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Dottie Troop Memoir

Troop, Dottie

Interview and memoir

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UIS Alumni Sage Society

Troop discusses her experiences at Sangamon State University as both a student and faculty member. She graduated in 1972 with a master's in educational leadership and then taught in the applied study office for over 20 years before retiring in 2008. She remembers the importance of the public affairs component required for graduates of SSU and her work with placement of students for both student teaching and applied study internships.

Interview by Karen Hasara, 2008

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Narrator: Dottie Troop
Place: Springfield, IL
Date: August 28, 2008
Interviewer: Karen Hasara

Q. This is Karen Hasara interviewing Dottie Troop on August 28, 2008. Dottie, you have an interesting background with the University because you were a student and then a faculty member for quite awhile. So I'm going to start by asking you about your student days. You had already gone to college somewhere before you came to Sangamon State. So what was your background when you got here?

A. Well I went my first year to Monmouth College right after high school and I didn't know what I wanted to major in but I realized that year I wanted to go into elementary education. So I transferred to Western Illinois University at Macomb and finished the next three years there and graduated with a bachelor's degree in education from there. Then I went to northern Illinois and taught kindergarten at Rochelle Illinois.

Then when we moved to Springfield, I taught a year and a half in the Springfield schools and then when we started having our family I was a stay-at-home mother. And then when Michael the youngest one was about four, I went back and did part-time teaching in Rochester. And then in 1970, when Sangamon State opened, I thought, "This is my opportunity to go get a master's degree in education administration." So I was a charter student and went through Sangamon State at that time, the first years, and got my master's degree in educational administration.

Q. What brought you to Springfield and what year did you come to Springfield?

A. My husband was starting work with the Illinois Department of Rehabilitation Services and that's what brought us to Springfield in 1956.

Q. Oh, so you had been here awhile.

A. Yes, I feel like Springfield is my home.

Q. Good. What was your impression of your two years at Sangamon State?

A. Well I think the thing that was interesting to me was living in the Midwest and not having the opportunity to be exposed to a diversity of faculty; that was the thing that was interesting to me. And we did have some very unusual faculty at the very beginning at Sangamon State. But I do feel that the ones that I had, with the exception of maybe one or two, were committed teachers. And I think that's what the whole idea of Sangamon State was – was teaching.

Q. Who were some of those teachers that really impressed you? Do you remember who or the classes that they taught, if you can't remember their name.

A. I had never had a philosophy class and that was something that was very interesting to me. A class that I had that I thought was very interesting was one where we looked at communities and looked at the power units within the communities. I still think about that class.

What are the power units within a community even in a large community and then some of your more rural communities? Who are the power players there? So those are a couple of them that stick out in my mind, the philosophy and that one. And I can't think of any others right off hand.

Q. What about the physical appearance at Sangamon State? I mean about – do you remember some of the classrooms?

A. Well, the first classes we had were downtown in the old Leland Building. And then when they started getting buildings on the campus, one of them was a kind of a tiered seating arrangement – there were no cushions or anything, they were hard, just hard surface places to sit. But maybe [laughter] that was to keep us awake!

Anyway, the whole campus was centered around one area down on what is now the lower – down on the eastside. And there was a concourse area where during lunch hour there would be people making presentations, there would be musical things – it was just interesting. You'd go out there and sit and be exposed to some things that I think were very unique.

Q. What about social activities? Do you remember taking part in any of those?

A. I didn't do much of that because I had a husband and three elementary school boys at home. So when I left the campus I went home. And then most of my classes were in the late morning or early afternoon or maybe once in awhile an evening class because after the boys went to school that was my time to hit the books. And that's what I did.

And so I really wasn't involved in anything and there really wasn't that much going on at that time because the University was just getting itself together. And I think that was not a high priority at that time, it was more or less to get things organized and get going. And I will say that there were some people that were there that I still treasure their friendships. So that was back in the 1970s and that's thirty plus years ago.

Q. Do you still have friendships with some of those people or do you mean that you valued the friendships that you made at that time?

