

Dr. Ivette Romero

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, NY

Transcribed by Ann Sandri

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

Romero, Ivette

Transcript – Romero, Ivette

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Summary: Dr. Romero discusses growing up in New York City and then moving upstate and attending Vassar College. She discusses her career path and what led her to teaching at Marist College. Dr. Romero also talks about her struggles in the program to get recognition and where she would like to see it in the future.

Gus Nolan ([00:10](#)):

Today is December the seventh, a day very important in American history and a very, very important here at Marist College. We have a chance to interview one of our outstanding professors, Dr. Ivette Romero. Is that the way I say it? Well, good afternoon, Ivette.

Ivette Romero ([00:33](#)):

Good afternoon.

Gus Nolan ([00:34](#)):

With us of course, is Dr. Stivers, who will be assisting us in this interview. It's going to be divided into several different sections. It's kind of before Marist and after Marist or before Marist and Marist. You're not after Marist. Yes <laugh>. Okay then, for before Marist, we go to a couple of elementary things, the beginning, your early years, your middle years in school, and so on. So at the beginning, let's start this way. Could you say a few words about where you were born and the conditions at the time you were born in?

Ivette Romero ([01:20](#)):

I was born in 1956 in New York City.

Gus Nolan ([01:23](#)):

You don't have to give us the details of the years here.

Ivette Romero ([01:28](#)):

It's going to be pertinent to my head, to my narrative <laugh>

Gus Nolan ([01:32](#)):

Oh, oh, okay. All right continue..

Ivette Romero ([01:34](#)):

I was born in Mount Sinai Hospital and I mentioned this because, I was raised in Spanish Harlem and in those days I think what's important is that it was marked by a shift, and that was school busing. So I was one of the beneficiaries of busing because I was at a grade school just in the center of Spanish Harlem. And, you know, it was overcrowded with few resources and I was bused to a public school, which now I guess would be called magnet school. And that was the Isadore and Ida Straus School for Intellectually Gifted Children.

Gus Nolan ([02:24](#)):

Oh, even at an early age, they picked you out as a gifted child. Okay.

Ivette Romero ([02:28](#)):

Oh, well <laugh> from 105th Street and First Avenue, I was bused over to 93rd and between Park and Third Avenue. And so the makeup of the students there were mostly the you know, upper crust Park Avenue kids with a lot of the other children that were bused to that area.

Gus Nolan ([02:58](#)):

Few people would know the details of what you're saying, but I do, because I taught in Harlem for a number of years. As a, contemporary teacher. Of course, it was not that successful. The school was near the park and oftentimes students decided not to come to my class, they went to the park, but I had no control over that. But this is more about you rather than about me move on now... During the, let's get back to family, do you have brothers and sisters?

Ivette Romero ([03:32](#)):

Yes, I have one sis, one brother. And both my parents are from Puerto Rico. So, when I was 11 years old, the family decided to move back to Puerto Rico where I'd finished my schooling. All through, undergrad years.

Gus Nolan ([03:54](#)):

Is that so? Quick comparison, how is school in USA, America versus USA Puerto Rico?

Ivette Romero ([04:02](#)):

Well, I had so many different shifts because it was the one experience in the very over crowded school, which was still emotionally, I have great memories of it. And then of course the shocks, like, Kennedy's assassination, that marked that moment, and then being in the, the new school was just an incredible experience. Just the, the resources and the types of teachers that encouraged me throughout.

Jan Stivers ([04:34](#)):

You even detected that at an early age, you could tell the difference.

Ivette Romero ([04:39](#)):

Oh, absolutely. I just felt, yes, I felt my horizons were open, but also I think it's because I had a lot of personal guidance. So on the one hand, horizons were open because suddenly I had access to French. I wanted, I always wanted to take French, lessons because one of my neighbors in Harlem was an elderly perfume maker from France. And I was interested in, in France suddenly, but, so I started with French courses in the, in the grade school. And then when I, in the special school and I had a, just teachers that took me under their wings and even came to the house to, to really see the life that we had there. Then the shift to Puerto Rico was a bit traumatic on the one hand, because I went to a, to the sixth grade in a wooden building with windows wide open where, you know, some of the students, instead of running to the park, the way your students did, some of them jumped out the window <laugh> Just left, but at the same time, it was, it opened my horizons, in terms of, of nature and just feeling free, physically free, going from a cooped up apartment and not being allowed to play outdoors because of,

Gus Nolan ([06:08](#)):

Yeah. Let's talk about that, besides the academic, let's talk about life in terms of your other interests. Sports, music, drama, anything like that. Did you do any of that in school?

