Martinez: This is Deborah Martinez Martinez, [and] I am interviewing George Autobee on February 20-

Autobee: 4th.

Martinez: 24th 2016. This interview is taking place at the University of Southern Colorado in the offices of the University Archives and Special Collections, in the library, in Pueblo, Colorado. The interview is sponsored by the CSU-Pueblo University Archives and Special Collections and is part of the Southern Colorado Ethnic Heritage and Diversity Archives Project. I want to confirm that you George Autobee understand that this interview is being recorded and this recording will be preserved in the archives.

Autobee: Yes, I understand.

Martinez: Thank you for agreeing to the interview and being part of the archives! George, I’m interested in when you came to the university, because it wasn’t the university at the time, if you could tell how you came to the university and your involvement with whatever Chicano clubs that were on the campus at the time.

Autobee: Sure, okay. Well, I came to the university--when was it--it would have been September of ‘69. I got discharged out of the Marine Corps in May of ‘69 and that summer I spent working at Gibson’s and ran into some friends over there. I made friends with some of the people out there and they said, “if you’re going to start at the university,”--or the college at the time, it was SCSC (Southern Colorado State College)--they said, “you should get into sociology.” Because I didn’t know what to get into. I had just came back from combat. I was trying to focus, and I had no idea what sociology was. So, Mike Garcia, who worked with me at Gibson’s-- “Plus,” he says, “you got to get involved with this organization called Chicanos For Action” [aka Chicanos Unidos For Action]. At that time I had no idea of Chicanos For Action. My dad used to use the term Chicano, but I had never heard it termed as an organization. It was mostly used as, “there goes a Chicano over there,” but it was never as a group movement. So, I got involved with Chicanos for Action and Danny Apodaca was the chairman. Gil Martinez--I know he was very involved with them also, because Gil Martinez was running with Sherman
Trotter for President and Vice-President of the student government and they needed the working relationship with Chicanos for Action to help them get the vote. I met Gil at the Chicanos for Action meeting. Gil then--

Martinez: Was he a vet also?

Autobee: Oh yeah, yeah. Gil was in the United States Marine Corps. He was with the 9th Marines. Gilbert and I developed a real close relationship, because of our history in the Marine Corps. But he ended up being my mentor, because--Gil ended up--he didn't win the position for student government. They lost the election. But student government said, “we’re looking for people to be our commissioners for student government” and they said that “we have a position for academic affairs. Recommend somebody.” And Gil and Sherman recommended me, because [of] my working relationship them. I helped them on their campaign.

I ended up as Commissioner of Academic Affairs in my freshman year [laughing]. I had no idea what student government was, other than what I had done in high school. I had the knowledge of how student government worked, because I had been in student government, representing my high school. So, I got in student government as Commissioner of Academic Affairs and the first question they asked me was, “what are you going to do as Commissioner of Academic Affairs?”

As the Commissioner of Academic Affairs, I wrote a proposal to student government. We got funded to go to California to study their Chicano Studies programs. While we were there, we went to the University of San Diego, Riverside, UCLA, and Berkley. I stayed with them and went to their classes. And Outward Bound has a whole training program, the Outward Bound school called Experiential Training. You talk about it, then you do it. I never saw that happen until I went to Chicano Studies classes, because what happened is the instructor said, “okay, we’re going to study Mexican music, but tonight I’m going to expect you all in Tijuana, because we’re going to listen to mariachis and you’re going to get class credit for being a part of that project.” [Laughing] This is my kind of reality! It was not only the educational side, but it was a hands-on practical application. While we were there we also saw how Chicano Studies was formed in the arts, in history, and how it applied across the curriculum. And then, the biggest thing we found out was they had a concept called the “Barrio Station.” The Barrio Station was the university students going back out into the community, sitting down with the community residents, developing recruitment programs for the university, so we would have a feeder system, a tutorial program. Going out there and helping kids with other programs. This played in later on very heavily, because we saw how when you give back to the community--yes?

Martinez: So, George who went with you on the trip back to California?
Autobee: Well, it would’ve been Dr. Cordova, he was our mentor--

Martinez: Faculty sponsor.

Autobee: Faculty sponsor, yeah, we had to have a faculty sponsor. Pablo Gonzalez, he was President of MEChA at that time, then Lorenzo Montoya, who was the Vice President of MEChA, and myself, because I wrote the proposal and got it funded. So, we were there for a week. We came back with all the curriculum, books. In fact we had a lowrider station wagon coming back, we had so much material. What ended up happening was that we came to the university. We approached the curriculum committee here on campus to implement Chicano Studies. They wouldn’t do it! Well, what ended up happening in MEChA--because what happened was Chicanos For Action had a big change in leadership. Pablo Gonzalez took over MEChA presidency, Lorenzo became Vice President. Then what happened was that Lorenzo--well it was Pablo, then J.J. Ragosa, then Lorenzo Montoya, and then myself.

