

Celebrating 40 Years of CASP: An Interview With Carol Dochen

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ABOUT CAROL DOCHEN



Present Day

1982

Carol Dochen, PhD, is the director of the Student Learning Assistance Center (SLAC) at Texas State University (TXST). She also serves as the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) coordinating prelaw advisor for TXST and taught University Seminar 1100 from 1994 to 2020. Carol actively participates in state, regional, and national professional organizations for both developmental education and prelaw advising as a mentor, presenter, author, and consultant. She was awarded the Mariel M. Muir Excellence in Mentoring Award in 2019, the Texas State University System Regent's Staff Excellence Award in 2020, and the First-Year Student Advocate Award from the National Resource Center at the First Year Experience (FYE) conference in 2020.

Carol earned a BS in psychology/guidance studies and an MEd in school psychology from Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. She earned her PhD in higher education administration, with a minor in educational psychology, from the University of Texas at Austin. She has been employed at TXST since 1974. Carol served as TADE Past President, 1982–1984, and is currently CASP Historian.

SLAC is a multi-faceted academic support learning center free of charge to TXST students. The center provides individual, group, and online tutoring services, Supplemental Instruction, learning and study skills workshops, standardized test preparation, and learning specialist consultations. SLAC serves over 13,000 students, with over 52,000 student visits per year. Hundreds of outreach presentations are also provided yearly for orientation, University Seminar 1100 classes, and student organizations. SLAC's latest initiative is the Veterans Academic Success Center, housed within the SLAC lab, which provides support for military-connected students.

J-CASP: Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, institutions of higher education in the United States began to address long-standing patterns of exclusion with a national focus on access and the resulting open-door admissions movement. Please describe what that period was like for those working in postsecondary institutions and for you, personally, during your early career working in a learning center.

Dochen: I'm going to take you on a little journey through that window of time because I think my journey reflects the growth and development of our field. As an undergraduate, I majored in psychology. I was hired as a reading and study skills paraprofessional student counselor in 1974 at Southwest Texas State University (now Texas State University). They didn't call us tutors at that time because the counseling center director was experimenting with hiring undergraduates and training them as reading and study skills student counselors. Today we call these reading and study skills counselors peer

mentors. I worked in that position for 3 years as a sophomore, junior, and senior for the grand total of \$2 an hour.

The student counselors worked afternoons in a tiny classroom in Old Main, the oldest building on campus. This space evolved into the reading and study skills lab under the direction of De Johnson (now De Sellers). De, an educational reading specialist, was hired in 1973 to create a psychology course to enhance students' academic success. The course, Psychology 1320—Effective Learning, focused on improving students' learning skills, and it had both a classroom and laboratory experience. De taught back-to-back morning sections, and students came to the lab portion in the afternoons to work with

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us, the paraprofessional student counselors. Initially, there were six of us hired to provide individual reading and study skills assistance to students.

Psychology 1320 began as a typical learning and study skills course covering topics on reading skills, comprehension, vocabulary, note-taking, time management, and test-taking skills. But there was one important exception. De began incorporating learning theories, such as behaviorism, to underpin the skills and strategies she taught, along with a self-change project for students to apply behavioral techniques to their own learning and lives. As time went on, metacognitive, cognitive, and memory theories such as information processing models were added along with theories and concepts from the affective learning domain. De was at the cutting edge in her approach and is credited for creating what are now referred to as “learning frameworks” courses offered throughout Texas and the nation.

J-CASP: How did the learning center become established?

Dochen: Our learning center—which we named the Student Learning Assistance Center (SLAC)—evolved from the reading and study skills laboratory portion of Psychology 1320 as students sought tutoring and writing help with content courses. We knew we needed a larger space because our room in Old Main was simply too small. De convinced the director of the university library to provide us with space, and the lab was moved into the eleven-story library that also housed some administrative offices. Our new learning assistance center expanded services to all students.

[Editors’ Note: During the 1970s, the term *laboratory* gave way to the term *center* as the Learning Assistance Center (LAC) concept, which was formulated by Frank Christ at California State University–Long Beach. Christ created the first LAC and was the first to use this term in the professional literature. In his vision, LACs should be housed in centralized locations on campus such as a library, provide comprehensive services to all students, and incorporate theoretical concepts including human development and the psychology of learning. Many of the first LACs, such as Christ’s, also experimented with early forms of technology for individualized learning (Arndale, 2010)].

