

November 14

College of Nursing and Health - Oral History Project

Interview of Dr. Debra Arms, Faculty (DA)

Interviewer: Donna Miles Curry (DC)

DC: Deb, why don't you start out by giving us a little bit of personal background and how you came to Wright State.

DA: Well, I graduated from Ohio State in 1974 with my Bachelor's Degree. I got a Master's in 1976. I went to school on a psych mental health traineeship and my adviser was Grace Sills.

DC: Oh my gosh.

DA: But my interest was in working with the Developmental Disability population. At the time MH and MR were together and so Grace said that I could have psych mental health training-ship and you can do all of your clinical work in working with the disabled, so that is what I did. Then my PhD, I got in 1987 in Family Relations and Human Development with a minor in neural psychology.

DC: Wow,

DA: So that is my educational background. I have really done every kind of nursing that you have afforded to actually at the time. I was a clinical nurse specialist. I worked at Nisonger Center for the mentally retarded. I was a genetics nursing consultant at Children's Hospital. I was a director of Women's Health at Mt. Carmel. I was also a lobbyist for the Ohio Nursing Association for awhile, but my true passion was working in Public Health. I did two stents at that: I did one early in my career where I was an MCH consultant and then later in my career I went back to public health and was the chief of the Division of Prevention, so I was responsible for all the preventative health programs in the state including bioterrorism and infection diseases and chronic disease and the state lab and all kinds of things. Unfortunately, that was a political position, and I was unclassified and hired under the Republicans. When Strickland came in, I was very vulnerable to them putting in their own people and so I was asked to leave.

So, at that point, I thought well I have this Ph.D. and I had done some adjunct faculty work at Ohio State and it just happened that, at the time, the State of Ohio was moving from quarters to semesters and most of the schools needed help with transitioning that from quarters to semesters with their curriculum and Pat Martin, the Dean at the time, hired me to come in and do that for her. So, I came in for 2 years working as the project director helping the faculty in the College of Nursing move from quarters to semesters. Then after that was done, I took a tenure track position for the rest of my time before I retired.

DC: Where there any challenges you had in that early situation?

DA: Yes, a lot of challenges. The faculty really wanted to do it themselves and so having an outsider come in to help them, in that process, was not looked on favorably; and as I look back, I think - well I loved the Dean, but I think she could have prepared the faculty a little better for me coming in.

DC: Right.

DA: I think they would have been more amenable to me coming in; at least in leading the committees and doing all the background work that they really didn't have time for anyway.

DC: Right, exactly.

DA: The leadership in the faculty was suspicious of my intentions, which were very pure I thought. So that caused a lot of problems and challenges; nothing that I hadn't seen in politics. I will tell you, and I'm certainly a pretty resilient person, I confronted those challenges with those faculty and I think that I won over everybody but one.

DC: Very good.

DA: From there, again, I was also interested in teaching and Pat had started an outreach program in Chillicothe, at their medical center, and the courses that were needed there. First of all, I live in Columbus, so it was easiest for me and it was a 45-minute drive down #43, to teach those courses then for faculty from Wright State to drive the hour and a half to get to the Chillicothe campus, so I started teaching a couple of those courses. Again, unfortunately I didn't go through the hiring process.

DC: Oh, you hadn't become a regular faculty yet?

DA: No, I was considered doing adjunct teaching and that caused consternation with the faculty, again, as I had not been vetted through their procedure for interviewing faculty.

DC: Of course.

DA: The problem was that I wasn't a full-time faculty, I was just an adjunct and adjunct faculty don't get vetted the same way, but because I was already there, the faculty viewed me suspiciously, they made a big deal about me teaching, even though nobody else wanted to go down there and do it.

DC: Right

DA: So, once again, I went down and talk and Pat had to justify my teaching down there.

DC: So, were you there at the very beginning?

DA: Not the very beginning. No.

DC: So, was Candy Cherrington the director at that point?

DA: Yes. Dr. Cherrington was the director.

DC: Was Carol Holdcraft still at WSU at that point?

DA: Yes

DC: Because I know that the two of them were very instrumental in starting the program.

DA: They were. Again, Candy was more tied – Candy lived closer to Chillicothe, but she was more tied to WSU than Chillicothe; but she would go down there maybe one day a week and be the director.

DC: Oh, I see.

DA: When I took over down there, I was there 4 days a week.

DC: Right, that was very good.

DA: Which is what they needed.