When I go to President of MEChA I pulled together everybody and we had a demonstration--that was some of the photos I was showing you earlier. We had a demonstration here on campus. We took over the campus and met with the president and he acquiesced. We got Chicano Studies here on campus, started the next fall with Chicano Studies 101, and we ended up with 100 students in the class. But that was because we had also written a proposal to student government for a disadvantaged scholarship program--because the racism that was in the financial aid office was so bad, many of our people couldn’t get financial aid. One of our other demands besides Chicano Studies was firing the financial aid officer and they did it. They fired him. We got a Chicano financial aid officer after that. So, the demonstration proved very well, except for the whole “Coors incident,” where a bunch a people got arrested. But that was out of our hands. That wasn’t a part of what MEChA was all about. Ours was academic oriented, not dealing with Coors. So, what ends up happening is that we have the demonstration and got Chicano Studies on campus and it was ours--

Martinez: How big was the demonstration?

Autobee: Oh, we had at least 100, 200 people.

Martinez: Where?

Autobee: At the administration building. Yeah, we surrounded it and took it over, but we did not deny access. If you deny access, you are in violation of their rights to public facilities. What happened down at the Coors Pub, where they had the other demonstration, they blocked the entrance and they were arrested for blocking the entrance. So, we had nothing to do with that--that was none of ours--that was the Brown Berets and La Raza Unida people trying to impose themselves.

Martinez: So, you were talking about--you had the demonstration. Who was President of MEChA at the time?

Autobee: I was President at the time.
Martinez: Who was President of the University?

Autobee: Oh, Harry Bowes, Dr. Harry Bowes.

Martinez: So, did you actually meet with him--

Autobee: No we met with him--

Martinez: --or the committee of the curriculum?

Autobee: No we met with both. The curriculum committee--well the curriculum committee would never meet with us. We would send reps. No they would never meet with us. So, we took it to the President and told him what was going on.

Martinez: And that was in the fall of--

Autobee: It was ’70-- [closing his eyes]

Martinez: ‘71?

Autobee: No it was spring of ’71. We started classes (Chicano Studies) in ’72, if I’m not mistaken. Yeah.

Martinez: You started (Chicano Studies) classes in spring of ‘72?


Martinez: Okay.

Autobee: And I’m proud to announce--I was one of the few that got a minor in Chicano Studies.

Martinez: All right!

Autobee: I think I was the first one to get a minor in Chicano Studies.

Martinez: So, you had 100 kids in that very first class?

Autobee: Yep.

Martinez: I assume it was Chicano Studies 101?

Autobee: Yeah, Chicano Studies 101.

Martinez: Then after that what other classes came online?
Autobee: Oh well, we had Chicano and the Law that was Joe Uliberri--Judge Joe Ulibarri. At that time he had just got out of law school. We did Chicano and the Law. That was a night class. We had art, dance, history…

Martinez: Education?

Autobee: Well, what happened was that Teacher Corps existed at that time and a lot of the Teacher Corps people were in some of these classes. Okay. I don’t remember if there was any [education]--there could have been. I’m going to have to look at my classes that I took when I was at the university or at the college. But I took every class that they had, so if I can find it--I’ll see if I can find it. What ended up happening, was a lot of those Teacher Corps people ended up becoming teachers and setting up MECAs and Chicano Studies in the high schools. And that was really awesome. Dave Marquez is one of them and he helped set up a lot of the Chicano Studies courses and MECAs in the community. So, it really paid off that we had something happening academically, so we could train people not only to self-identify themselves as who they were and our history, but to go back out into the community and to start teaching it in the community. And the best part was that we ended up with money left over from that disadvantaged scholarship program--about $10,000--and we used that to set up Project Adelante, the Barrio station. We went out to the projects--

Martinez: How did that happen? You took ASG money--

Autobee: Yes, student government money.

Martinez: --to the community. Explain how that happened? You said that was one of the Chicano barrio--

Autobee: stations.

Martinez: --stations projects.

