophical differences on how to do the Mission and the Vision of the campus. As I think back I don't know if there could have been a conflict-free establishment of a university. I also think that the timing of, you know, those years, nothing like we’re having now with the MeToo movement and the Black Lives Matter, but it was the beginning of a lot of individuals who had not had a voice beginning to hear their voice. So I think those conflicts, if anything, sort of were the first signs that a lot more people are going to have to come to the party and there’s gonna be a lot more discussion, a lot more interaction. But there’s no doubt that there were philosophical battles and to some people it became very personal. But I don't think I lost any friends, I may not have made any friends, because I don't think I took stands when people wanted me to. I thought the easiest focus was is this helping our students persist, which was a challenge on campuses and still is, helping them persist and helping them obtain their educational goals. If you use that as your focus, then it doesn’t matter whether we
did this particular policy or [whether] that course was counted in GE and this one wasn’t. I mean they all impact but I have four classes or three classes and I’ve got 26 to 35 students and I’ve got some Capstone students. If you focus on that you don't have much time to do much of anything else.

**Benmayor:** Right, right. So kind of in summary because you must be tired, we’ve been talking for a long time. Or you’ve been talking for a long time. . .

**Ittelson:** That’s my norm but I assume that’s what you want in an oral history.

**Benmayor:** Yes, indeed.

**Ittelson:** I’d love to flip cards and talk to you! You and I know that part of one of my joys on campus was working with you and you remember Troy Challenger, who now works there, and the work that you did in oral history which you’re doing now which I think is so critical -- like I wanted to do today - - is, “Hey, there’s a new technology that can make your life easier.” And you would always say, “I’m not sure it would make it easier.” But then Troy and I would try to figure out how to do it and I think I helped with some audio recording procedures and eventually some video.

**Benmayor:** You did.

**Ittelson:** I did a lot of work with our World Languages and Cultures. I think we did touch on the fact that we considered someone that had a language already an asset rather than a negative and that we still think foreign language is incredible and really important and having a global viewpoint. So it was being able to reach out to disciplines that weren’t my own was one of the joys.

**Benmayor:** Well you were known as the Tech Toys Guy. Because whenever we had a question as to how would we do this with technology we would always come to you and you would have a new toy to train us with. [Chuckles]

**Ittelson:** Much to the chagrin of my wife.
Benmayor: So what, in summary, what do you think were your greatest accomplishments and contributions to the campus and what were some of the things that you wanted to do that you weren’t able to do? Or maybe start with that first.

Ittelson: Yeah. What I wasn’t able to do. I think when the campus opened there was talk of greater interdisciplinarity. I was in what was the Information and Technology and Communication Design which had multimedia and computers and the world wide web and its great expanse. Then we had Teledramatic Arts with …

Benmayor: Luis Valdez.

Ittelson: Luis Valdez. And at that point, since I had a Radio, Television and Film background, I ended up teaching some classes in TAT. So even though we had departments the lines were very were dotted. Maybe not even dotted. I’m not even sure we had lines. And Luis had an introductory class for Teledramatic Arts and clearly there’s nobody better than Luis to talk about the arts. But I was the gadget guy, so Luis asked if I would team teach the Intro to Teledramatic Arts with him. I just remember going, “You want me in the same room with you?”

Benmayor: [Chuckles]

Ittelson: I was doing the technology stuff. And Luis was very much, he clearly, he’d done films and stuff but he was the writer. He was the heart and soul of what he created. He had other technology people. But he wanted to learn this. He really wanted Teledramatic Arts to be emerging. I just remember team teaching with him and just in awe, like the students were. I mean I could listen to him for hours. I would talk about some part about the technology and something about history of broadcasting. I just remember Luis coming up to me and giving me a hug and just thanking me for being willing to teach with him. I was going, “Willing to teach with you? You’re thanking me?” I said, “This was one of the best teaching experiences I’ve had because you’re teaching all the media, they are learning how to make the
widgets work, but the widgets aren’t important, it’s the message that comes out from the widgets. And it’s 521 the story.” And Luis was talking about those stories. And as I said it sort of amazed me then.

[1:05:25] As the campus grew and resources got somewhat limited and some of the battles that you talked 523 about, there was less and less interdisciplinary work. And eventually I wasn’t teaching in Teledramatic 524 Arts. Teledramatic Arts really had shifted to being more of a film and traditional media. The World Theater 526 sort of separated. But at the beginning the start of the World Theater, the Teledramatic Arts, and our 527 program really were blended and we weren’t able to sustain that because of the way Academic Programs 528 worked, the way hiring works. So that’s probably my greatest disappointment, that we weren’t able to 529 continue interdisciplinary work. And that’s a problem in all higher education. The silos are tall and deep.