Ivette Romero ([06:21](#)):

Well, yes, I actually, from that one school that had meager, very meager, resources. I went to a junior high school where I was able to continue taking art classes. So I was not able to take French, but I did

find also a teacher that, whose family spoke French, and then I discovered... sorry, there seems to be something in the air that... so the visual arts, that's what opened up for me.

Gus Nolan ([06:54](#)):

Have you continued that in some way? Do you do any drawing, any painting?

Ivette Romero ([07:18](#)):

Very rarely, I don't do any drawing anymore but, some of my scholarly work now has to do with the visual arts. And some of what I write, has a lot of comparison between the literature and the visual arts. And also I found, so during high school, I was able to, participate in contests and I won prizes for painting and drawing and also for dance.

Gus Nolan ([07:48](#)):

Oh.

Ivette Romero ([07:50](#)):

I joined a folk dance group, folkloric dance group. So that was wonderful.

Gus Nolan ([07:56](#)):

Did you ever perform on stage?

Ivette Romero ([07:58](#)):

Yes, I, I performed with a group on stage several times. So that was also very, just rewarding.

Gus Nolan ([08:06](#)):

Yes.

Ivette Romero ([08:06](#)):

But now I have an academic blog that focuses on Caribbean studies and we, it's my colleague at Vassar College. And I write about anything happening around the Caribbean and the Caribbean at large, the diaspora. So we focus on fine arts literature, all types of cultural events.

Gus Nolan ([08:31](#)):

So this is the whole period from the late grade school through high school that you're really developing these multiple skills really or interests. That would be part of, take a second and refresh yourself and your voice.

Ivette Romero ([08:52](#)):

Thank you.

Jan Stivers ([08:56](#)):

Did I miss anything, in the move, when you were 11, was it to Puerto Rico? Did you have access to an extended family at that time? Did you move back nearer to family?

Ivette Romero ([09:09](#)):

Yes, I did have, my grandmother and cousins there. So that change was also did part of the, that pleasure of discovering the island and nature and running around chasing after lizards and tad poles and fishing tad poles. We also live very close to the ocean and that's one of my great, so mm-hmm <affirmative> yeah.

Gus Nolan ([09:35](#)):

I just, you, uh, your, your English is impeccable. It's beautiful. Did you grow up speaking English or is it, uh, different languages?

Ivette Romero ([09:44](#)):

Well, I was raised bilingual, so I think that made a big difference in, in the future. Uh, so I, I learned Spanish and English almost at the same time. So, uh, speaking Spanish in the house and then watching TV. Yes. The great babysitter

Gus Nolan ([10:01](#)):

<laugh> oh yeah, yeah. <laugh>

Ivette Romero ([10:03](#)):

And then adding French to that at an early age, I think helped me.

Gus Nolan ([10:07](#)):

Can you get that?

Ivette Romero ([10:08](#)):

Oh yes, I did. The schools in Puerto Rico.

Jan Stivers ([10:14](#)):

What was the language of instruction?

Ivette Romero ([10:16](#)):

The language is Spanish <affirmative> and this was public school in Puerto Rico now every, because the island is a Commonwealth of the US. Everyone needs to teach English, but the island is about 80%, Spanish speaking, and only about 20% is bilingual.

Jan Stivers ([10:38](#)):

Oh, wow.

Ivette Romero ([10:38](#)):

Yes. But, but we had English courses. <affirmative> one English course, every grade.

Gus Nolan ([10:46](#)):

I would say New York City today is more than 50% in Spanish speaking in some ways I, sometimes my hometown, I don't know what area it's, you know, it's in Spanish, you know

Jan Stivers ([10:59](#)):

I think that the most populous group in New York City schools, I think is Dominican from the Dominican Republic.

Ivette Romero ([11:06](#)):

Now in New York, Oh yes.

Jan Stivers ([11:08](#)):

In New York, number two is Chinese. So things, things have changed. Yeah.

Gus Nolan ([11:13](#)):

Well I haven't been in the city for a while, so we got through a lot of high school. Where did it go to college?

Ivette Romero ([11:23](#)):

So I went to the University of Puerto Rico.

Gus Nolan ([11:26](#)):

Oh, okay.

Ivette Romero ([11:27](#)):

And there are different branches. So I went to the branch closest to where I live, which is the Southwestern end of the island. So my hometown is called Cabo Rojo and the University of Puerto Rico branch is in a city called Mayaguez, which was about 40 minutes away from my house <affirmative>. And I chose French because that was my opportunity to pursue the traveling dream.

Jan Stivers ([11:55](#)):

And you've been primed for languages from your earliest childhood?

Ivette Romero ([12:00](#)):

Yes. Well, that's true too. I had that constant move between languages moving back and forth also within the city, just in terms of class, you know, seeing two different, how two different sides lived or many different segments lived. And then we did travel back and forth between Puerto Rico and Manhattan during my childhood. So that kept feeding into this.