Autobee: Yep. What happened was that we had $10,000 left over from the scholarship, because one of the demands we had was, that everybody who was on scholarship be taken into financial aid, because they all qualified. But it was the racism of the director--he wouldn’t take their applications. So, we got them in--they got taken care of--so we had $10,000 left out of the $25,000. Okay. And we said, “well, how do we apply this? Through Chicano Studies, we’ll set it up as a barrio station.” So, we went out and talked to the people from the Housing Authority, Jack Quin. Jack gave us the recreation center to work out of. Then we got basketballs and all kinds of stuff for the kids. And Project Adelante then started doing its thing, a tutorial program, started training.

Martinez: How did you get staff for something like that?

Autobee: Well, the first ones were Chicano students that were volunteers and the second ones were Chicano students that were on financial aid that did work study. Yeah. And then people would take an independent Chicano Studies class and they would work out there and they would
get credit for working at the projects. We’d give them grades. They’d go out there and work with the kids and we’d show them—tutorial—getting them applied. We recruited quite a few kids from the projects from the college.

Martinez: How was it managed though? I still don’t understand how the university—well Southern Colorado State College—is able to take $10,000 of student government money—

Autobee: Uh huh! [Nodding his head and smiling]

Martinez: --to a project in town. You know there always has to be a paper trail of who’s authorized—

Autobee: Oh, there was a paper trail and I was authorized.

Martinez: --who manages it.

Autobee: I managed it. I authorized the expenditures and we gave the University the receipts. And so we bought equipment. They said, “okay, no problem.” We ended up buying a mimeograph machine and a machine that would burn the stencils for us. Yeah, it was really interesting! And we started our own publications. We started producing publications, newsletters. Ricardo Mora, who had just come out of the prison, produced his first book on that mimeograph machine. I don’t know if you remember Ricardo? But yeah, I was the executive director of the scholarship program and they said, “Well, what do you want to do with the $10,000, because we can’t use it for scholarships.” “So,” I said, “we’ll use it for Project Adelante,” which caused a whole lot of people wanting that money. Like I told you before it caused a lot of interaction with certain individuals who wanted to intimidate us and take the money from us, but a—

Martinez: I think that was a great use of the money though!

Autobee: Well hell yeah!

Martinez: Because Project Adelante lasted for—

Autobee: For 10 years.

Martinez: --as far as I know about 10 years, which is a good amount of time for a community based—

Autobee: You better believe it.

Martinez: --program. And I’ve heard from other people that it evolved into a drug prevention program.

Autobee: Yeah! What ended up happening was that I wrote a proposal to City Council. We got funded for $50,000 from city revenue sharing moneys. And because we had already been out in
the community for a year with Project Adelante, we already had a history and they gave us the $50,000 and with that we started--we set the project up. I left to go work for the governor’s office right after that, so I was only there for about 2 months after we set it up.

**Martinez:** But you graduated from SCSC, right?

**Autobee:** Yeah I graduated from SCSC and then I got into a master’s program. I got into the Urban Regional Studies Program at the University of Northern Colorado, where I got into new town planning and my degree was in social sciences, focused urban planning. Yeah, that was later on in about ‘76 and that’s when I left Pueblo to work for the governor’s office after I got my master’s degree.

**Martinez:** So, you talked about how Chicano Studies began. You talked about the disadvantaged student’s scholarship, pressure on the administration to fire staff who were exhibiting discrimination practices in financial aid, so some students did not get financial aid--

**Autobee:** Yep, the executive director.

**Martinez:** You talked about the establishment of Project Adelante by students actually--

**Autobee:** Yep, MEChA.

**Martinez:** --of the college in the community. Do you remember any other projects that university students, MEChA students, helped?

**Autobee:** I think was one of our biggest ones was setting up Special Services. That’s where we brought in Bob Martinez, former Senator Bob Martinez, and George Solórzano and we wrote the proposal together with some of the people here at the university. They ended up getting close to $100-150,000 and they were around for a long time.

**Martinez:** What did Student Special Services do?

**Autobee:** Recruitment and financial aid prep and guidance, advisement, and curriculum--showing them how to stay in college, keeping them in college. Yeah, I don’t know if they still exist, but I know for George Solórzano and Senator Martinez before--

**Martinez:** Do you remember Juan Piñeda? Did Upward Bound exist?

**Autobee:** I remember the name Juan Piñeda, but it was--I knew Patrick Tate was with Outward Bound when I was here. Piñeda came in after I left. Yeah, Outward Bound, or Upward Bound, I should say, was a big recruitment tool also. A lot of those people ended up coming to the university or the college at that time. But yeah those were the significant activities--I mean not even talking about taking over the student government. We had the first Chicano student government president. It didn’t last long, but we got one. [Laughing] Or we got our own. And then--I mean here was the training ground where I got involved with the Chicano Democratic Caucus and the Democratic Party. And that to me was because of Chicano Studies. It tied me in
to the networks, the people, especially in Denver with the Crusade for Justice and the other people. And again it was the Crusade and it was the consilios that gave us the incentive. And we saw what happened in California to set it up. Then we came up and set it up. And it was all student led. Now, those were great days. How many times do you take on academia and win?