Probably if there was a greatest success it would be the Capstone experience. In the Capstone class 530 you really are a guide on the side. One of the greatest things going through the Capstone experience is 531 students would come into their projects and they would be seeking approval and wanting to know, “Is this 532 what I should do?” I’m a great idea person. I could say, “You could do this, you could do that, you have to 533 decide.” They would go away confused. Again, I’d use technology. I had a tablet where I could write on it 534 what we discussed and have that sheet and hand it to them and say, “This is your next step.” When they 535 would come in the next week or a week after that, I’d pull up my electronic copy so we knew what we 536 talked about, they knew what they talked about. I just remember one student in particular going, “Look, 537 every time we come here you give me a different idea. You give me this … Tell me what to do!” I said, 538 “I’m not going to do that.” He finally came back and he said, “Okay, I’ve looked at all the stuff. This is 539 what I’m gonna do.” I said, “Great. You now own it. This is what I’ve been trying to do for the last four 540 meetings. I don't have to like what you’re doing. You have to like what you’re doing.”

Benmayor: That’s right. That’s right.

Ittelson: I saw that happen so many times. I think probably the best one of this was not only the 543 project but we had the Capstone presentations. So not only did the students have to do the work but they
had to share it to a public. I would have practices for the Capstone presentations. My wife, who was a professional presenter, would come and we would both coach them. We’d come in. I remember two students who were Korean and they did an incredible project but they were having a great deal of difficulty presenting. You know, they were very shy. You first have to speak loud enough that people can hear you. I mean it was that level.

[1:08:54] And I made a promise to my students. I said, “Anytime you want to practice it, I’ll be there to help you.” Well, these two women decided they really wanted to get good at this. So they wanted to practice every night.

**Benmayor:** [Laughs]

**Ittelson:** Bless my wife, for about a week she met with them for about an hour every night. I met with them about two other times. Not only was their project wonderful. It was done at the DMVC which was the Defense Data Center. That’s where they did their Capstone project. They ended up getting a job there based on their Capstone project. And they invited the Director of the DMVC to come to the Capstone presentation and he had never been to one of our Capstone presentations. And their presentation knocked it out of the ballpark. The joys on their face at the end of the presentation, and their parents came up to me and said what have I done to their children? I mean they’d never seen them this vocal. About a week later they came into my office still on a high. And I said, “Well, was it a good experience?” And they said, “Not only was it a good experience. That Director of DMVC asked them to make the same presentation to the whole DMVC.” So I you can’t claim full success for all your students’ successes unless you’re willing to wear every one of your student failures. So I can’t say this is my greatest success but it was my greatest happiness to be part of the success of our students. Now I’m retired. What’s scary, being 25 years since the campus opened, -- and the joy of Facebook --, I have former students who are now retiring.

**Benmayor:** Wow.
Ittelson: Sending me notes about the careers that they’ve had. My son who was in middle school when we started at CSUMB, just recently contacted me. He says, “You know, I’m now working with one of your former students.” And he remembered the student’s Capstone. The student remembered Brendan as my kid. Now all three of us talked and he said, “I never thought professionally I would be dealing with your son.” [Chuckles]

Benmayor: That’s beautiful. [Chuckles] I remember Brandon. He came and set up my computer at home.

Ittelson: Yeah. He’s still in that biz. In fact, when I told him I was talking to you, I wanted to verify that the transcription feature [in Zoom] was on, and at which point Brendan said, “Oh, you’ve got other things you need to tell her.” But one reason you may want to look at it, even though you have somebody else that can transcribe [the interview] is there’s another service that they’re looking. The Zoom conference. And you get a transcript. Then you edit the transcript like you would edit a paper, and it takes that edited transcript and automatically edits the video.

Benmayor: Wow!

Ittelson: Yeah. So this is about technology empowering creative-

Benmayor: John, you continue to be the Tech Toys Guy who gives you great ideas and teaches you how to follow through on it. So I’m going to be looking forward to a session with you on this.

Ittelson: Well, for old time’s sake let’s schedule not a formal oral history and I can tell you the real dope, but let’s schedule a time that we can show some of the new technology. Yes, Brendan who helped you set up your computer can even do more magical things now.

Benmayor: That’s wonderful. Well, John, I want to thank you so much for this lovely interview. You have wonderful stories to share so you’ve made a real good contribution to our oral history project. Thank you for that. And I will be contacting you in terms of the paperwork.

Ittelson: Sounds good. I know technology, I’ll sign the PDF and send it to you.
Benmayor: Okay. So I’m going to stop the recording now.

Ittelson: Sounds good.

(END OF RECORDING)

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