Gus Nolan ([12:31](#)):

And your high school graduating class, what percentage went to college, half?

Ivette Romero ([12:38](#)):

Actually, possibly around 10 to 15% of the whole class, but of my immediate group, which was the advanced, you know, the way classes were divided into

Gus Nolan ([12:54](#)):

A, B, C, D.

Ivette Romero ([12:56](#)):

Exactly. Yeah. So, of the group, the immediate group that graduated with me, I think 75% went to college.

Gus Nolan ([13:05](#)):

I see.

Ivette Romero ([13:06](#)):

Yes. And some of them are you know, one of them is a professor, like I am right now and of course there are lawyers and doctors from that small group.

Gus Nolan ([13:17](#)):

Yeah. Very good. In graduate school, the same thing, you had multiple courses? I mean, you could choose a major, what was the major in high school, in college?

Ivette Romero ([13:30](#)):

Oh, in college French Language and Literature.

Gus Nolan ([13:33](#)):

Oh, right.

Ivette Romero ([13:34](#)):

And then I added to that and took Italian and German. And two years of Latin

Gus Nolan ([13:43](#)):

Multilingual, my goodness gracious!

Ivette Romero ([13:45](#)):

Well, that's my great love. And I think also, I always tell people, that's my only strength. My learning languages.

Gus Nolan ([13:54](#)):

You can say it in any language <laugh>

Ivette Romero ([13:57](#)):

Yes.

Gus Nolan ([13:58](#)):

Okay. Then moving on to graduate school, you jumped there earlier, you went to the New School?

Ivette Romero ([14:05](#)):

Oh no. I went to Cornell.

Gus Nolan ([14:08](#)):

Oh, you went to Cornell. Okay.

Ivette Romero ([14:10](#)):

And that's, that was an experience. But when I was in Puerto Rico, I finished in French Literature, but then I took one year off and taught at a bilingual school. I taught Spanish and English. I taught Social Studies and all sorts of courses, like Spanish for Native Speakers, Spanish for Non-native Speakers. It was a special school for, mostly for the children of businessmen that lived in Puerto Rico at that time. So they had a need for bilingual teachers, and I got a chance to teach one French class with all grades in one single classroom.

Jan Stivers ([14:53](#)):

Wow. That's pretty hard.

Ivette Romero ([14:54](#)):

Which was pretty, challenging.

Gus Nolan ([14:57](#)):

Numerically, how many students would there be in this all inclusive? Would there be 25 or, or how many more than that?

Ivette Romero ([15:06](#)):

Oh, in the, where I taught?

Gus Nolan ([15:08](#)):

Yeah.

Ivette Romero ([15:09](#)):

Well this varied, the French class only had about 12 students, but then I had English courses where I had I guess the largest group was 22.

Jan Stivers ([15:21](#)):

Oh, oh, nice.

Gus Nolan ([15:23](#)):

It's a good size.

Ivette Romero ([15:24](#)):

Yes. And I, I loved, I loved them, but then I applied for grad schools and I got into

Jan Stivers ([15:29](#)):

What drew you to Cornell?

Ivette Romero ([15:31](#)):

Well, I only applied to three places. <laugh> I, I applied to at Michigan, University of Michigan. I applied to NYU cause I always had the dream of coming back to New York, but I had heard, and I had been advised about the programs in Michigan and at Cornell. And then really what happened was that Cornell was the only one that offered a full ride for my first two years there. Oh, okay. So I thought...

Gus Nolan ([16:04](#)):

How can you say no? <Laugh>

Ivette Romero ([16:05](#)):

This is it <laugh>.

Gus Nolan ([16:07](#)):

Then again, the interest though, you were in college, pretty much language based, or did you do anything beyond that?

Ivette Romero ([16:17](#)):

Oh well I chose French Literature again, excuse me. But then I decided to add Latin American Literature to that. And of course all sorts of courses in Philosophy, but they were all feeding into the same major.

Gus Nolan ([16:37](#)):

Yeah. Okay. Did you do any travel while you were in college or graduate school?

Ivette Romero ([16:43](#)):

Yes, I did. I applied for a grant to be able to spend a semester in France. So I went to Paris for a semester and had the amazing luck to be able to go to courses by some of the leading, I just sought out some of those thinkers that I was learning about at Cornell. So I went to, I sat in a course by Julia Kristeva, I met Jaques Derrida.

Jan Stivers ([17:14](#)):

Oh my gosh.

Ivette Romero ([17:15](#)):

And then I was, this is terrible, my pride, he said that I could join one of his courses that were specialized for US students. And I was upset and refused because I wanted to go to the course in French with the French students. And now I'm so embarrassed to think. Well,

Jan Stivers ([17:37](#)):

Well I think that says something about knowing your own strengths and resisting a categorization.