J-CASP: Did you also work at SLAC at that time?

Dochen: Yes. I was working on my master’s degree in school psychology from 1977 through 1979. As a graduate assistant, I taught two sections of the Psychology 1320 course as did Richard, another school psychology graduate student. De taught the remaining sections. We offered six or seven sections each fall and spring to accommodate the demand for the course. As SLAC evolved, we were also responsible for administrative duties in the center. Richard took on the responsibilities of hiring and training the tutors and coordinating the drop-in lab, and I coordinated the center’s outreach efforts and group content study sessions (much like Supplemental Instruction) for summer bridge students.

During this time on our campus, there were no advising centers, and there was no overall statewide postsecondary placement assessment. Faculty members served as advisors to students. I remember working with various student groups, including international students, student athletes, and conditionally admitted students. We provided reading, writing, and math assessments, and then helped faculty advisors and coaches place students in appropriate courses. Athletic coaches were especially appreciative of our work with their student athletes. We also helped students with accessibility issues, primarily those who were visually impaired. Our administrative assistant adopted this role as her responsibility by ordering their textbooks on tape and the special recorders. Students with dyslexia also became eligible for recorded textbooks so the number of students we served continued to grow, and eventually, the university created a separate Office of Disability Services.

J-CASP: The university’s student population grew from approximately 15,000 students in 1980 to over 21,000 by 1999. This growth must have provided opportunities and challenges for the institution, for SLAC, and for the Effective Learning course.

Dochen: Faculty members served as advisors throughout much of the 1980s. But if you were an undeclared major, your advisor was a counselor from the counseling center. Robert Hardesty, our president at the time, had a vision to create new support for undeclared majors by establishing the College of General Studies (now University College). Eventually, De was promoted to dean of this new college, and I was hired to replace her as director of SLAC in 1987. De’s appointment truly fostered the growth of SLAC and the Effective Learning course

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During the early 1980s, the Psychology 1320—Effective Learning course evolved into Educational Psychology (EDP) 1350, keeping the same name. The course was realigned with the College of Education, which had a department offering educational psychology graduate courses. Several faculty lines had also been established to hire instructors to teach EDP 1350 through the College of Education. In 1986, Russ Hodges was one of those faculty members hired; he also served as SLAC's Outreach Coordinator.

Over the years, SLAC and EDP 1350 often worked in tandem, supporting students from underserved and at-risk populations through various conditionally admitted student programs. Many of these programs required students to enroll in EDP 1350. In fact, in 1999, De, Russ, and I conducted a longitudinal study of conditionally admitted students enrolled in EDP 1350 that produced several statistically significant results in terms of these students' academic success and persistence compared to similar students not enrolled in the course. This research, along with similar research being conducted by Claire Ellen Weinstein at the University of Texas at Austin, convinced the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to authorize formula funding for up to 3 hours of credit for what were then called "Learning Frameworks" courses. Before that time, these student success courses could be offered but did not generate formula funding. Once funding was established, De, Russ, and I provided training to institutions across Texas that were creating learning frameworks courses. That eventually led the three of us to co-author *Academic Transformation: The Road to College Success*, a theory- and research-based student success textbook now in its third edition.

J-CASP: Let's now transition to events leading up to the creation of the College Academic Support Programs conference.

Dochen: According to archival records, College Academic Support Programs, or CASP, took twelve years of planning before it became a reality. Two important events took place prior to our first conference. In 1982, the Coordinating Board sponsored a workshop in Austin on Improving Developmental/Remedial Education. Texas educators attended from both 2- and 4-year institutions. These were educators administering or teaching

multiple levels of developmental reading, writing, and math courses or running learning centers. The Coordinating Board published a proceedings booklet, so we have an actual record of some of the sessions that were given. Hunter Boylan gave a presentation on "Measuring the Success of Developmental and Remedial Programs" and another one on "Effective Instructional Methodologies for High-Risk Students." Ann Faulkner, a reading faculty member in the Dallas County Community District, presented a session on "What's in a Learning Center." There were many panel sessions provided as well. For instance, Kay Henard, coordinator of the Access Program at Amarillo College, was highly involved in our field before CASP was created, and she served as one of the panelists.

