

Barrett Oral History Project
Interview with Stephanie deLusé
18 March 2019, Barrett Campus
Primary Interviewer: Cortney Volmering
Notetaker: Shale Brenner

VOLMERING: Hello, this is Cortney Volmering. I am with Shale Brenner interviewing Dr. deLusé on March 18th, 2019 at 1:40pm in Dr. deLusé's office on the Tempe campus. This interview is part of our Barrett Oral History Project. Our goal is to preserve Barrett's history in honor of the 30th anniversary. Thank you so much for taking the time to sit down with us and share your experience. What brought you to Arizona?

DELUSÉ: I was born here. I think at your age and older there are a lot of people who are born here but at my age there weren't so many.

VOLMERING: What kept you here?

DELUSÉ: Initially family, and I am a first-generation college student, so I wasn't necessarily encouraged to go to school. I came upon going to school sort of by accident. In my first job somebody said, 'you're too smart and interested in the world to not go to school,' so I started taking a couple of classes and then wound up in this path. It just turns out that this is a good school. I was lucky that I lived nearby enough to come here and even when I went to graduate school, I did look at other places for the programs that I was interested in but they weren't ranked as highly and they were going to wind up costing out of state tuition and all these other things. It made more sense to stay put. I had been exposed to the campus as a child roller skating when I didn't really know what a university was. It was just this nice big place that was empty on the weekends and you could roller skate here but it was interesting years later when I end up coming back as a student and starting to get an appreciation of what higher education at a university was and the role that it played in the community.

VOLMERING: What made you choose Arizona State University?

DELUSÉ: I suppose I could have gone south or gone north and stayed in the Arizona state system, but again, it's hard to beat ASU in terms of the overall constellation of things that it offers. While I did move out when I was seventeen, I've been supporting myself since then, I think that's part of why I stayed here. My network was here. The jobs I was cobbling together in order to put myself through school were here. The idea of moving to another town had a novelty and all that would come with that, it just didn't seem appealing. Why would I when this is in my backyard. I started at the community colleges because they were even closer to home and affordable but it never occurred to me to come to the university until I was getting straight A's

and talking to a professor and they asked if I was transferring to ASU and I said, “huh, there’s an idea.” It hadn’t even occurred to me. I remember I got a letter at the very beginning of the honors college at ASU... I graduated from Mesa Community College as the valedictorian of 1988 and that’s when ASU was starting their university honors college before it was called Barrett. They invited me to be in that first class of what we are in right now but I was working my way through school and didn’t have any role models about going to school. It didn’t make sense to me why I would take on extra work or additional fees to be in an honors college. I knew it appealed to me, I took honors classes, AP, and things in high school and at the community college but the idea of trying to adjust at a university with all that extra... I didn’t realize what I would get from it for what it would cost me in terms of the time and money and inconvenience. Now with the benefit of hindsight, I wish I had found a way to work it out because I believe that there is value in the experience that the students get here and I would have been interested in getting that value myself earlier in my life.

VOLMERING: What led you to desire to study at Arizona State University?

DELUSÉ: In addition to the things we’ve talked about, I think having the world opened up to me in terms of all the different things that you could study and the value of pursuing additional education not just for the job skills but also for the personal growth kinds of experience that one can experience. Do you know what I mean when I say the word “catalog?” Is that in your vocabulary? You might think of a mailer catalog... how you choose shoes or gifts, but back then we had a course catalog. It was only available in paper and you could just sit and thumb through it or you could fall down to the floor and open up to a page and think “I didn’t even know there were classes on that.” You would accidentally, at least I accidentally discovered a whole world of knowledge which I didn’t really know or think about before. I think it is harder for kids today to do that because unless you have the right keyword or the right prefix, you’re not going to run across it as easily when you’re scheduling classes. When we used to schedule classes, you had the catalog and a paper schedule, and you had to do so much tracking with your eyes that you actually found unique things that you wanted to take as electives or consider as a second major or minor. I was generally interested in learning for learning’s sake and it occurred to me, as I saw the world changing around me, that it couldn’t hurt to be educated and to pursue these kinds of things. My dad wasn’t in favor. He showed up at my graduation from MCC because I was the commencement speaker and the deeper I got into school and the more accolades I got for being a star student, he started to pay attention and think “well, I think she’s really stuck on this path so maybe there’s something to it.” I think maybe he started to think about it in a different way. He turned from disinterest or discouragement to neutral to, at least, proud by the time I got my doctorates. It’s not like he wasn’t educated. You see those books on the top two shelves there (pointing to a series of books)? It looks like a nice set? Those are the great books of the western world and he saved his pennies and bought those and read them himself. He educated himself reading his way through the great books of the western world which a lot of people use several of