Ivette Romero ([17:46](#)):

I mean, it's true. I wanted to be challenged as well, and I felt confident about my French.

Jan Stivers ([17:52](#)):

And that pigeon holed.

Ivette Romero ([17:53](#)):

Yes, exactly. So that was

Gus Nolan ([17:57](#)):

Where do you get this desire to do more than the ordinary you're always reaching out for something beyond. Were you prompted by your parents, who pushed you this way?

Ivette Romero ([18:06](#)):

Well, to tell the truth, my mother always had education forefront because she was unable to continue after the fifth grade. And she always said, I would like her dream was to see me graduate from high school. And that was as far as the horizon was, but I think I was also lucky to just run into kind and interested people who wanted to expand my horizons. So, and also the grade school made a huge difference because they were already speaking to students about the colleges where they could go. So when we moved to Puerto Rico for a little bit, I was afraid that that was the end because I had always thought, oh, I'm going to Hunter College. You know? And my mother, you know, always remembers that and says, yes, I remember when you were in the fourth grade and they said that you were, you had to go to Hunter College. But of course then after,

Gus Nolan ([19:11](#)):

Well, don't mar Hunter College, my wife went to Hunter College

Jan Stivers ([19:15](#)):

And my son.

Ivette Romero ([19:16](#)):

Well to tell you that for a long time, I wanted to work at Hunter after I finished.

Gus Nolan ([19:25](#)):

After graduating from graduate school, first job, did apply for employment in a school or a college? Where did you go?

Ivette Romero ([19:35](#)):

Well, so during my last few years at Cornell, I was also a Teaching Assistant because I only had the first two years covered. And that allowed me to get a lot of experience teaching both French and Spanish. So, I left as an ABD and I worked all over the place <laugh> as an ABD. So I worked at Syracuse University, that was my first fulltime job after leaving Cornell as an ABD. But after that, I went to UCLA. I worked at Hobart and William Smith <laugh>.

Jan Stivers ([20:16](#)):

Those are radically different campuses.

Ivette Romero ([20:21](#)):

Yes. Well, I started at Syracuse then Hobart and then New York City for a while, where I just, I worked part-time as in a gym as, I forgot the word when you're signing up people, the

Gus Nolan ([20:42](#)):

Receptionist?

Ivette Romero ([20:43](#)):

As a receptionist. Yes. And then half time at Dominican Academy teaching Spanish to girls, it was an all girls school.

Gus Nolan ([20:57](#)):

All right. We've had a good bit of time about other places. This happens to be Marist, <laugh>, let's talk about Marist.

Jan Stivers ([21:06](#)):

You can't possibly be any more interesting than this. This has been very fascinating.

Gus Nolan ([21:10](#)):

When did you first hear about Marist and what made you think you'd like to come here, especially when you've been to these other places and quite prominence?

Ivette Romero ([21:23](#)):

Well, I decided to come back from UCLA, I applied again to, well, I came back to Cornell to finish my dissertation. I was very motivated to complete it. Yeah, so I came back and then it was applying at, as I was writing the dissertation, I was applying to different colleges in the area, like Alfred University, just not as close as I thought it was but, and Vassar et cetera. But I interviewed someone who worked at Vassar because I was, this was part of my dissertation. And with that conversation, I did get an opening, you know, someone to actually get to know me and then was successful. And getting a not part-time, a visiting position at Vassar. So I had two years at Vassar as a visiting, while I completed my dissertation.

Gus Nolan ([22:34](#)):

I see.

Ivette Romero ([22:35](#)):

Yeah. And so then from Vassar, I, I applied to Marist in 1994, but that position was only a visiting position. So I waited for the tenure track position to open. And that was 1995 when I started here.

Jan Stivers ([22:52](#)):

So did you do the visiting for a year?

Ivette Romero ([22:54](#)):

I interviewed with Maurice Bibeau. Oh. And loved him immediately. And I said, well I really feel like I want to wait.

Gus Nolan ([23:05](#)):

Yeah.

Ivette Romero ([23:05](#)):

Because he did say this would open as a full position later.

Gus Nolan ([23:12](#)):

Oh, too bad you met Mo. I mean, he was, you know, so a hard guy to get along with you.

Ivette Romero ([23:17](#)):

<laugh>

Jan Stivers ([23:18](#)):

Such a generous man.

Ivette Romero ([23:20](#)):

Oh yes, absolutely.

Gus Nolan ([23:22](#)):

Well, will you talk then about your first years here, it must have been a shock coming here after having been to such elaborate and well known places as Vassar and Syracuse and these other institutions. So, yeah. Talk about that.