That same year the National Association for Remedial/Developmental Studies in Postsecondary Education (NARD-SPE), which became NADE [now named TxNOSS], had a Texas chapter workshop in Houston. Both meetings provided opportunities for educators to converse on important issues in our field and allowed us to make final plans for a statewide conference.

J-CASP: Tell us about your memories of our first CASP Conference.

Dochen: The first "College Student Academic Support Programs Conference"—as it was known then—was officially sponsored by the Reading and Study Skills Lab, known as RASSL, at the University of Texas at Austin and the Texas Chapter of the Western College Reading Association. It took place in October of 1982. Pat Heard, the director of RASSL, was the site chair; she and Denise McGinty and other RASSL staff members organized the conference. It was held at the Villa

Capri hotel in Austin, which has since been demolished. My role was helping plan the program.

Claire Ellen Weinstein, from the University of Texas at Austin, was our keynote speaker. I had never heard of her, but after listening to her engaging and humorous talk, I immediately became a fan. Her topic was called "Reading is More Than Meets the Eye," which focused predominantly on metacognition and cognitive learning strategies. She also talked about her individual learning skills course that she developed in 1977. This course eventually evolved into Weinstein's 3 credit-hour Educational Psychology (EDP) 310 course based on her Model of Strategic Learning. And De and I were thinking, well, it's similar to our Psychology 1320 course; however, it's much more heavily based on cognitive

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theories and strategies. Our course was more behavioral-based, especially with our students' self-change project. Over the years, we formed a strong professional relationship and friendship with Claire Ellen and spent a lot of time collaborating. We hired many of her graduate students to teach our course, too.

J-CASP: What were some of the topics offered at the first CASP conference?

Dochen: It was 1982. CASP sessions focused on academic support for disabled students, research and evaluation of learning centers, programs and grants, retaining high-risk student populations, intensive summer programs, early forms of Supplemental Instruction, and using computers to track usage and provide accountability. There were also sessions that described successful developmental reading, writing, and math programs as well as sessions on English as a Second Language instruction. Our first conference also had four interest groups: funding and grants, evaluation, higher risk students, and learning centers and computers. Interestingly, when you look at CASP programs from 1982, 1992, 2002—and even now in 2022—the conference sessions and topics are all quite similar except for the influence and integration of new technologies.

J-CASP: In 1985, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board created the Committee on Testing to consider the merits of a state testing program that would measure the basic skills of college students and provide a basis for improving the quality of higher education in Texas. As a staff member appointed to assist this committee by your university president, you coauthored its landmark 1986 report *A Generation of Failure: The Case for Testing and Remediation in Texas Higher Education*. The report recommended that first-year students entering a public college or university in Texas be tested in reading, writing, and mathematics skills at levels required to perform effectively in college. What are your memories of working with this committee?

Dochen: At this time, institutions had been creating their own assessment and placement systems. Business professionals as well as educators (instructors, department chairs, deans, vice presidents, and, in some cases, presidents) from both 2-year and 4-year institutions testified before the committee about the need for basic skills proficiency. It

was important to so many of us—even students—to create a statewide standardized assessment. Think about students starting at a 2-year institution and then transferring to a 4-year institution where they had different placement requirements for college-level courses. One dissenter who I remember giving testimony to the committee was an attorney for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund. He was concerned, and rightly so, about potentially biased testing that would disproportionately place Hispanic students in developmental courses. I know that he was raising a real issue, but for the most part, everyone was on board.

J-CASP: The Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) was created by the 70th Texas Legislature in 1987 when Bill 2182 was passed into law. The legislation required students to pass three sections of the TASP test before they could enroll in their upper-level courses and before graduating from a certification, associate, or baccalaureate program. TASP was first administered in March of 1989. How did educators prepare for this new statewide policy and how did it affect the direction of CASP?

