



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

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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: Now, these are the Friday Seminars?

DT: These are the Friday Seminars, yes.

GC: What did they add to the Training Program?

DT: What did they add? Well, a number of different things. Some of those seminars were given by post-docs, who let the other trainees, the other post-docs, any faculty members who were interested, and anybody from the town who wanted to wander in and come to the seminar - it was open to the public, but rarely attended by anyone who wasn't part of the family - it let them find out what that person was doing, what they were working on. Occasionally there were actually seminars given with the idea - and that was a special series, not the Friday Seminars, a special series for work in progress, where we actually asked people to present things that they were working on, and where they might want some input, from other people who might be interested. We also had another series of seminars: pre-presentation. If trainees, either post-docs or pre-docs, were going to give a paper at a professional meeting, we encouraged them to give it first here in front of a friendly audience. And I think that really helped a lot of times. And of course we encouraged our trainees to present papers. So it was good for the trainees that way. Another thing that was happening in the seminars is that we had reports on faculty research from within the Center. And that was good, because you could find out something about what other people here were doing. You might even find out that there was something that you were interested in having some involvement with. We found a number of visitors, for one reason or another, were willing to give seminars. Some of them were invited in specifically, or mainly, to give seminars, and that gave people a chance to hear people from other institutions, which was good. What did it contribute? Breadth to the program. A variety of things that you could find out about that were related to population and hopefully to your interests. I guess we did have special seminars, too, for whatever they called it: integrity in research ethics, in research, or something. There came a day when the NICHD, the NIH traineeships, not just NICHD, but NIA and whatever else we had, required that there be

something on integrity in research. So we included seminars of that sort that the trainees were expected to attend, and generally did.