Ivette Romero ([23:39](#)):

Well, I really think the biggest shock in all of my formative years, the biggest shock was to go from University of Puerto Rico to Cornell as a student <affirmative> because that was just, you know, part size because of the size the feeling of isolation. Also in Puerto Rico, I had much more personalized attention from the professors and that university is huge, but it felt more like Marist felt, when I applied here more of a family feeling, you know? Well at Cornell I was lost. It was challenging in so many ways and the weather and everything else, but coming to Marist was not such a huge leap because I worked for a year at Santa Clara University, and that was quite similar to Jesuit institution, Santa Clara. And so that was familiar. And also coming from Vassar to, to Marist was quite easy because that's a very small place, as well. Yeah. So I would say that I was ready and happy to be at a place like Marist with more of a

Gus Nolan ([25:00](#)):

Warm background.

Ivette Romero ([25:02](#)):

Yes. And also by the way, 1994, when I first interviewed Marist, when Maurice Bibeau interviewed me, I was expecting. So when I started work, I already had my baby <affirmative> and I came into a very small department, as you know, and I really felt that I was kind of nurtured. I was, I felt that nurturing family feeling wonderful. So I liked that. And then in terms of the students, I immediately fell in love with the type of students because they weren't the types of students who came in feeling ultra confident. They came in.

Gus Nolan ([25:47](#)):

Yeah. I was going to say the difference between Vassar students and Marist, would be quite a contrast, I would imagine.

Ivette Romero ([25:54](#)):

Yes. So I felt it was even more rewarding to be able to get them interested in language and literature and to show them that they could become fluent. They could become proficient and it was great to see them kind of just blossom and embrace their own capabilities.

Gus Nolan ([26:19](#)):

That's a great vocation to open the world to so many kids and say, you can do it, you know, and come here. I think you're the personification of achieving that here at the college, which we'll come to another question later on. Your colleagues at the time, did you know what was her name now?

Jan Stivers ([26:41](#)):

Irma Casey

Gus Nolan ([26:42](#)):

<laugh> Irma Casey <laugh>,

Ivette Romero ([26:45](#)):

Yes, that is who you were thinking of?

Gus Nolan ([26:45](#)):

You heard about Puerto Rico, her office was like an office in a store of Puerto Rico with it.

Ivette Romero ([26:52](#)):

It still is. <laugh> She hasn't moved everything out of there yet.

Gus Nolan ([26:57](#)):

So like that, of course there were not that many professors here in Spanish, were there in those days? You had two maybe?

Ivette Romero ([27:10](#)):

Yes, Maurice and Irma.

Gus Nolan ([27:13](#)):

I think and Maurice is not originally Spanish speaking. I mean, he's French speaking, I suppose, in part, you know, but so what would in those first years, what was the attraction that, you know, there's, did you think about moving on to a more elite institution? Because let's face it, we have a Hudson view <affirmative>, but we don't have a lot of other things that are available in other institutions, you know, and maybe you could say something about that. What convinced you to stay?

Ivette Romero ([27:54](#)):

Yeah. So there are a few things, but let me just, for, as the sake of transparency, there are also priorities. My priority at that time was to be able to raise my son in the same city in the same area where my husband was. And although we got divorced, he was, he got a job at Vassar and I got a job at Marist simultaneously, which was just a stroke of luck. And that, this is where I wanted to stay and raise my son. And this is what happened and you just met him a few minutes ago.

Gus Nolan ([28:37](#)):

Oh yeah.

Ivette Romero ([28:37](#)):

But at certain moments I felt that I just really wanted to expand into other areas. Now the way I did that, because I feel like I did not find, at Marist people that understood my field or that I understood my scholarly work. And actually the only person who really got it was Bill Olsen from History <affirmative>. And unfortunately, I only discovered that he really, really got what I was writing about and what I was interested in towards the end of his life. So we never got to really talk too much or anything like that, but he wrote one of the best letters recommending me for tenure. But I think the way I managed also to kind of quench that thirst of exploring other areas was going to a lot of conferences. So I went to conferences everywhere. And since my specialization is Caribbean studies, a lot of those conferences were in the Caribbean, in Cuba and Puerto Rico. And also

Gus Nolan ([29:49](#)):

It was going home <laugh>.

Ivette Romero ([29:50](#)):

pardon me?

Gus Nolan ([29:51](#)):

It was like going home.

Ivette Romero ([29:53](#)):

Yes. And then I got to explore other Latin American countries as well, through these conferences and to build just a community outside of Marist the people that I could share with and speak to

Gus Nolan ([30:06](#)):

Very good. A long time you mentioned 85, was that when you were interviewed to come here?

Ivette Romero ([30:17](#)):

Here 94 for that one year position. And then I came in 95.

Gus Nolan ([30:26](#)):

So more than 25 years then, you know?