Dochen: Between 1987 and 1989, over 700 educators were involved in committees supporting the creation of TASP, which focused on basic skills development in reading, writing, and math, advising and placement, and learning support. Half of the educators were selected from 2-year schools and half came from 4-year schools, with 33% of the educators identifying as Black or Hispanic. I was a member of the Texas Academic Skills Council with 27 other people from around the state. National Evaluation Systems was contracted by the state to create the assessment. TASP was first administered—as I remember it—on a small scale in March 1989.

TASP was very much the focus of CASP. The 1987 CASP conference, held in Austin, was themed “Investing in the Future.” Joan Matthews, the Acting Director of Testing at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, was the closing keynote speaker. Her session was titled “An Update on the Basic Skills Testing and the Council on Learning Excellence.”

The theme of the 1988 CASP conference held in El Paso, TX, was “Preparing for Change,” and many of the sessions were focused on helping our educators respond to the coming challenges of implementing TASP. In 1989, the year TASP would be implemented, CASP’s keynote speaker was Jaime

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Oscar Escalante, the famous Garfield high school teacher known for transforming the lives of his high school students by convincing them to enroll in upper-level mathematics courses. He was the subject of the 1988 film, *Stand and Deliver*. CASP was being co-sponsored by the Coordinating Board, and they paid his speaker fees. John Corcoran, our second keynote speaker that year, was a literacy advocate. He claimed he was illiterate until the age of 48, despite graduating from a public Texas university. CASP clearly conveyed the message that change was on the horizon.

In April 1989, the Texas Academic Skills Council, Houston Community College System, and North Harris County College (now LoneStar College) held a special meeting specifically on TASP titled Texas Academic Skills Program Practitioners Conference in Houston. The conference provided Texas postsecondary educators from around the state with additional TASP information and support.

J-CASP: What other notable CASP keynote speakers come to mind?

Dochen: CASP has featured many memorable keynote speakers over our 40 years. I believe our most notable was Claire Ellen Weinstein. I think she keynoted six times. Her presentations were always refreshing, engaging, personal, and relevant—and always focused on how we could help students learn. I remember she would give the audience a list of 10 or 12 words to memorize. She would say each word slowly—“pillow,” “blanket,” “moon,” etc., then set a timer for at least a minute and tell a personal story to distract everyone. After the story, which was usually hilarious, she would ask us to write down all the words we could remember. Inevitably, most of the audience members would include the word “sleep” even though it was never one of the words she listed. She was priming us for her topic on schemas and how to help students improve their memory. Claire Ellen was an incredible storyteller and scholar and became synonymous with CASP. You always felt grateful to be in her presence because she was just so passionate about helping students succeed.

J-CASP: CASP has held two joint conferences with CRLA. Our first was in 2006 in Austin, and our second was in 2012 in Houston. This collaboration must have broadened the appeal of CASP and provided new networking opportunities for attendees. However, merging the conferences must have had its

challenges. What were some of those challenges?

Dochen: I think there are huge advantages to attending a joint conference—especially for folks that cannot attend both state and national conferences. But hosting a joint conference is tricky in terms of merging the goals of our CASP state board with the goals of the CRLA national board. I also think that it can be especially challenging not letting the national conference overshadow CASP to the point where CASP has no identity. I also remember other issues such as dividing up the financial responsibilities, creating a logo representing both organizations, and merging site and program committees together. There is also the issue of how the new board officers are installed and awards are given out—separately or together? Yes, it can be a long and tedious process for those involved, and it takes careful negotiating skills.

J-CASP: Over the years, CASP’s sponsoring organizations have jointly recognized outstanding leaders in the field, including yourself, with awards such as the CASP Presidential Award and the CASP Lifetime Achievement Award. Can you tell us more about the history of these and other awards?

Dochen: It was not until the mid-1990s that we have records of CASP giving awards. CASP’s Lifetime Achievement Award has come to represent one of the highest honors given by the CASP board to deserving members. The award recognizes individuals for their contributions over the entire span of their career rather than for a single contribution. The first Lifetime Achievement Award wasn’t actually given at CASP. It was presented to Sylvia Lujan, from UT Pan-American, at her retirement party in 1995. Other early recipients of this award included Frances McMurtry in 1996 and Gladys Shaw in 1997. Occasionally, the award is given to more than one individual, which happened for the first time in 1998, when both Anna Harris and Cynthia Teter received the award. As of this year, Kathy Stein joins the 25 other recipients that have received this prestigious award.