A. Well, there are still a couple people that were there early on that I mean – I will have to say that Dr. Spencer's wife Edith, I spent some time with her a few years ago out in Bozeman,

Montana. She was unique in her own way and I appreciated that. And she's always very welcoming to you.

Q. Looking back at your education that you received as a master's degree student, I mean, do you feel positive about the education that you got? Could it have been better? How would you evaluate it?

A. Well, I think it could have been a little more in-depth than what we got at that time. And I'm sure as the University has progressed through the years that getting a master's degree and the thesis would be a little more intensive than what it was at the time. But I don't feel it was a deterrent to me in my working at the University.

Q. What about things like grades and some of the things that were unusual then, could you comment about, did you receive grades?

A. [Long pause] Well, I don't think we got a letter grade. I think we got written evaluations at the very beginning. And sometimes I think that takes more work on the faculty member's part to look at each student and to evaluate them as to what their learning has been in that class, then give you a letter grade.

Q. How would you compare the relationship with the teachers say compared to what you had at Western? Was it different?

A. Well, the classes were small so consequently I think the faculty that were there at that time were a little more focused on you as a student and I think that maybe it was better in that respect – the smaller classes, yes.

Q. You mentioned your thesis. What was your thesis about?

A. Well, my degree was in education administration and my interest was in outdoor education in the elementary school, which was not very evident in many schools at that time. So I felt that that was something maybe we could work on in the elementary schools was to incorporate that concept into the curriculum of an elementary school.

And today I appreciate the Lincoln Memorial Gardens and the educational component there. And I think we need to get our children then and now more outdoor-oriented. And that was my whole thesis – outdoor education in an elementary school.

Q. Great. Let's switch now to what happened after you got your master's. What did you do then?

A. I got the degree in the spring of 1972. And in the fall of 1972 I started working in the applied study program, basically working with the student teaching. And my responsibility was to work up the placements for the student teachers and to work up the components that they had in

two or three of their classes to get the students out into the classes before they do their student teaching so they can get an idea if they want to really be a teacher. And some of them found out, no, don't think so. And that was good.

Q. Right. And that was at Sangamon State.

A. That's right, in 1972.

Q. Do you remember about how many student teachers you'd have in a semester or year?

A. I can't answer that one now. It wasn't very many because it was not a big component. But I think the thing that was interesting to me was that most of the student teachers were majoring in psychology and I felt that was good in that they had an understanding of psychology to take into the classroom.

Q. And applied study, was that a mandate?

A. When the University started we had just come out of the 1960s and it was the idea that many of the students who were finishing degrees in the 1960s were saying, "I have a degree, what do I do?" And so it was built into the curriculum that every student at Sangamon State, when they started this University, would do eight semester hours of applied study.

So consequently when they started the program you had to work with students from history, English, the sciences, math, anything – economics and so forth. So every student had to do eight semester hours of applied study. And that was very unusual. I mean, I think Sangamon State along with Evergreen in the Seattle, Washington area were two of the schools who started off with this whole thing of experiential learning in the upper level University.

Q. How did the community react to that because I assume that not so much for student teaching but for other students in other professions that you had to have some cooperation from the community for these students to get that experience, do you remember?

A. Well, I think being in the capitol city with state government we found a lot of placements at that time within state government. And they were not paid placements; we were just looking at students getting experience. So consequently, many of the state agencies and businesses and things in the local area were willing to work with students because they might have a special project they want to get done and they just don't have the time and the resources to do that.

So they could give that to a student which would be a learning experience for the student. And over time we found that possibly one-third of the students who did an applied study got a job out of their placement, which was a plus for the student.

Q. Do you have any particular matches or experiences that you recall that would be interesting to recount?

A. Well, I've just noticed that a student that graduated with my oldest son from Rochester High School came in one day and said he was an economics major and he wanted to do his applied study in grain merchandising. And I'm thinking, "Oh my! Where can we do that?" So I thought of a business out in Curran, Illinois which was a big elevator – I can't remember the name of the company. So I just called and they did it. That young man went on and went way up in that company.