those in their human event classes and it's formed a foundation of a lot of educational systems. I certainly don't think one has to go through the university to become an educated person because I know my dad was smart and he thought, "I did it on my own so why do you need to go to school to do it?" but later he could see the value in it. Certainly, there are people who spend their time and money here and don't leave with as much education and wisdom as some people have without pursuing an education, but I still wish everybody could.

VOLMERING: How has your major in communication prepared you for your career in Barrett?

DELUSÉ: When I was an undergrad I majored in communication and I don't know if you still have to but back then we had to pick a track and I picked three tracks because I was an overachiever. I did extra classes to do three tracks: interpersonal communication, intercultural communication, and organization communication track. I think it prepared me on all those three fronts. On the interpersonal level, when you're facilitating discussion/ seminar classes rather than giving lectures, you need to use some interpersonal communication skills in order to encourage people to discuss, you read body language. There's a number of students who raise their hand with their face, what I mean by that is they just kind of crook their head or raise their eyebrows but there is something that tells you that this student wants to jump in on the conversation. I definitely pay attention to nonverbals. I use a number of the skills in terms of using them myself, modeling them for my students, as well as, telling my students to paraphrase, to perception check, to not assume but ask questions. I'm very big on pursuing a spirit of inquiry as opposed to a spirit of judgment in how we approach things and of course that blends over with intercultural. It's easy to stereotype or come to assumptions based on quick cues about people but asking good questions and challenging your own assumptions is useful, as is being open to incorporating multiple multicultural texts into the class. There was a long time in the human event course where it was more like a western intellectual class, even though it was never intended to be, for some people it is tilted that way a little bit more because it was their comfort zone. In the past ten years or more, we have made a more explicit effort of making sure we bring in non-western kinds of authors and underrepresented voices in different ways so that people have that opportunity to experience a little bit, have their awareness raised a little bit about the world around them, about different cultures without necessarily being an intercultural communication type of class, and organizational studies wise it kind of connects because a lot of what we're looking at in the human event has to do with how institutions have changed over time. If you look back at the flow of important ideas and how we've shifted to different kinds of justice systems and different attitudes towards gender or slavery... all of these different things, they echo or are founded in major institutions like religious institutions or political institutions, thinking how organizations are structured just kind of folds into how I think about things. Of course, I also minored in psychology and business, the equivalent of, so I have a constellation of things that kind of wrap up into how I think about being prepared for Barrett as a teacher and as a colleague.

VOLMERING: Why did you choose to teach at the same school that you studied at?