Ivette Romero ([30:31](#)):

Yes, I keep forgetting. <laugh>

Gus Nolan ([30:33](#)):

What was the attraction? Was that, that over the course of those years, there must have been some, real grab or your affection for the place, your affection for, you could sort of develop, I suppose. I mean, when you came here first Marist didn't have the buildings that it has now, the library wasn't up yet, 99 goes the library. So even that was and the old library, they, it was a kind of a joke, you know, they said, you know, this is a library, it was a dormitory before that, you know,

Jan Stivers ([31:10](#)):

It was attached to the chapel

Gus Nolan ([31:12](#)):

That's part of the chapel. Yeah. And and even before that Donnelley was the library, which was like a museum, I mean, we'd stained glass windows around it, you know, because something had to be attractive. We didn't have the books yet. Yes. You know, so that part of it, I'm talking, you should talk. <Laugh> Tell me about the changes that you experienced here, across the board. We can go by buildings, we can go by personnel, we can go by programs we can go by so many things. What's some of the things that come to mind?

Ivette Romero ([31:47](#)):

Well, when I first started working here the old Fontaine was right there next to the library, the old library next to the chapel.

Jan Stivers ([31:56](#)):

Old Fontaine. Yeah.

Gus Nolan ([31:58](#)):

Well, when I left the old Fontaine. I had a view of the Hudson when I taught there, and then I got promoted to Lowell Thomas where I had a view of Route 9 <laugh>. You know, I tell you, what's better looking at trucks, go by or looking at boats go by. Even though Fontaine was rather humble, it had it's own beauty . Alright, keep on, now I interrupted about other changes, that buildings would be one thing, go on...

Ivette Romero ([32:26](#)):

I should probably also say something that I used to be a little bit rebellious and I would do things that I was not supposed to do. So I remember coming back from a trip to Cuba and I brought Cuban cigars. So the old Fontaine was a place where I could go up on the roof where we were not allowed to go. And I remember sitting there with a few colleagues, I won't mention their names and we just sat there smoking cigars and looking out over campus. But just wanted to mention that because that's something we have not done at the new Fontaine <laugh>, which is where we are now. So that was one of the big changes, the well, of course, the new library and the new Fontaine also, we had that period that I actually really loved where everyone in Fontaine, or at least three quarters of the faculty went to offices in St. Ann's <affirmative>. That was a good memory that I have of being in that quaint, special place. <affirmative> What other changes can I...

Gus Nolan ([33:39](#)):

How about changes in the program? Did the, while you were here there were some major changes in terms of even the majors, the humanities program, the science event program. Some of those things, have gone and other things have come, I suppose.

Ivette Romero ([33:56](#)):

Yes, absolutely. Well, when I first arrived, it was the, I can't remember what it was called. The Humanities section. Yeah. Vinny Toscano was the

Gus Nolan ([34:12](#)):

There's a name out of the past

Ivette Romero ([34:14](#)):

And then of course that changed, into the School of Liberal Arts. Yeah. And that was one of the major changes in terms of programs. Well, I have to speak about the Caribbean and, Latin American and Caribbean studies Program, which I designed for my department. With the help of Irma. For example, <affirmative> what else?

Jan Stivers ([34:45](#)):

Well, I wanted to ask about that. Yes. So you were really moving your department into a new area. There wasn't already support in terms of the curriculum or in terms of the interests of the staff, I wouldn't imagine the faculty. So I'd like to ask about the support for your research, the encouragement and support that you've got initially, and then over time, how has that gone for you?

Ivette Romero ([35:16](#)):

Well, I have to say that the support that I got for all of the research I did was mostly financial <affirmative>. So when I applied for research in the summers, when I applied for going to do any research at any point to go to conferences, for example, all of that, I was never denied resources to go. So I always say that I feel very thankful for that. I do feel that apart from people who really know the Caribbean and the issues like Irma and Bill Olsen, for example, I didn't really feel there was an understanding of what or why would people even study Caribbean Literature or what it was, or Caribbean film or anything like that. But I feel that because I got the financial support, I was able to branch out and create that community outside. Of the Marist walls.

Jan Stivers ([36:22](#)):

And did you feel that when it came time for tenure review and promotion review, that your work was taken seriously? That it was, worthy?

Ivette Romero ([36:35](#)):

By the same people that I mentioned <laugh> and of course, Maurice Bibeau, who was the chair for so many years. So the people who

Jan Stivers ([36:42](#)):

Mattered people were making the decision

Ivette Romero ([36:43](#)):

People who mattered. Yes. Yes. The deans who were making the decisions did not understand exactly what I was doing.

Jan Stivers ([36:55](#)):

Did they appreciate, or did they respect the opinions of those who were closer?

