

DMACC Sociology Discipline

Information from interview with Rudy Harris

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The DMACC Sociology discipline is almost synonymous with Rudy Harris. Rudy started teaching at DMACC in 1972 and taught full-time for over 40 years, retiring in 2014. He became the chair of the Sociology Department. After retiring, he taught as an adjunct for another five years. Paul Lowery was president of the college when Rudy was hired, and Zach Hamlett was on the search committee that hired Rudy. Rudy was the second full-time sociology instructor at DMACC. He worked with four college presidents and nine deans.

Initially, Rudy taught classes at Sabin Elementary School and then the Osteopathic College. Some courses were offered from 6-9 pm and from 9-midnight. When the campus started to form in Ankeny, Sociology courses moved into Building 18 on the lower campus. As the upper campus was built, those classes moved to Building 6 and finally to Building 2 where they currently reside. Rudy shared an office with Rick Chapman, Frank Trumpy, Bruce Hann, and Jerry Wisnieski

When Rudy started teaching, there was a Sociology Part 1 and a Sociology Part 2. One of Rudy's first initiatives was to prepare a proposal for the Curriculum Commission which would combine the two courses into one – Soc 101 Intro to Sociology. Other classes that were added to the curriculum over the following years included Marriage and Family, Social Problems, Juvenile Delinquency, Criminology, Minority Group Relations, and Issues in Aging. These additional courses were chosen following the demands to reflect changes in society and culture as well as reviewing courses that were being offered at other institutions. Emphasis on certain topics varied with instructors.

The Sociology Department depended significantly on adjunct instructors. Rudy is very proud of his recommendations to hire Mike Delaney and Gary Titchener as full-time faculty. He also gave recommendations for the hiring of adjunct faculty. Over 50 % of the faculty in Sociology was adjunct. At the beginning of his career, lecture was the primary format for teaching in the classroom. The teaching approach trended toward having more discussion along with the use of overhead projectors and PPT. Rudy was always a classroom teacher.

Rudy feels that he did observe a change with students. He thinks that students, as a whole, used to be more dedicated to getting an education and doing well in their courses. So many students now have to work and can go to school only part-time. This can affect their ability to commit to their classes.

Sociology faculty from all campuses would get together for annual meetings to discuss issues in the discipline. One year, Rudy and Mike Delaney put together a seminar for the Iowa Sociology Society when faculty from across the state came together to share ideas.

Rudy shared two other memories. The first was a time when the state cut funding to the college. To deal with the reduction in money, some areas of study and faculty would have to be terminated. Faculty had to stand up in the auditorium and try to defend their position before an audience. The second memory was the "Keep it quiet" rule. No one was supposed to say the term "Arts and Sciences." Since DMACC was considered a "technical school," some people, including Iowa legislators, felt that Arts and Science courses didn't belong at the college!

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Photo by Anna Duran

Rudy Harris prepares his Marriage and Family class for the day's material.

Campus Chronicle article (below) and picture by Anna Duran, Managing Editor of Ankeny campus student paper.

Retirement Series: Rudy Harris's 40 years nears end

ANNA DURAN
MANAGING EDITOR

Rudy Harris, the head of the Sociology department, is retiring after 40 years at DMACC.

In those 40 years, Harris has worked with four DMACC presidents, nine deans, thousands of students, and only missed three days of work.

"He's got a very strong work ethic, and believes in being here as much as humanly possible," Sociology professor Gary Titchener said.

Harris also has a unique attachment to his career. He has kept up with the research in his field and reviews the texts in his field for a publishing company.

"If you want to be a good teacher you have to fine tune all the time, keep your brain sharp. I like these areas and wanted to pursue them. I've always been interested," Harris said.

"He has a passion for sociology. He's always enthusiastic. You can't replace 40 years of experience," Dean of Arts and Sciences Jim Stick said.

There's no doubt that Harris cares deeply for his students.

"Seeing students graduate or go through a course with me, seeing them light up on a journey with me is a cool experience. It's really nice to maintain contact with the students I've connected with," Harris said.

It's obvious his students feel the same way about him.

"I love him as a professor. I've had a blast in the two classes I took with him. DMACC is really going to lose something when he retires," said Chris Flannery, a first year student.

Harris and his colleagues have relationships that are mutually brimming with respect.

"He's an amazing guy, extremely well-liked by his students. I have a hard time imagining this not being a part of his life. Rudy would say he was going to retire in two years, and then the next year, I'll retire in two years. It kind of became a running joke," said Titchener.

"This is very hard for him to retire. I know he's put it off," said Stick.

"I didn't expect to stay here this long, but DMACC is an excellent institution," Harris said.

His office is overflowing with sociology books, and he says he's been cleaning. The shelves - still full of texts and papers - do little to prove it.

"It's been emotional," he says of the cleaning process.

Harris can't remember any particularly bad days.

"I'm always positive and upbeat. We don't live in a perfect world, so there are frustrations. Most of the time, it's positive," he said.

Staying positive has its benefits, but Rudy harbors no illusion that retiring will be easy for him.

"I think the first year may be the most difficult, making the transition. I think after the first year, I should be okay," Harris said.

Harris has plans to travel this summer. He and his wife have planned an Alaskan cruise and to spend some time on the east coast with family before returning in the fall to teach as an adjunct part time.

"It's been a fun experience, a hobby for me. It's a challenge, but the rewards are terrific. I'm really going to miss it. It's been a beautiful journey."

<https://www.dmacc.edu/departments/psychology/Pages/welcome.aspx>