DELUSÉ: Well, it is sort of rare. There are a number of people here who have done an undergraduate degree here, gone someplace else for graduate school, and ultimately decided that they wanted to come back to the southwest or this institution for a number of reasons. It just happened to work out for me that I got to stay here the whole time. I got my PhD in psychology here, I could have gone other places but the expense and inconvenience of going someplace else just didn't appeal to me when ASU's psychology program is one of the best in the country. The year I was... there was something like 400 applicants and they chose four. There were other programs that were even more competitive than the one I was in. Competitiveness doesn't necessarily define what goodness is, but once you get into a program like that, if you think the fit is good, you're crazy not to go if that's part of your goal. That's one of the reasons I stayed here but I demonstrated my effectiveness... responsibility, my work ethic, etc. that when I was finishing my grad school, there was a constellation of things that happened, a confluence of events, that I was invited to stay in the position there but you grow and you change and I was leaning towards some interdisciplinary thinking so there was a nationally competed job posted... they were getting applications from around the U.S. and a lot of applicants from around the world, that's how a lot of positions are hired, so I was hired into interdisciplinary studies and spent many years there. I grew and changed some more and entered a competitive search and ultimately found my way to Barrett.

VOLMERING: You were in a variety of departments before you found your way to Barrett correct?

DELUSÉ: I was in the psychology department and then I was in Leadership and Interdisciplinary Studies. My undergrad, as we discussed, was in communication with the psychology and business aspects too, but even within there, there's "interdisciplinarity" and at the time, the field of communication was pretty young so a lot of the research that we read and a lot of the division classes came out of psychology or social psychology or organizational psychology so I decided to pursue psychology for graduate school. In a university like this, you can recreate yourself without having to switch universities. There's so many schools and colleges that I then steeped myself in interdisciplinary theory for a number of years and then decided how can I take all of that and take it into a space that is working with extra motivated and extra prepared students compared to the mix that you'll get in the more general population and still pull from different disciplines such as you do in the Human Event but honor the history and the wisdom of the past as sort of... as to how it's current to our lives now.

VOLMERING: In your clip on www.ASUhistory.com, where you describe your book *Arizona State University*¹ [pub. Arcadia Publishing 2012, *The Campus History Series*], you said, “when Denise and I decided to study ASU’s history, a large motivation was to expand our own appreciation of the place and share it with others.” How has your appreciation of ASU changed with your findings?

DELUSÉ: You already know of my humble, innocent beginnings in encountering this physical space and people on it and sometimes we just move through our world and you don’t even... especially now, you see students glued to their phones. They’re not even looking at the people around them but it’s amazing as your walking from here to the MU or walking from here to wherever, you could be passing people who are working on curing cancer or solving the world resource problems around 8 million tons of plastic going into the ocean every year or how to help developing nations have clean water. You are passing by the faculty and the staff that are changing the world and we just kind of think of ASU as this... a lot of people, I shouldn’t over generalize, but it’s just sort of this institution that took over Tempe or helped grow Tempe and it’s the sun devils and it’s causing traffic or it’s causing parking issues... I think the focus should be on what this institution does in developing the lives of each individual person that is studying here, as well as, what they’re doing in terms of their community embeddedness and ways that they’re contributing to research and practices that actually help the world. I already started to get a sense of that the more I was in psychology and interdisciplinary studies, and when I started researching that... digging into existing archival information, as well as, trying to find anybody under the sun who I could talk to from different stages of the university’s growth and different disciplines. It’s humbling to see all of the different things that people are doing... I can’t really remember the stem of your question but what did I learn? I learned that my native sense that something important is going on here has just really expanded in terms of every person I pass... maybe they’re just doing this because their parents told them to go, maybe they just want a “good” job, that can be part of it but I think there is just as many or a greater number that, while of course we need jobs, there’s something more to it. That makes of respect and humility because in the grand scheme compared to some of those people, I feel like a draft in the bucket that we all have our own different way of contributing individually and it takes a team effort.

VOLMERING: Expanding on that, what was your most interesting discovery? What was your reaction like?

