

Theresa Garcia Ruiz

Interviewed by Bibek Luitel
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Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
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Transcribed by Bibek Luitel

[Bibek Luitel]: Well, welcome Theresa. This is Wednesday, November 8, 2023. My name is Bibek Luitel, and I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Today, I am meeting with Ms Theresa Garcia Ruiz, who has been gracious enough to grant me the time to be able to talk about her experiences and observations, while associated with Corpus Christi State University (CCSU)/Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMUCC) as a student in late 80s and early 90s. So, Teri, thank you for your time.

[Theresa Garcia Ruiz]: Thank you. I appreciate you. Asking these questions.

[Bibek Luitel]: To begin with, could you please tell me a little bit about yourself and your association with Corpus Christi State University (CCSU) and/or Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMUCC) as a student in the early 90s?

[Theresa Garcia Ruiz]: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So, I am from Corpus Christi. This is my hometown, so, the university is always had a place here. Back in the in those days, University was known as Corpus Christi State University and it was in upper division; sophomores, freshman and sophomores were not supported, I mean they were not taught that level here on this campus. So it was only juniors and seniors and graduate students. And so. Had a much lower profile in the community, back than. I knew about it, but I never knew anybody that actually attended school here. As when I was in high school in late eighties, of course, that's when students start thinking about their options for going to college, and at the time, there was no four-year option here in corpus christi. So students would either have to plan to go to Del Mar for 2 years and then transfer to CCSU or leave town and go to a university somewhere else. So, at the time this was would have been 80s, 1988-89, there was a lawsuit going on, LULAC and I'm not sure who all I think MALDEF was also involved in the lawsuit to get more support for our university here corpus christi state which was part of the university system of south Texas at that time that included like A&M system, but it was south Texas which was CCSU, Laredo State A&M university and Texas A&I Kingsville. So, the resources that the state allocated for our system was much, much, much less than UT system, A&M system and anybody else. So, that was something that was being kind of fought over in the courts at the time. In the background, students who came of age during that time here, we knew there were changes going on but it was not going to be in time for us. So, we were kind of on the sideline but hopeful.

[Bibek Luitel]: How many years did you study here at CCSU?

[Theresa Garcia Ruiz]: Well, I left Corpus to go to school and in another city, it was a four-year university. I would come back home every summer and take classes here. First two years, I took classes at Del Mar and to transfer to my university. After my sophomore year at that summer, I wanted to take class here at CCSU, but I was not able to because I only had 58 completed credit hours. And, at the time it was very strict you have to have 60. So, even though 3 hours summer class would have put me over that hours not allowed to enroll here until I had actually 60 earned hours. So, 58 would not counted. It was very, the rules were enforced quite stringently. So, I went to Del Mar for another summer. So my first summer here, my first class would have been in 1991 in that summer. And, it was completely different university, it was here in the same place but the feeling of it everything, the size was so much smaller, the students were all adults, it was very different. So, that would have been my first semester here.

[Bibek Luitel]: Ok, great. Well, just flashback retrospective, what kind of academic support was provided by departments and offices of CCSU? for example: library services, or academic advising services, writing center, this kind of things. You also got those supporting services and how do student take those services.

[Theresa Garcia Ruiz]: Right, Right, Right. That's a great question. At that time, I would say that the students support services and that sense like writing centers and like we have CASA today, those not exist. I mean, it was not, we don't even have a concept that was something that could exist. You know, student went to college, you were kind of on your own. Figured things out yourself, work with the professors as you could. This was a commuting college. So, there was no dorm, you know, everyone came here part-time. To my knowledge, nobody was a full-time student at that time. So, it was a lot of adults they were taking a night classes something like that. So, they probably, you know, would not have had time for writing center, tutorials things like that. So, it was kind of more of a sink or swim, you are on your own type of mentality as far as that kind of academic support. I don't remember meeting with an advisor at any point. We did our course registration, you know they used to come out with the booklet. You will see the course that were coming up and mainly just talked with your college department like faculty for advising on what would be your degree or what classes you needed to take and we just went and signed up for them. If they were open. So, it was more of direct, direct direct self-directed.

[Bibek Luitel]: Well, then, lest have a look some other aspects of student services. For example financial services. What kind of financial aid service was provided to students? such as finding scholarships or completing FAFSA or taking loans or any kind of aid options students may have. These kinds of services were there at that time?