Martinez: Yeah!

Autobee: I had just came back from Vietnam and we lost that War. And you try to look for something, a focus, and Chicano Studies and MEChA gave us that focus. Gave us a way to put that energy in a positive way. Yeah, there was a bunch of other things we were involved with through the anti-war demonstrations and other things, but those I think were the big highlights. Setting up a non-profit, setting up Chicano Studies, setting up Special Services, and getting the Disadvantaged Scholarship Program set up so we could recruit. Because I was the director of the Disadvantaged Scholarship Program also--I had written the proposal for it. So, with all those things happening, it impacted the university. It impacted the community, because it was our time. And that’s why we’re going to be holding this reception, because we want to honor those people who were involved. Because we could have lost everything. I mean if one thing had gone wrong, we could have got kicked off campus. I would have lost my G.I. bill. I would have lost my financial aid. I would have lost my position on student government. Yea, it would have been quite the loss. We had to weigh it.

Martinez: Well I’m glad for your service George.

Autobee: Yeah.

Martinez: You were there when it was all breaking loose in ’71-’72, so--

Autobee: Oh yeah.

Martinez: —the early 70s, so I appreciate that.

Autobee: Yeah. Even in spite of all the road blocks. [Laughing] I don’t know, I think it just made us stronger.

Martinez: Was there anything else you wanted to add?

Autobee: Other than--I’m so proud all the other institutions that existed before--the Brown Berets, La Raza Unida, they’re gone. Chicano Studies is still here. Even MEChA is gone. I understand that MEChA doesn’t exist on campus anymore, or LULAC, the student LULAC organization. But Chicano Studies is here and to me the richness of that is that the academic part. The youth are still being trained. We got Chicano faculty that are teaching the classes. It’s still a reality that exists 45 years later that I helped implement. And then to come back and teach classes—I taught for 4 years here.

Martinez: Huh, when what that?
**Autobee:** This was when I got back from Washington D.C. I spent 40 years in Denver and then five years in Washington D.C., working on Hillary’s [Clinton] campaign and for the American G.I. Forum. So, when I came back I got a hold of Fawn (Dr. Fawn Amber Montoya) and she wanted to acknowledge what we did and I said, “well the best thing that I can see is, let me teach a class.” So, I taught Chicano Studies 101. I taught Chicano Studies Health, but the one I loved the most was the Chicano Studies Research class I did and that one was showing people how to use the census data, to do the analysis, to do proposal writing. And I got to get the census bureau in. We got to show them how to use the data, how to pull it off the computer, and then how to put it in the maps, highlight the areas with high concentrations of poverty. This is what you need for your proposals. Whenever you make a proposal be it for drug abuse or for youth or for senior citizens and feeding, you got to have the data. It’s rhetoric if you don’t and you have to show in that data the need. It’s what they call a needs assessment. That to me is vital. When you go out and you graduate and you go out into the community, you have to know these basic tools to be able to help our community go forward. And documentation using statistical analysis is the bottom line.

**Martinez:** You had your own company, didn’t you?

**Autobee:** I still do. I have my own research company, World Demographic Research, and I do the research for the Hispanic Chambers nationwide on Hispanic business growth, which is interesting because first of all I’m the only one doing it, which is really interesting. But second is I have clients from Florida to California, Texas to Chicago and New York. They all need the data to show their corporate people why they should be investing in the Hispanic Chambers. And I just finished the Denver report. I’m going to be looking at the Colorado minority business report that includes; Asians, Native Americans, Blacks, Hispanics, and Women. So, that way we can show the power of all the groups together, in reference to our, not only purchasing power, but our gross receipts generated by minority businesses and women businesses. payroll generated. These are all data factors that are vital and that Chicano Studies was what prepped me for all of this.

**Martinez:** It sounds like it was a great class.

**Autobee:** Oh yeah! I wish I could give it again. [Chuckling]

**Martinez:** Bev, we’re done.

**Autobee:** This is George Autobee coming to you from channel 59, Telemundo. [Laughing] When I had my own TV program I--in fact the only reason I had my own TV program, was because of my research. Telemundo invited me to come and make a presentation on the Hispanic growth. And they said, “can you do it in Spanish?” And I said, “yo no puedo hablar español muy bueno.” And they said, “we’ll do it in English and we’ll transcribe it.