DELUSÉ: The most interesting discovery... I know you looked at the book online but I don’t know if you have read it yet, but there’s just so much of it in there. It’s hard to say; you should look at it when you get a chance. It’s just so fun and snippets that you can absorb. I wish I had time to look that over. A couple things that come to mind.... Here’s a silly one that people often relate to: the boy scouts built a cabin in the attic of Old Main. I think that was a surprise to me. It

¹ Stephanie DeLusé and Denise E. Bates, *Arizona State University* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2012).

was also a surprise to me on a more serious note that John S. Armstrong, who was basically the founder of ASU, hardly even was given the credit that my research indicated that he was due because he moved away. and another important person in the history of the college, [Charles T.] Hayden. You would hear a lot about Hayden because Hayden's family was still here and he was easy to find to interview and all of that. Certainly he played a role, but John S. Armstrong was the person that went to the legislature and he is the one that was a teacher. He and his wife saw that this would be the perfect place to do teacher training. As I said before, everything is a team effort but I gained a new respect for that founding father if you will. I don't know if you know but his... will it be great grandson? I think it is, would be W.P. Carey. That descendent going on to honor his ancestors... what he started. There is a building named after Armstrong. It's Armstrong Hall and he's connected to the law department, but I think they should name a street after Armstrong, if not officially, somehow put up one of those little signs and make it Armstrong Way or something because I think he was really key. It really didn't matter what I was looking at, there was just some interesting appreciation that developed. I don't know if you knew, Barbara Barrett was a student of ASU. She is of course an inspiration and I made sure to work a picture of her in there because I think she's just such a positive role model and of course important figure in the development of the university via their contribution to Barrett. I don't know if you have noticed because so many people are glued to their phones these days but just walking, there's Palm Walk and digging into how Palm Walk started and finding those pictures of when the palm trees were so little and look at them now. It's interesting that we really are building on the shoulders of the thoughtful work of people that came before us.

VOLMERING: Have you ever thought of teaching a course about your findings from your co-authored book, *Arizona State University*?

DELUSÉ: I hadn't until just now, but I think that that's not a bad idea. I could think that through because it really does pull from multiple disciplines and whether a student was interested in history or not, there could be an appreciation for... yes, the history of how the seeds of the aspirations and design and paradigms that we talk about now and how ASU is number one in innovation now... Part of that is through President Crowe and the great contributions of the faculty and our inclusive approach to how we admit students, but it also is partly due to the foundation that was put in place by others... the seeds of all those things that we brag about now were already in place. I think there could be a segment in a class that helps people understand the identity of a university and the role in a community and the world. You could look at economically, socially, politically... a number of different levels. Plus, students could dig into the specific disciplines or research areas that they're interested in using some of this as a springboard. I think it could be possible.

VOLMERING: Have you ever thought about teaching a course about your findings from your book, *Legendary Locals of Tempe*?²

DELUSÉ: Well, similarly I guess the same principles would apply. I think there are people that are interested in the local art scene, local politics, local... I guess music could be part of the art scene. All the same things that I talked about in regard to ASU could be connected to Tempe. In fact, one of the reasons that I wrote the Tempe book is because I encountered so many interesting people that just weren't the right fit for this book but ASU and Tempe grew up hand in hand and they needed to be acknowledged in some way. That other book needed to be written and I probably could have written volumes. In fact, I considered doing multiple volumes but I decided it would be better to have one accessible volume then to have people having to choose between them or the like. Maybe it could be a class that combines them. I will be thinking on these things. I appreciate the idea.

VOLMERING: You're welcome.

DELUSÉ: I learn so much from my students and other people's students.

VOLMERING: Thank you! In your paper, "There and Back Again: Learning From the History of a Freshman Seminar Sequence", you describe the evolution of the course.³ In what ways do you see the course evolving moving forward?