And he's retired now at fifty, and has moved back to this area. He was out east and I know he's in the Springfield area now. But sometimes you just had to – when they came in with an idea you just had to think, "What do we have around here or elsewhere that we could use for a placement for students?" And just make a contact and many times they were very receptive to it.

Q. So some of the placements were out of the city?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. Did the students go somewhere else and live for a quarter or semester?

A. We had some students but not a lot of them. Sometimes we had our biggest enrollment of students in the summer because they would go back to their home area and work up a placement. So consequently, the fall was usually our downtime because they weren't there in the summer to work up a placement for fall. So if they had an idea of something back in their local area, they could go back home and do something there.

Q. So the students probably were helpful at times in getting their own placement then, I assume.

A. Oh, yes. But they had to bring it in and we had to get approval on it. We had some independent-type of things that students did for applied study, too. But the thing was that over time, one of the faculty who worked with us and was with the program most of the time, helped us work up an academic component to go along with the applied study. And he along with us, we worked up a workbook and we had classes that were a part of the applied study program. So it had that academic component in it which we could justify for the academic credit.

Q. And who was that?

A. Craig Brown.

Q. At development?

A. I was in the bookstore not long ago and that manual had been revised but it still has Craig's name as one of the original developers of it.

Q. So for awhile you worked just with student teachers and then did you broaden that?

A. Then as time when on and the University got more student, I worked into the applied study and did not work with the student teachers because they were getting faculty in that program to do that part.

Q. Did you ever have difficulty getting student teachers placed?

A. Well there's a lot of competition in Springfield as far as student teachers are concerned because Western was in here with a student teaching program. And so we had to go outside of the Springfield school district to some of the smaller school districts to get placements.

Q. Because I assume that a student teacher couldn't go under just any teacher.

A. No.

Q. Do you remember what the requirements were?

A. You mean for the teacher?

Q. Uh-huh.

A. I don't remember.

Q. OK. That would be like the master teacher.

A. That's right. And they had to be recommended by the principal or the one at the school who felt that that person was a good classroom teacher in order to take a student teacher because they had extra responsibilities too. And if they didn't want to assume those responsibilities then that was their decision, too.

Q. What was the follow up then not just for student teaching but for any applied study position? I mean how did you know the student progressed?

A. Well, as part of the applied study and the academic component initially in the classes, they had to work up what we called the learning contract with the supervisor in the placement. And then they had to state their learning objectives and how they were going to meet those learning objectives. And then we would make at least two – one if they were a distance we would make one field visit particularly in the summer.

And then if they were close by we would have an initial visit and then a follow-up visit at the end and go over that learning contract to see if the student had met those learning objectives. Then the student had to write a self-evaluation of their experience and the field supervisor had to write an evaluation of the student based on that learning contract. I always felt that we would do about five hundred students a year towards the end of my position there. And I really felt that we were doing a good job in that respect. [Telephone rings]

Q. Dottie how long then were you at the University in that capacity?

A. I worked at Sangamon State which is now University of Illinois at Springfield for twenty-one years and I retired in December of 1993.

Q. Was the school still Sangamon State then?

A. It was when I retired, yes.

Q. Looking back, do you still keep in touch with people in applied study and is it pretty much the same, do you know if it's changed much?

A. I made up my mind when I retired in December that that part of my life was behind me and so I consequently had no contact with the program after that because that was of my choosing. And I've become involved in other things, volunteer and travel and so forth, and so consequently I don't know what the status of it is at this time. I do know the person who is in charge of it now, I saw her not long ago.

And I don't know how it operates at this time. I do know that they have lost some funding that I was very instrumental in getting for students to be paid on their internships and that has been taken away from them from state funding. So consequently, we're back to square one where the students may be doing things for nothing. And that's too bad because I mean students today need to be reimbursed and they can do that.