[Theresa Garcia Ruiz]: There was offices of financial aid, all of these offices were in the round building. So, it was very convenient to just go from one to the other, you know, want to get your student ID may there was financial aid, scholarships. But really, the cost was so much less, back then. And, a lots of students were just self funded, or what was promoted more heavily back then was the payment plan. So, you would sign up for class and you would go business office and set up a payment plan. So, you would make paid a certain amount and then you would have payment throughout the semester. Not so much the student loans. They were available but mostly it was like, if a student was taking two classes that would have been may be like, I don't know, full load of 15 was like less than \$400 or something like that. So, in fact, that information right here (she

showed me the catalogue of CCSU for the years 1988-89). The cost was, for a long session, for 1988-89 to 90, one three hours class was cost \$144. So, you could make that in three payments. Or, six hours was some \$200. So, you know, the need for loan less, it really was something that you can pay yourself. So, I like financial literacy and that kind of things, I don't remember anything like that. Finding scholarships, there was an office, I don't thing that was financial aid but they did probable scholarship office, they would help you apply for the things like the colleagues who have a bit hispanic focused scholarship, I don't know they still do. But, the scholarship office here would try to connect students, where they could apply for scholarships. Right!. And then of course Pell grants things like that through the financial aid office.

[Bibek Luitel]: Very good background and context. Well, lets talk about one another very important aspect that is career support. What kind of career support was provided by the career center on campus? For example, was there support for the student find the right career or job search support or internship, for example, resume building, this kind of workshop, interview preparation and so on, career counselling? well, these kinds of services in those days?

[Theresa Garcia Ruiz]: I am sure there there was, I don't remember big emphasis on it. I do remember seen flyers around campus for say internship, like info meetings or I relly don't remember a lot like career support kind of high profile presence. Again, a lots of the students were already employed. They were working, So, it was a different focus for them, I am sure. But, I don't remember, now, this university did graduate BAs and BS. Right. So, I as sure there was, but I was not ever in a four year program here. I did go through the College of Education, the teacher preparation program and they had their own kind of connection with the schools and there were like career fairs like school career fair. So, I am more familiar with that. I know the College of Education did have that. So, help place students, new teachers, but as far as the overall college like it does now, I don't remember that. That's not to say, was not there. But, I just did not know about it.

[Bibek Luitel]: Based on the program offered that time, the doctoral program, this EdD was the first doctoral program offered here in 1992.

[Theresa Garcia Ruiz]: Yes, that was actually the time I was.

[Bibek Luitel]: Let's talk another aspect of services that provide to students. That is a personal and social support provided on campus? For example: general counselling center, health center, disability center, or this kind things.

[Theresa Garcia Ruiz]: I would not say there was healthier center. But I don't, I never went there, so I don't know. Actually, there was one. Most of the student services were all held in the student center, which at time was the glass cog, now where the CASA is. That was the student center. That's where the book store was and lots of the offices that worked with students were all in that. And a little like cafeteria, or now, I don't even know if they use it anymore, but if you walk by glass cog you see other is kind of an it's kind of a open square where there is open outside area. It used to be eating area there for student go for eat, there was eating area inside and outside were kind of hardwood slab covers so you can get a little shade. It was very nice. And, that they had a glass cog student center, there was also a big room with a big TV. Because back than, no cell phones right, so, they had a large TV and students just go in there, and sit and watch

whatever together. And, so, it was a nice way to spend time with your fellow students and people get together for to watch certain program, they would watch every week or whatever. So, it was a nice social kind of experience. Now, I don't think they have that, because everybody has stay watch on their phone, every ones more into their own individual experience. It was more of a communal experience back then. So, I don't remember, counselling center anything like that. Again, that say that was not there, I just was not aware of it. I didn't use it. But, it was the social and the personal support would have been, at the glass cog center. And, it was always pleasant and nice place to be, there would always an activity, so I think the university made in an effort to make that. A place for students. Now, the library kind of serves like that. The current UC has the big open space, but its not the same, that's more like an eating area. The old student center had places for students to just have be together, talk each other. So, I think kind of society in general that is not as common anymore. It is important. But, it was a very nice place to be.

[Bibek Luitel]: Technology and other kinds of things are changing, you know , like, its been 30 years back days.

[Bibek Luitel]: Well, what about additional services, you mentioned earlier not much more kind of student housing other services like transportation services, how do people commit to being here, was there food bank services, child care services, veteran services, international student services.

[Theresa Garcia Ruiz]: Yeah, this is a really great question. There was campus housing there were 2 small dorms at that time. But, very few students actually lived here. Mostly everybody lived, wherever, whether they were local students may be their own apartments. But, I don't remember any kind of food bank now, that's I would tell you for sure, there izzey food closet that they have now, that was not. There was nothing like that. Child care no. Veteran services, I have no idea. I am sure, they probably did, not being a veteran myself, I don't remember that. And, international students, I cant, I don't even know we had international students. I don't remember any that's very interesting but I am sure there was but I dont remember that we had international students week now. No, there was nothing like that. So, we were not on the map yet (laugh). May be there were, but I did not know about it. Housing service just small dorms they had. And then which are still on campus now, but there are other there. And I do remember seeing some students just hanging out there you know their launchers outside watching the come and go. The overall vibe on campus was much more slow pace and relaxed then it is now for sure.

[Bibek Luitel]: Well, then, you have great experience of 30 years, what significant change that you see in those days and now? could you please share with us, a few aspects of changes that you observed.

