

Des Moines Area Community College

## Open SPACE @ DMACC

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Recollections

DMACC Pioneers

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2016

### Recollections by Lloyd Miller

Lloyd Miller

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## DMACC Recollections

**Submitted by:** Lloyd Miller  
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**1. When did you begin work at DMACC?**

June 1970

**2. When did you retire or leave DMACC?**

June 2000

**3. In the early years, what was your work position and major responsibilities?**

I was hired on a 12-month contract to develop and teach introductory-level Spanish courses. The Arts and Sciences Division began officially in fall 1970. A handful of us, including the dean Rus Slicker, were hired in the summer to develop curriculum.

The prevailing story was that Dean Slicker and Academic Vice-President Phil Langerman gathered a bunch of community college catalogs from around the country and spent a weekend developing an arts and sciences curriculum. I told Rus that I could also teach anthropology (I had taught it, as well as Spanish, at my previous community college job), and, grateful for an additional course he hadn't counted on, he put it on the fall schedule.

Apparently, some DMACC staff members were not familiar with anthropology. Shortly before the fall term was to begin, Rus asked me to write up a short description of the subject. He said that at least one counselor told students that he "didn't know what anthropology was, but thought it had something to do with rocks and minerals!"

I taught classes in anthropology, Spanish, and occasionally social issues and special topics until 1974, was administrative director of the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, 1974-82, and continued teaching anthropology and Spanish until I retired in 2000.

**4. What events or happenings to you remember most about your first years at DMACC?**

Perhaps my most memorable experience from that first year was the fall in-service meeting of all faculty and staff, during which President Lowery introduced Rolland Grefe, President of the DMACC Board of Directors. Many Arts and Sciences faculty had come to the college from other states (I was previously employed in Illinois) and so had little knowledge of the issues peculiar to the creation and rise of community colleges in Iowa. When Mr. Grefe rose to speak, his first words were, in effect, "Let me make it clear that there are no Arts and Sciences at DMACC."

Several of us turned to each other and said something like, "What on earth is he talking about, and if what he says is true, then why are we here?" Of course, we quickly learned that when the Iowa comprehensive community college legislation was enacted in 1965, an influential political faction believed that community colleges were intended to be exclusively vocation and technical institutions. In fact, some of the fifteen colleges created under the 1965 law were precisely that.

This rift coincided with a national mood common during the 1970s, a mood that then US Secretary of Education Sidney Marland influenced heavily. Marland's underlying philosophy was that most of the jobs the nation needed filled did not require a four-year liberal arts college or university degree. What they did need was specific vocational and technical skills training. The kinds of two-year degrees and one-year certificates community colleges offered were tailor-made to fill this need.

As DMACC's founding and ruling fathers shared Marland's point of view, the college grew and developed such that arts and sciences education played "second fiddle" to other forms of education. It was routinely underfunded compared to other educational areas, and rarely mentioned in college promotional materials. The per-student cost of arts and sciences education was less than that of career education because generally it could enroll more students per class per instructor with fewer equipment expenditures.

By the end of the 1970s, DMACC's arts and sciences enrollment exceeded that of the career education sector. It continued to grow and it became a "cash cow" for the college. In subsequent years, the numbers of students exceeded classroom space to house them. When personal computers became common tools for faculty and staff, arts and sciences faculty were the last to receive them. As more sections were added to accommodate growth in enrollment, non-contracted adjunct rather than full-time contracted instructors were hired in increasing numbers. From what I can observe, this trend continues today.

##### **5. What major changes did you observe during your time at DMACC?**

The most significant educational change I recall during the early years was the development of a general education core curriculum. From 1970 to 1974 the liberal arts portion of DMACC's curriculum was entirely undifferentiated. All courses were considered introductory and no formal guidelines directed students to distinguish between disciplinary or subject area categories.

In 1974, the college created an academic structure whereby the three educational divisions headed by deans (Arts/Sciences, Career/Vocational, and Adult/Continuing) were subdivided into departments, each headed by an administrative director. I became director of the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences that included both the academic courses (anthropology, geography, history, political science, psychology, and sociology) and certain two-year degree paraprofessional programs such as Criminal Justice, Human Services and Teacher Education, among others.

Our first task, together with the two other departments in the division—Communications and Humanities, and Math and Science—was to develop a core curriculum. Since our department was the largest and included the paraprofessional programs, we were given the assignment of developing our part of the core the first year. The other two departments completed theirs the following year.

Creating a core curriculum was both a stimulating and, at times, frustrating task. In our department, we needed to come up with a list of courses to meet the 12 credit-hour social and behavioral sciences requirement for a two-year Associate in Arts degree. As faculty realized that required courses generally guaranteed higher enrollments than elective courses and therefore increased job security, many wanted their courses included. Our core curriculum development became as much a political as an intellectual process. We ultimately succeeded and I think we all learned much from the experience.

**6. Who do you remember the most from DMACC and why?**

Rus Slicker was an excellent boss. His bespectacled, balding, and overweight aspect belied his keen mind, sharp wit, and verbal articulateness. He enjoyed a rousing argument, and I learned much from good-natured discussions with him. He always listened, and he showed respect for his faculty.

Rus's successor, Gary Wilcox, was a respected colleague and a friend, as well as a good boss. Our personalities differed markedly but we both adapted and I learned to work well with him. Our many years of association made Gary an influential and memorable part of my DMACC career. Both Rus and Gary have since passed away.

I have enjoyed the collegiality and friendship of many fellow DMACC employees over the years. If I tried to name them, I'm afraid I would inadvertently leave some out.

**7. Please share any other special memories you have about the early years at DMACC.**

A recent AP article in the *Des Moines Register* (5/16/10) reporting on the large number of college students who need remedial classes reminded me that we began noticing this problem at DMACC toward the end of the 1970s. Many of us in the Arts and Sciences Division favored a system whereby students with deficiencies in math or reading would be required to take remedial classes to improve those skills before being allowed to take regular college credit classes. Some community colleges had adopted such a system and increased student success rates.

DMACC went as far as pre-testing new students and recommending developmental courses for those in need. However, holding fast to the idea that an open-door college meant that all classroom doors were open to everyone, the college never made these classes a requirement. Perhaps ever-increasing public demands for credentialing and fears of short-term enrollment decline (and reduction of state aid) were enough that no lay board of directors would have approved mandatory developmental education.

Nevertheless, I believe that many community colleges nationwide (not only DMACC) missed an opportunity for courageous educational leadership.