DC: So, at the time you became the director had you already taken a faculty line?

DA: Again, you know trouble is my middle name. Because I decided (and Pat and I had a discussion about this), and I decided that I wanted --she didn't have a special project line for me and what I really wanted was a clinical faculty position and the union wouldn't allow it because I had a Ph.D.

DC: I see.

DA: And so, at the time, there was really no place for me to get hired as a clinical faculty person.

DC: Oh

DA: Who doesn't have to worry about tenure and just teaches. So, that is what I wanted.

DC: Sure.

DA: Because I was 6 years from retiring.

DC: Right, it wasn't your priority.

DA: So, I really didn't think that I wanted to be tenured. I had this discussion with Pat, and I wasn't counting it out; and in fact, in retrospect, if Adena had stayed and we were able to rule that program, I would have probably gone to tenure.

DC: Right

DA: Because I liked that job. That was up my alley to teach but also to be an administrator, which is where my expertise lies.

DC: Right

DA: Keeping that in mind when Pat was there, I decided okay I will just go for the tenure tract position. Well, that caused all kinds of problems too because at the time, the thought was who is this outsider coming in and a couple of the faculty that were pretty obnoxious were trying to prevent that from happening. I went through the whole process and the faculty chose not to recommend me and Pat hired me anyway. So then Pat had to justify that hiring, which she did. The reason they didn't hire me was because they had too many public health people.

DC: That was their rationale but that is not where Pat wanted to use you.

DA: Right, that is correct.

DC: Did you ever teach the community courses?

DA: Not in Dayton.

DC: Not in Dayton.

DA: Not in Dayton but at Adena I did.

DC: Ok

DA: But the thing about that at Adena, I could teach all of the courses except for the clinical courses other than public health.

DC: Right

DA: Unfortunately, the students didn't have very much variety in their faculty, so if they didn't like me, they were stuck.

DC: So how many years were you at Adena?

DA: Five years

DC: Five years – that is a long time.

DA: Yes. There were five classes, and I became the director shortly after I came on staff because Dr. Cherrington decided that she wanted to try administration.

DC: Right

DA: So she couldn't do both so they put me in the director position down there.

DC: That is right, that is how it was. I kept thinking it was. Okay, that is correct. Very good. So, describe what it was like with the usual pattern of things at Adena. What was it like?

DA: The thing that was nice about Adena was that you had Lisa Filio who was hired as the advisor and the skills person. So she – and the classes and there was only one class that had 40 kids in it when it first started. So that was when class size was 36. 36 was a good size.

DC: Right

DA: So I think it was. 36 was pretty cost effective as well. Of course, we had less in the first couple years because we were building up and then we had 36 in the middle and I think about 30 in the next one and then we started to dwindle. We started to dwindle because of a couple of things.

DC: Okay

DA: One is all the enrollments in colleges took a dive when we switched from quarters to semesters.

DC: Right, I forgot about that.

DA: So, that was an issue for a small program in terms of cost effectiveness. The other thing that happened is the politics down there. When that program was started, Dr. Gabby was the medical director.

DC: Ok, yes

DA: ... and he graduated from WSU. So, he was very pro WSU nursing program coming on board. They wanted to have a BSN program because the director of nursing who did his minor

at that time wanted to get Magnet status and they just didn't have enough bachelors degree nurses to think about doing that. So that was the emphasis. Of course, OU has a branch in Chillicothe, but at the time, they didn't have a bachelor's degree in nursing. They had associates degrees, they had master's degrees, but they didn't award a BSN.

DC: In the whole university?

DA: No.

DC: I didn't know that. Okay

DA: Other people that bid on coming to Chillicothe was Mt. Carmel – I think because of Gabby. I don't know why; but Candy would know the answer to that question. WSU got the bid, but that was a huge bone of contention for OU that WSU got that bid. From the minute they got a Bachelor's degree program, and there were a lot of people on the hospital board that were from OU, they wanted that.

DC: Sure

DA: So what ended up happening is that they undercut the tuition.

DC: Wow

DA: And the new dean wasn't sure of the program to begin with and

DC: The new dean at WSU?

DA: Yes at WSU.

DC: Ok

DA: Rosalee Manous had lots of questions, as she should, when evaluating all the programs.

DC: Sure

DA: Unfortunately, the finances - One of the things I have found when you go from someplace like public health or any business to an academic setting -

DC: Sure

DA: is not being privy to and not understanding the finances. This business woman, who handled a \$52 million bioterrorism grant, not being privy to my budget at Adena was extremely

frustrating to me. So, when the new dean came in and kept saying to me that "I'm not sure this is cost effective," I kept saying to her, "let me see the numbers."