I would like to mention that when I was working with the program we were really very unique in higher education and we went to many conferences; there is a group called the National Society of Experiential Education and we did presentations at a number of those national conferences on our program and were recognized throughout the country for the program.

And then we did go to some that were cooperative education and we tried to get a cooperative education grant and applied for it but were disappointed after all of our effort that we did not get that. But I just believe it was of a very integral part of a student's education and there came a time when the applied study was not required.

They built in another component where the students could take either a liberal arts component or the applied study. However there were some programs that still kept it as a requirement.

So we had some frustrations over the years, I mean there was one program that felt that we shouldn't be getting the credit, they should be getting the credit.

And then they took it and we understood that the students were just doing anything to get eight hours of credit. And it was pulled back into us, to the applied study program much to their dismay. But that was done by the academic vice president.

Q. Did the public affairs courses that became required courses take the place of some of those service hours or was that in addition?

A. Well, the public affairs component was always there when I was there. Then they took the applied study and made the applied study and the liberal arts because they thought they needed a liberal arts component. I don't know whether the public affairs component is still there, I don't know.

Q. In the past I know, I believe all students were required to take a public affairs...

A. PAC they called it.

Q. Yeah, a course. And they were interesting, very interesting.

A. They were good.

Q. Where were your offices when you were employed there? You probably had more than one I'm guessing. Do you remember?

A. When we started out we were down in one of the temporary buildings on campus there down in that quad area, they called it. And then we went up into the Brookens Library, had an office up there. And that's – we were in two or three places up in the Brookens Library in the office facilities up there. And that's where we worked when I retired.

Q. Do you still go to the University for events or have any contacts out there?

A. Well, I was out there the other day to buy tickets for the symphony and a couple of other programs, yes. I just think it's wonderful, the housing that they have built out there. I mean it's not this high rise you see at other state campuses. I just think the buildings on the west there are – give me a feeling that Frank Lloyd Wright would approve of. I mean, I think they are just a wonderful asset to the campus. And I think that structure they have outside of the PAC Building with the fountain is a beautiful thing. I just love the campus. I love the landscaping that's been done there because when I worked there we had no trees.

And when our offices were up in Brookens Auditorium in the wintertime we had some very harsh winters there. And my husband bought me an Icelandic wool scarf hood and there were days when I walked up that walk to Brookens Library that I just kept saying, "Right foot, left

foot, right foot, left foot," because the wind was horrible. And now they have wonderful trees along there.

But I was just out there the other day and I just looked at the beautiful landscaping around there and I think the person who is in charge of that should be highly commended. I think the whole campus has a real nice feel about it. And I'm proud of it and I know that when the idea was being conceptualized to have a university in Springfield there was a lot of aversion to not have one here because we had a junior college but I don't think we've taken away from that.

I think we have added a lot to the Springfield and local community and surrounding area with higher education. And I talked to a student the other day in the ticket office who went to the school my boys went to in Rochester and she got her bachelor's degree and now she's working on her master's degree there. So I think that it's really fulfilled a need in central Illinois and I think a lot of students area coming in from other places too because of the public affairs thrust of the University.

Q. Is there anything else you remember and would like to comment for posterity?

A. Well, there were some things that happened there that were very upsetting to us and I think that I will commend the faculty senate for their diligence for keeping the University on a good path. And I picked up a student paper the other day when I was out there and I was very impressed with that. I took it home and scanned through it. There were things that happened and I think they all happened for a reason and the University is better for it. And that's about the only thing I can say.

There was a time when of the academic vice president was dismissed and I just was appalled but then I respect that person and it didn't deter him and his career. I think there were a lot of things that those of us who graduated from there were appreciative of having our degree made a University of Illinois degree, I appreciate that. I've gone to some of the graduations since because I ushered at the auditorium for a period of time and I always thought it was fun that we had floppy hats.

Q. [Laughter]

A. I don't know whether they still do or not but I thought that was kind of a unique thing and I have mine.

End of Interview

Total running time: 32 min 17 sec