Ivette Romero ([37:00](#)):

I think for the most part, yes. At least for you know, the tenure and that's when Dean Regina Haboucha was here. And because of her field, she was also in Hispanic studies. So she did, she definitely understood everything I was doing. I think it just, in later years it was more difficult. And if there's something that I can say that is negative, it's just that out of maybe fear of difference, or just misunderstanding of what other people are doing or other people's interests. I think I felt that I could have done so much more had I had support from the higher levels of the administration.

Gus Nolan ([37:49](#)):

On that point, but just a little bit off to the side <affirmative> what other disappointments did you have here? What kind of, what is it maybe this semester lands the interruptions, the schedule, the classes that you got, did you have some kind of negative reactions to that?

Ivette Romero ([38:11](#)):

Oh, well, I <laugh>, let's see. I believe I grew into the challenge of having four courses a semester when it was four and more, but I think that some of the disappointments had to do with that type of extremely heavy load and heavy service component. And then also to try to keep my head above water for, in the scholarly area, because you do always have to prepare just in case you don't get tenure just in case, you have to go elsewhere. So the biggest, biggest disappointment was that I had to, let's just say fight

Gus Nolan ([39:02](#)):

All the work in other words

Ivette Romero ([39:03](#)):

That I had to fight so hard to become full professor. After, you know, all of my publications,

Jan Stivers ([39:12](#)):

You had to prove yourself when you shouldn't have had to, it should have been apparent.

Gus Nolan ([39:16](#)):

It should have been an award given to you of what you are doing.

Ivette Romero ([39:19](#)):

Yes. Well, especially, it's not that I felt that I was, you know, one of the, you know, brightest,

Gus Nolan ([39:27](#)):

which you were <laugh>,

Ivette Romero ([39:28](#)):

But I felt that for a place that speaks about diversity a lot, it was very disappointing that they didn't just take advantage of me as a poster child, because, you know, they could have said, oh

Jan Stivers ([39:44](#)):

Someone who's actually advancing those goals, not just representing them, but advancing them.

Ivette Romero ([39:49](#)):

You know, or they could have said, well, the first Puerto Rican woman to become full professor at Marist.

Jan Stivers ([40:02](#)):

Or a scholar, a scholar, regardless of whether you were Puerto Rican or not, this was your expertise

Ivette Romero ([40:06](#)):

Exactly. But also, I just felt that, exactly that my, the subject matter that the, also a lot of times, the subject matter of my courses and also the subject of my scholarly work was not quite well, there was a disinterest or simply, people didn't know what to do with it. <affirmative>. So I felt that how can I say this? I could have been perhaps, groomed better towards other areas. But I think I was feared because I always speak my mind and very straightforward about everything I feel. So I think, you know, being kind of distrusted or just like, didn't help at the same time, I felt that because I felt slightly marginalized in these areas that helped me become better known outside of Marist.

Jan Stivers ([41:17](#)):

Looking for that,

Ivette Romero ([41:19](#)):

Because I was

Jan Stivers ([41:20](#)):

Acknowledgement elsewhere.

Ivette Romero ([41:21](#)):

I was acknowledged elsewhere. Yeah.

Gus Nolan ([41:24](#)):

Changing the subject a little bit. Let's talk about the students. Talk about the students when you first came here and over the years, have you seen a clear development and change between them or is it pretty much the same person?

Ivette Romero ([41:40](#)):

I've been seeing it every single year, but I, even though I came from other universities where students were even more independent, I feel that students at Marist were much more dependent in 1995 than they are now. It just seems like now they need more, a lot more guidance, a lot more handholding even

before the pandemic, they just needed much more attention. Not that I didn't pay attention to them before, but I think it's a different type of attention. I almost feel that they were, they came across as being more adult <affirmative> in those years, <affirmative>, leading up to about 2000 and as the years went by, they seemed to be a little bit more childlike in their approaches to things or naive in their approaches to things. But at the same time, a lot more savvy in terms of their, what they wanted in terms of financial gain with their careers. <affirmative> because in the past, I think there was more credit given to intellectual gain. And I think students, you know, grew into that. And as I said before, blossomed into that, but I feel now it just almost seems like it could be the national situation. Where students are really just counting dollars and cents in terms of what is their career going to,

Jan Stivers ([43:18](#)):

We had a little bit of this discussion not long ago. And my feeling about it is that at one point, the college recognized that a marketing advantage was affordability. And so then affordability became a centerpiece of our pull. So we were getting students, we were getting young people from families for whom this was a priority.

Ivette Romero ([43:45](#)):

Yes. Yes. That's absolutely understandable. I hadn't thought about it in that, from that perspective,

Gus Nolan ([43:53](#)):

I also think the culture has changed. It used to be a much more open now it's my phone, my friends at home, you know that sort of thing. I have to check and see, you can walk next to somebody, you don't know them, you know, they were in class with you but the phone is my way to the other things here.