DC: The numbers

DA: Because I think that's erroneous information and course, at that time, Jill was gone and Pat was gone and you know I kept saying "ask Pat." That was something that I don't think was done. It could have happened.

DC: Right

DA: So the finances were always kind of weird to me and I could never really get a handle on them.

DC: Sure, that would be a big challenge.

DA: On that – in terms of indirect costs. All Pat would ever say to me was that it had to be a zero-sum gain.

DC: Okay

DA: And unfortunately, Adena had a lot of turnovers in their fiscal managers so they had no historical documentation. What ended up happening was that Adena was supposed to charge back to us their indirect costs and they never did. See, Pat had made a negotiation with the university that the college of nursing could keep 75% of the tuition.

DC: Oh

DA: So the breakeven point - the deal was that we would get 75% tuition for the indirect costs from Adena and then we would provide the faculty. The faculty was supposed to come from WSU. Well, the faculty didn't want to teach so then -

DC: Wow

DA: It was let's get some adjuncts. They are less expensive, and they are from the community and the thought was to really foster that academic clinical relationship which would have worked marvelously if I had time to do that. I was building up a nice group of adjunct faculty to teach that liked to teach. Now we had gone through a couple of director of nurses but the overall the nursing staff and the president of the hospital were very satisfied with the product that we gave them.

DC: very good

DA: We got lots of accolades about those students who became nursing at Adena. They could always tell WSU graduates.

DC: Neat. What do you think the WSU students demonstrated?

DA: Critical thinking skills.

DC: Critical thinking because of the baccalaureate degree in contrast to the associate degrees.

DA: Stop

DC: Were the majority of the nurses prior to that - were associates so their focus might have been a little different?

DA: Yes, I think they did have critical thinking skills. #1 that they had a professional. I think WSU really taught them what being a professional nurse really meant by the courses they taught, by the way they acted when on a clinical unit.

DC: Sure

DA: You know you would really have to talk to the nursing staff there.

DC: That would be a really good idea.

DA: To find out what they saw as the difference. I really do believe that the WSU student didn't see it as a job, they saw it as a profession.

DC: So, who was the director of nursing then that you may have developed a good relationship with there? Someone who was supportive. I know at one time, I had met the -

DA: Well, Denise Minor was one, I can't remember the name of the other woman. I don't remember her name,

DC: That is okay.

DA: Candy might know her name.

DC: Just curious if we ever had an opportunity to interview -

DA: Peggy - she is there now.

DC: The current director?

DA: Yes

DC: Okay – so the current director was there while the program was in place? that would be an interesting person to interview at some time.

DA: I didn't find her as helpful. Denise all came to our graduation ceremonies and those kind of things. The other gal, was more interested in the advanced practitioners. They were trying to grow hospitalist.

DC: Correct

DA: Kris Scordo was not supportive, in fact.

DC: That was too bad

DA: and it would have been nice because it could have kept our foot in at Adena, but she didn't feel like there – you know she was in control of the faculty and she didn't feel like she could spend the time and energy.

DC: That is too bad

DA: So, she was more of an OU supporter, I think

DC: Oh interesting.

DA: I may be wrong about that; but I didn't find her as supportive as Denise Minor, who I also had some issues with.

DC: Did she – was she working on her doctorate at the time?

DA: She just finished it.

DC: She just finished it.

DA: She didn't have much of a welcoming personality.

DC: Denise?

DA: Yes, she was very offish and she really wanted that magnet status and she was always wanting to know how many – her issue was how many of our graduates were going to come to Adena.

DC: So, if you educated folks who wanted to work other places -

DA: That was not – it was a bone of contention.

DC: Very interesting.

DA: And then the other thing they did that I often wanted to write up and never had – was they started an internship program and most of our grads went into that internship program and I believe there was less of a turnover. You know with those grads.

DC: Oh

DA: You know when we first started that program, we got a lot of people from outside of the Chillicothe area.

DC: right

DA: The people who couldn't get into Columbus State because the waiting list was too long. Lots of foreign students from Somalia, Nigeria, and those students were – some of them were very good, but others of them, culturally speaking, just didn't work very well.

DC: So, did they do primarily their clinicals at Adena?

DA: Yes, all the clinical were at Adena except for the psych and the Pediatrics, oh and public health.

