



Carolina Population Center

In 1966, the Carolina Population Center was founded at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. To celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2006, a project was conducted to document the history of the Center. This transcript is an excerpt from an oral history interview.

Interviewee: Don Thomas

Interview conducted by: Grace Camblos

Interview date: November 16, 2005

Don Thomas was a CPC Predoctoral Trainee studying Epidemiology from 1974 – 1977, CPC International Programs Office Research Assistant from 1976 – 1981, and Training Program Coordinator and Training Program Director from 1981 – 1999.

GC: How did the training program change while you were the coordinator?

DT: Well, being able to support foreign trainees made some sort of a change. I guess the growth was certainly related to changes that were not simply “getting larger.” When Amy [Tsui] became the deputy director, associate director, whatever it was that her title was, she had some good ideas about doing things for and with the trainees. The basic way that we did things, I would say, did not change very much. The system of having each trainee with a faculty preceptor, working closely together, was in all the time I was around, and I would sort of hope that it was still in, because that was one of the strengths of the program. The selection process, I would say, didn’t change dramatically during the time I was around. The types of trainees that we got varied, but they varied, I think as much as anything, based on the research that the fellows were doing and those that were really involved with the Center. Some time before I became the training program coordinator, Vaida Thompson in Psychology was the training person at the Center. And she remained active on the training committee for some time. But that aspect - we did have several trainees in Psychology, but not an awful lot. Most of them were Sociology, some of them were from Economics, some from Geography, some from other fields, Epidemiology, et cetera. I don’t think that the changes that did take place in the disciplines for the trainees were related to the growth of the program or anything of that sort. I think they were more likely related to which people on the faculty had funding for research and wanted to be working with research assistants who, if they were paid by a training grant, did not have to be paid from the research award. Which of course was helpful.