The CASP Presidential Award was created in 2012 by the CASP Board to honor individuals that have made highly significant contributions to the members of TADE and TxCRLA. I was honored for this award in 2012 for my work in helping to establish TADE, TASP, and CASP; David Caverly received this award in 2018 for his research, scholarship, and having established and conducted the Technology

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Institution for Developmental Educators (TIDE) for nearly 20 years.

For a time, TxCRLA also offered the “Developmental Educator of the Year Award,” given to individuals that made a significant contribution to the field through their scholarship or practice. Claire Ellen Weinstein received this award in 1996 for her work creating the Strategic Learning Model and the *Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI)*. She also received the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2011. Other early recipients included Gerald Corkran in 1997, Gail Malone in 1998, Janith Stephenson in 1999, and Mary Ann DeArmond in 2000. This award, however, has not been given out in recent years.

J-CASP: The sponsoring organizations of CASP also provide scholarship funds to their members awarded at the CASP conference each year. In fact, one of the scholarships—the Carol Dochen Professional Development Award—bears your name. Can you speak about the creation of these scholarships?

Dochen: James Mathews, former SLAC lab coordinator, received the first CASP Ann B. Faulkner Professional Development [Scholarship] Award in 1995. This scholarship was given out for several years then scholarships became more associated with either TADE or TxCRLA specifically. Initially, we had the TxCRLA Professional Development Award and the TADE Professional Development Scholarship. Then the scholarship names evolved to honor some of our CASP members. TxCRLA now has the Gladys R. Shaw Professional Development Award and the Claire Ellen Weinstein Graduate Student Award. I was recently honored when TADE renamed their scholarship the Carol Dochen Professional Development Scholarship. The awards have been given mostly to graduate students, which is a wonderful way for these organizations to support their career interests in developmental education.

J-CASP: Over the span of 40 years, you have witnessed CASP’s sponsoring organizations expand their professional development offerings through conferences, webinars, a listserv, and an academic journal. In the years to come, how do you see CASP sponsoring organizations continuing to meet the needs of educators within our field?

Dochen: I’m just amazed at what has transpired. *The Journal of College Academic Support (J-CASP)* is just brilliant. The listserv is great, too. I like the idea of the virtual *CASP Conversations*, which emerged now that we’ve all become Zoom savvy. For the past 2 years, CASP has hosted our virtual conferences, and they have been outstanding as well. However, I look forward to our return to face-to-face conferences. I know travel budgets are going to be limited, but the real payoff is being able to network and develop personal relationships with our colleagues, mentor new people in the field, and support those seeking to take on responsibilities of leadership

roles in our professional organizations.

J-CASP: In your longtime role as CASP historian, you have made a wonderful contribution as the keeper of the history. From this historical perspective, do you have any last words of wisdom to offer?

Dochen: Yes. One of my favorite mantras is “new people offer new ideas.” That’s what I value. When you bring in new people, they’re not going to settle for “we’ve always done it this way.” You want your newest educators to rock the boat a bit, to look through a different lens. We need their fresh ideas and perspectives. This is how we thrive as a profession. I often offer this advice to our learning center staff when they are in the process of decision-making. “We employ 50+ tutors, 60+ SI leaders, and several student support staff, so let’s ask them and get their advice.” The same goes for those in CASP leadership positions. When you need to know where to go or what to do next, ask your members and listen carefully. It’s the best advice I can offer.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Camrie Pipper, MA, is pursuing an EdD in developmental education with a concentration in learning support at TXST. She joined TXST as a first-generation student in 2007. She received her BA in English in 2011 and her MA in Literature from TXST in 2014. She has fostered success for postsecondary faculty, staff, and students through her work with the Philosophy Dialogue Series, Staff Council, the Common Experience, and her collaborations with the university’s Office of Disability Services (ODS). She received the ODS Staff Recognition Award in 2021 and Employee of the Month in July 2020. She was awarded the TXST Doctoral Merit Fellowship and the Frank and Alice Christ Scholarship for her first year of studies.

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