DELUSÉ: To some degree, I'm not sure that it needs to evolve. That's not to say that it won't or that we won't experiment in some way or another going forward. I actually don't think... What's the expression? If it's not broken, don't fix it. We've done these tweaks and are much more conscious of, being of, incorporating underrepresented voices that are non-western and we did that experiment I talked about in there in terms of going deeper into some specific domain or helping appreciate the perspective that people were coming from differently. I'm glad that we tried that experiment and I'm also glad that we moved away from it for various reasons I discussed. There's ideas thrown around somehow... Sometimes now and then for instance a number of people would like to reduce the amount of writing in the class or when we are being really bold even talk about getting rid of the writing component all together but then that would put all of the pressure on the public discourse side and there's always some students who don't participate as much but their writing really is good and you can see their thinking and engagement there. There's other students who are excellent discussants and they need to work on their writing so what we've learned is that to help the Barrett students be their best, we have both components because just resting on the morals of what they think it should be like or what they

² Stephanie deLusé, *Legendary Locals of Tempe* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2016).

³ Stephanie deLusé, "There and Back Again: Learning from the History of a Freshman Seminar Sequence," *Honors in Practice* 10 (2014): 83-93.

did in high school usually isn't going to be enough and without a class like this they may not be as well prepared for doing a thesis or some of the more rigorous honors contracts etcetera. We would in some way like to emphasize the public discourse because we would like the quieter people to speak up in a day and age where learning how to engage in polite, evidence-based discourse instead of just shouting each other down in twisted-discourse and to use it however we want... Really having thoughtful discourse we need to see that more in the media than we do. That's an important contribution to this class and makes to the future citizenry and leaders but being able to do that in writing is important too. It would be easier for us to grade if we didn't have the writing component. People throw ideas around and maybe we will experiment with some of those sometime but I kind of doubt it because it works as a cohesive thread to help prepare the students for more rigorous training and build cohesion and give them a chance, in a relatively safe space of the human event, to class try on a lot of things in the back of their mind. Maybe to take on new perspectives.

VOLMERING: How do you think the evolution of the course has impacted students' ability to think both critically and creatively?

DELUSÉ: Oh I... based on what the students tell me, I think you might get a bell curve talking to students about the human event. Most are going to like it okay, know that they got something value out of it. I think our curve skews to the higher end, even if they don't appreciate it in the moment they're in it or right after they get out, they look back at their 4-5 years in college, they realize that it was a different sort of class that helped them in meaningful ways. They can't always recognize it right away. I think it would skew positive but you're always going to have some that are more of the cheerleaders and say "I hated it! I hated it!" you know, whatever. I tend to think people get out of it what they put into it which is a bit cliché but it's true. Even those that don't always put their best selves into it, I don't know how they can't get a little bit better at their creative and critical thinking through just being there and listening to the discussion and taking whatever growth risks they took in their own participation or writing.

VOLMERING: How do you think that it compares to the history of ideas courses, with consideration that transfer students have kind of had life experience prior to coming to ASU?

DELUSÉ: In an ideal world I would still love to see even the transfer students have a two semester sequence. In an ideal-ideal world, I would like to see the human event be a three semester sequence because we start with the most ancient texts and move through about renaissance in the fall, or in the first class, and then around renaissance to modern in the spring and there's usually, in any one person's arch in their development, there's something that gets elided a little bit, either the deep ancients or the middle ages or something gets elided. I think there's so much more wealth of knowledge that we could explore. The extra semester would give the students even more time to develop as readers, thinkers, and writers. I would love to see the

transfer students do two but that's unlikely in the grand scheme of the over busyness and speed that some of our educational components require. I think that they may be... it's hard to say, Courtney... I think the history of ideas students that I've encountered have been comparable but they have more life experience so sometimes they can bring a little bit more wisdom to the table but the other side of that is sometimes the longer we've walked the earth, the more set in our ways we can get and that can be a bit harder to crack open the egg of being more open minded. I can't really report that I've had any problems on those fronts but those are possibilities and it may just depend on the group of students you get. I think that because they are already ensconced in life that they tend to be busier. It's hard to believe because we are all so busy. They may be busy sometimes in different ways that makes the class be a nice... a break, a place to sit and think about some of these important interesting things but for other people the class is a lot of work and it's something that they need to integrate in but if you're going to an honors college... it's not just that something is more work or that we are just giving you more work because you are in an honors college. It's just organically more work to be a more of a seeker trying to get a better and more rigorous experience.