Ivette Romero ([44:12](#)):

Yes, that's true.

Gus Nolan ([44:13](#)):

We only have a few minutes left, but it's very important. What do you see in the crystal ball? Where is Marist going? What do you, what are the things you, if you were invited to speak to the Board of Trustees, what would you say? Here is some of the needs of Marist ? And on the other hand, here are some of the things don't let it go. What do you see in the future?

Ivette Romero ([44:42](#)):

Well, I have seen, I've been here for different presidents, for example. So President Murray, President Yellen, President Murray and now Kevin, the new president <laugh>. Yeah. And I have hopes, I feel that just with the recent email message that we received, where the president was contributing, \$250,000 for the growth of certain programs, et cetera, I see this move going in the right direction.

Gus Nolan ([45:26](#)):

A Vice President for Cultural Diversity.

Ivette Romero ([45:28](#)):

Yeah. And I'm assuming that part of it will include Cultural Diversity. And I think there was some discussion of a, need blind...

Speaker 4 ([45:40](#)):

I'm not on MARFAC anymore as a retiree, they kicked me off. So I didn't get this

Ivette Romero ([45:45](#)):

I'm so, oh, this was very, very recent this new development. But I believe that although everyone is well, has been well, meaning I sense that now this idea of diversity as something that is enriching and that will add to the growth of a place, including the curriculum, the courses, the faculty members and hopefully the administration as well. I feel that is a direction that I'm seeing and I'm hoping this is true because I think what Marist does not need is just window dressing or a cosmetic change to it. But something where there is some belief that there will be a common good to having a much more integrated and diversified everything.

Jan Stivers ([46:51](#)):

The nature of the discourse in a class will change.

Ivette Romero ([46:54](#)):

Exactly, not the students, not only the you know, the supporting staff, but that these changes will be integrated into every level of the university.

Gus Nolan ([47:11](#)):

One last question, is Marist worth the investment for a student? Would you say that in terms of what it takes to be a success here? It takes time, it takes money, it takes participation, you know, you gotta be involved and do we require too much or not enough? Or is it wasted?

Ivette Romero ([47:40](#)):

Now that's, that's a place where I, I really, really feel positive about because I've seen so many types of students, come through Marist, from different social levels, et cetera. And I really see, I keep in touch with a lot of them. So I really think that most of them would say, this is an absolute, it's absolutely worth it. Everything they did. And many of them miss the type of structure they had here, the type of access, yes relationships to their professors, and also the different types of courses that they could take. So I think I'm more of, it's not just my feeling. I think I'm a witness to that point that it is worth it. And that most students that come through here do feel it's worth that. It's worth it.

Jan Stivers ([48:41](#)):

Can I go with one last question? One more question. As you were thinking about this gathering today, was there anything that you wanted, any points that you wanted to make that we didn't get in?

Gus Nolan ([48:54](#)):

Exactly. That was a question at the end of what did we did not cover that you would like have covered <laugh>

Ivette Romero ([49:01](#)):

Oh, no, I think I've covered everything. Oh, yes. You asked me about some of the best experiences. Yeah. So, and of course, I have the tendency to go, start with a positive and suddenly go downhill into the negative. But I forgot to mention that one spark of energy. I got, that was a very important one was

after I served as chair for two terms here. When I was chair, I worked very closely with Dean John Peters and with Vanessa, his wife, Vanessa Nicole Peters. And I felt that because I was chair, I was taken to see the programs in Spain, the programs in Italy and the programs in France, or the one program in France. And I think they were able to see me perform at my best, because I was able to be in Paris and, and speak in French and in really connect with people in those institutions. I was able to do the same in Spain. Well, that one was a no brainer, but, and then also go to Italy and then speak to everyone in Italian and make

Jan Stivers ([50:18](#)):

Your credibility you shouldn't have to convince anybody.

Ivette Romero ([50:21](#)):

So I kind of felt that that was my moment where they could see me performing at my best at what I can do best what I feel confident in. Very good. So that was great. And ever since then, after I became chair, they decided to keep me connected to Marist Abroad programs as a coordinator for students going abroad. So an academic advisor. So I've been, I relish that part of, of my job as well, to help these students go abroad just the way I was helped to go abroad when I was in Cornell. So I felt recognized, I felt valued and that's a highlight of my career.<Affirmative>.

Gus Nolan ([51:16](#)):

Well, thank you very much. It's been a very wonderful, informative and entertaining.

Ivette Romero ([51:20](#)):

Thank you.

Gus Nolan ([51:20](#)):

And wonderful times.

Jan Stivers ([51:22](#)):

I'm sorry that during all the years I was here, I didn't get to know you better.