DC: So, do you think given the role and nature of Adena, do you think there was any bias

DA: Oh – yes.

DC: Because the students looked differently.

DA: Well, the Muslim students wore head-dresses so we really had problems at the VA.

DC: Interesting.

DA: And we had some problems at the hospital.

DC: So mostly they had concerns about what they were wearing?

DA: No, because they were Muslims.

DC: Oh that they were Muslims?

DA: Yes.

DC: Interesting. So other things that you would like to share with us about your experiences. If there are some accomplishments you were able to get done at the program there, things that you were able to -

DA: Well, we graduated almost 100 students and most of those students are practicing in rural Ohio at Adena and Greene. Is there a hospital there?

DC: Yes.

DA: So, I would say that 2/3 rd of them practicing in either Chillicothe or some place in the rural area. So, I think we accomplished what we set out to do. I feel badly that we weren't given enough time because of change in directors, change in politics. It is interesting to me that when the threat of OU – what OU did was that when they established their BSN program -

DC: Yes – tell me about this.

DA: They – the tuition for their nursing program was actually higher than WSU.

DC: Oh.

DA: On the main campus; but what they did was they cut their tuition in half at all of their out-reach campuses. So, Zanesville, Chillicothe, Lancaster – their tuition was half.

DC: Wow.

DA: And WSU couldn't compete with that, #1, or they could have but the new dean chose not too – so Adena then decided not to renew our contract.

DC: That was what I was going to ask you – how did this whole process go about that the relationship between WSU –

DA: First of all, we had a meeting with the dean and the CEO of the hospital and the Vice President of nursing and the Dean came down and just was embarrassingly rude.

DC: That is too bad

DA: Then I had to go back after she left and do some damage control. I had built up a good relationship with all of those administrators. So, she damaged the relationship that Pat Martin, Candy, I, Carol Holdcraft, and Gabby had built up.

DC: So, was she rude, was she like insulting?

DA: She was very insulting.

DC: That is too bad. So that -

DA: Very brusque about what they could offer us and about – this was just a financial deal and there was no room for negotiation. She walked into that meeting, from my point of view, with absolutely no intention of trying to negotiate something. So that was the beginning of the end and then with the student enrollment dropping so much, she gave us one more year to get the enrollment up; but by that time, we couldn't. We ended up with only about 25 but then only 19 students. We had 30 to begin with but with attrition. By that time, Adena had talked to OU and OU said that they would come in at \$2000 less when it was \$4000 for WSU tuition so it became a financial issue. It really was not a quality issue at all, ever. I do pride ourselves that we had quality teachers, the ones that came and the adjuncts we had developed were all very good. With a few exceptions, but I didn't rehire them.

DC: Sure

DA: Yes – so unfortunately with the handwriting on the wall. Lisa Filio left so then we had to rely on the people from the main campus to come down and they weren't as invested as Lisa was. Jodi Gill left.

DC: She was the backbone

DA: Right, so now she did come back as an adjunct for me for the final ICU course. So that was all a struggle towards the end. The thing that really made me sad was that the Dean won't negotiate a competitive salary at Adena, but she has done that at the Lake Campus.

DC: Oh interesting. Do you think she has learned from what happened there?

DA: I don't know.

DC: That is interesting. I will have to interview her on that sometime. That is very good.

DA: I don't know how well the Lake Campus is doing, but once again, I have never been involved in the upstart at that. It is almost like well I was a failure at Adena, so they are not going to interview me for Lake. I don't believe that to be true.

DC: So, what was it like that last term in the program?

DA: Well, actually I had a wonderful group of students. Many of them are facebook friends with me now.

DC: How nice.

DA: You know. I think that it was a very small cohesive group. I did the capstone – you know I was out there on weekends and nights following those kids and talking with their preceptors. It was fun.

DC: Yes – anything else you would like to add?

DA: There are a couple of things I would like to say. That final year I came back and I did the RN and BSN program online, which I dearly loved.

DC: Good.

DA: The other thing that I did for the University, that I feel I did a very good job with, was that I was chair of undergraduate curriculum for two years, I was chair for bylaws committee for two years, and I was on the U-cap at the University level and on the Technology committee. So I thought I did - provided lots of leadership and mentorship in terms of the skills and abilities that I have.

DC: Right

DA: That many faculty, from my perspective, do not have in terms of running a committee, getting things done. Those kinds of things.

DC: Thank you very much.