VOLMERING: What has been the proudest moment in your time at Barrett, the honors college?

DELUSÉ: Well I haven't really thought about proudest. I can tell you some of my proud moments... I felt proud in being selected to join Barrett because these are a great group of colleagues that are... We all probably have these moments where we are like "oh other people are smarter than I am" or "am I going to fit in?" Some of these people speak Latin, Greek, and all these other fancy things and I don't but we all have something that we bring to the table and that's one of the things that I like a lot about being in a department or a college that's interdisciplinary at its core. We still probably skew more towards history or literature people and they can all be very different from each other as well. I'm not saying they are all cut from the same cookie cutter but I like it when we hire people from social and natural sciences or from other kinds of things or when people have other interdisciplinary background because it helps us realize... you can go up and down this hall and if there's a text you're just not 100% sure about or you're thinking about taking something new on, there's somebody around here that knows better about that than you do. I think one can feel pride in standing in the place of what they bring to the table and at the same time feel humility when you look at all the things you don't bring to the table and it helps you realize that we're a good group, especially when we work together. I felt pride when students nominated me for the Excellence in Diversity Award, or the Centennial Professorship, these are since I've been to Barrett. I was nominated for other things before but there's an Apple Polisher Award that students who are Sun Devils Advocates and walk around backwards giving tours, they pick somebody, and I've been chosen for that. I like it when... I guess it's just like everybody else, you like a little pat on the back or a little bit of recognition even when you don't win it. Some of my students are nominating me right now for a faculty women's association mentoring award. What's interesting is that I used to work almost

exclusively in interdisciplinary studies. I was working exclusively with juniors and seniors and they had a different understanding and I didn't win some of the awards they put me up for but here working with freshman, they're not into the system quite yet and they are still very much thinking about their own survival as opposed to whose really contributing to their development. I'm proud about all the different things that all my students are trying to do or are doing, which I become aware of when they ask me for advice or letters of recommendation. I'm proud of some of the things I think I've contributed to our development as a faculty however subtle they may be. I try and be a good colleague and help us come up with policies or perspectives that help us be collaborative instead of competitive etcetera. I'm proud when books come out and stuff. I'm proud when I get my human event grading done, mostly exhausted.

VOLMERING: What legacy do you hope to leave from your time serving as a Principal Faculty Honors Fellow at Barrett, the Honors College?

DELUSÉ: Well, I guess building off of what I was just saying, I think the most important legacy is my students and I know I'm not their only teacher and I know some of them have a love/hate feeling for me or the class but I believe that whether they are aware of it or not, or admit it or not, I think and hope that they are getting something from every course that they are taking at ASU. I know that I put everything I can into every course I teach and even though I've been teaching a very long time and I'm generally well regarded as a teacher, I don't stop learning. I took a graduate level course that ASU wanted some of the faculty to kind of pilot and see if we thought it would be a good course for teachers to take and that took a ton of time. I knew a lot of what they taught but still got new ideas and I'm always asking for feedback. I get ideas from teaching assistants and process things with them. So legacy wise, I'm trying to model and show that even inside one person we can appreciate different disciplines and we can keep growing at any time of our life. I'm still a work in progress and I hope that the body of my work and my way of being helps students realize that they can be okay at whatever stage they're at, it doesn't matter. We're not fully baked, ever, and we can continue and keep improving. If they carry with them some sort of insight or attitude or habit of mind into their other classes or how they live their life or how they service a citizen then I guess I'm playing my role because I may not ever win some big gigantic prize but each student is a prize.

VOLMERING: Thank you for your participation. If you have any more thoughts to share later please feel free to reach out. And if you have any questions about this interview or the 30th Anniversary Oral History Project, please contact Vice Dean Nicola Foote.