[Theresa Garcia Ruiz]: Yes, absolutely. Yeah, there are so many changes. So many changes. It's it's hard to even where to start, Bibek. I mean. Let's start with adding freshmen and sophomores. That completely changed the feel on campus. I mean of course, it grows the campus a lot, size wise, because you had all these classes that you did not need before. And the freshman and sophomore students had different needs and interests. It was a different demographic completely. but now you're younger students. Getting started in life, whereas before it was older students who were picking up the certification or coming back to college. You know, had families of their own already. So, they were different. A lot of differences. A lot of things

changed to serve the new younger traditional kind of students that we did not have here before. Of course there were more students not from Corpus, which was unusual at the time, you know. With CCSU, it was more students from around here. Once it became a four-year university, it was more of a broader draw. And that also leads into the incorporation to the A&M system. With that changed tremendously everything. During the transition, there was a lot of uncertainty, you know, going back, I would not go back to much further, I know you have your focus here but just the background of the whole lawsuit that was filed and the purpose was to get more support for our university here and South Texas, Laredo and the Valley. The solution to break up the university system of South Texas and put the institutions in the already existing UT and A&M system was not the original focus of that lawsuit. So, you know, you always wonder what could have happened or how things would have been different had the university system of South Texas survived and just been strengthened. We would have had a focus here in South Texas. Instead, these groups, these individual institutions disperse into other systems. So, you know, the focus was not on South Texas. We are part of A&M system, and A&M system is all over Texas, it is not focused on South Texas. So, I don't know, that the true original desire of field. It was solution but it was not the original goal. So, with that in mind once we became a part of A&M system, there was a transition period. So, we were CCSU for couple of more years and as part of the (she showed the campus catalogue's of 1988-89 back page), the campus of Texas A&M University System. So, we were still CCSU. So, we had our own identity for a while and during that time, there was lots of uncertainty. As, what it would be mean to be a part of the A&M system, what we lose our identity, What would it bring? What will we lose? That was in. So, it was kind of a lot of anxiety at the time. Some people wanted to accelerate their programs so they would graduate with CCSU, other people wanted to slow down and wait till after the transition. So, you know, there was just a lot of uncertainty. And, now, 20-30 years later, we can look back and see how some of our concerns were this kind of crazy, but others, you know, it has changed our identity. We are no longer CCSU, we no longer have corpus christi in our name, we are no longer institution focused on this part of Texas. We are part of another system. So, our, as far our ability to do things we have to have the approval of the system. So, I don't know, I don't have the answers. I think it's been positive in a lot of ways because you look around. This University is growing too much, but there is always I wonder, if we had not been part of A&M system, if we were stayed with our university system of south Texas. We would have still grown as four years university, even if we would stayed as a CCSU as a four year university, how would that have changed? we never know. But, there are lot of people still here that were from those days. Fewer and fewer (laugh). But, there are lots of retirement going on, but there is people here that like myself who worked here that were students, or still some people who worked back in those days. Because it is great place to work, it is great place to study. And, you know just see what the future brings. Hold on and just always hope for the best.

[Bibek Luitel]: Well, then, is there any final remarks you would like to make? We are at the end of the conversation now.

[Theresa Garcia Ruiz]: Well, I wanted to just thank you, for taking the time to ask these questions. And, you know, I have not thought about these days in a long time. About those days and how things have changed. But it's good to remember and to go back and see and think about what would think about that. A lot of people here in Corpus don't know all this history. They

have no idea the history of this university. I think in general, this institution is less well-known in town than say Del Mar. Most everybody knows about Del Mar. But, there are still significant numbers of people they live here in Corpus, they don't even know about this university. Because it's really I mean, it's described as the island university. And that's kind of isolates us from the rest of the city. So, you know, it would be, I would hope, in the future, that we are able to connect more closely with our local groups. You know, I don't know the numbers of students who go to school here or in one of the school districts from the corpus area that come here. I don't know. May be a lot, but I know we have a lot of students from other areas, San Antonio, Austin, and Houston. With they do have other options and they come here, for whatever reason they come here. We originally were designed to support our local students. So, I would like to see more emphasis on that. You know, now or in the future to build up our Corpus Christi area. And serve our students here, you know, we should be a destination. And you know, I didn't come here out of high school because I didn't have that option. But now there is the option. So, I would love to see more locals, local students come here. Just see this university more in mashed in the regular life of this town. So, you know, but everything is a process. So, it is great to bring in people from other places. Like yourself. Yeah, in all of our now international students and students from other parts of Texas and other parts of the country in the world. It really adds a lot to Corpus Christi. But, we also have to bring our local people too. So, they can meet you. So to get to know the wider world, you know, this university is a connecting spot. And, I would like to see it continue to grow.

[Bibek Luitel]: Thank you very much, Teri, for your time and valuable conversation.

[Theresa Garcia Ruiz]: Yeah, thank you. And, have a great afternoon!