

50th Anniversary: Discovering Alyce

CCAPS Newsletter
 March 2011

Discovering Alyce

 Printer friendly

By Sue Stock



I found Alyce Graham Pasca via serendipity, as many wonderful discoveries seem to happen. I was working with the committee planning the 50th anniversary celebration of the Commission for Counseling and Psychological Services (CCAPS) of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). CCAPS and ACPA had been my professional home since graduate school, and I was enjoying both looking forward to the next fifty years of CCAPS as well as looking back to celebrate the accomplishments of CCAPS and her people.

More specifically, I was working with Sherry Lynch Conrad on capturing the history of the organization. A document had been written in 1986 by Lynn Roney chronicling the first 25 years of CCAPS, or Commission VII as it was known then. Sherry and I were to work on documenting the second 25 years. As I read Roney's summary, the list of the founding members of the Commission caught my eye. There, amongst members from well-known schools such as the University of Iowa, Boston College, and Michigan State, was listed "Alyce Graham Pasca, Roosevelt University."

I came to Roosevelt, a small liberal arts college in the Chicago loop, about 2 and a half years ago, to serve as the Director of the Counseling Center. My experience is that, at least some circles, Roosevelt is not well-known outside the Midwest. Finding a Roosevelt connection in the very formative years of my home professional organization was a delightful surprise. I wanted to know more.

The people that I spoke to, in CCAPS and at work, had not heard of Alyce. It seemed that she had perhaps not stayed in the Commission very long, and had not been at Roosevelt for quite a while either. However, I found a friend in Laura Mills, the University archivist, who willingly pulled all the documents she could find. The writing below is a result of those documents. The record is incomplete, due to the randomness of what is saved and what is not at one's workplace. But I was able to form a picture of a woman who was my foremother in many professional realms.

Alyce Graham Pasca was an African-American woman born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1923. Not much is known of her early life.

A founding mother of Roosevelt University

Pasca began working at the predecessor of Roosevelt University, Central YMCA College of Chicago, in 1942. She was a member of the staff that founded Roosevelt in 1945. She held positions as a psychometrist, lecturer in psychology, and counselor. She was appointed co-director of the Counseling Service in 1954, and its director in 1958. She remained as the Director of the Counseling and Testing Service until her death in 1975.

Roosevelt University was formed when the Board of Directors of the YMCA sought to impose quotas on minority enrollment at the Central YMCA College. These were quotas designed to limit, not increase, enrollment, especially of African-American and Jewish students. The then-college president, Edward Sparling, refused, and was encouraged to find other work. Sparling resigned under protest, and the faculty followed by taking a 62 to 1 vote that the college should break away from the control



Join ACPA

CAREER
 CENTRAL

ACPA GLOBAL
 INITIATIVES

ACPA on Twitter

of the Board. Shortly thereafter, the student body took a 488 to 2 vote of their own. Thus, Thomas Jefferson College was born, which was shortly thereafter renamed Roosevelt College. Alyce Graham Pasca was one of the brave faculty members who voted to leave the YMCA without a building, endowment, library, etc., in the service of a set of ideals and values that education should be accessible to all.

Pasca played many roles at RU, some suggested by her position titles. It appears that she was an active and interested member of the Roosevelt community. Her file in the University Archives reveals many letters sent to the university's presidents and other top officials, informing them of important developments or issues she believed merited attention. She sent articles, asked questions, and even challenged the salary levels of women versus men in Student Services. And it appeared that her counsel was well regarded. A 1973 letter from President Rolf Weil to Pasca states:

"I have just had a chance to read quickly your report on "Nonwhite Student Usage of University Mental Health Services." I found it interesting and it aroused my curiosity as to where Roosevelt University stands with regard to this matter. If you ever have the time and feel like telling me, I will be all ears."

Psychology Training and Service

Pasca completed her B.A. in Psychology from the Central YMCA College in 1944. She was hired as a psychometrist and then left shortly thereafter with the rest of the faculty to begin Thomas Jefferson College. In a 1948 personnel form, she lists graduate work at the University of Chicago, but with an asterisk and the explanation "Have completed coursework for a Master's Degree in Psychology, passed the written examination, but have not been able to get a sponsor for my thesis topic." One wonders how her race and gender may have influenced her ability to find a faculty mentor at the University of Chicago in the late 1940s. However, her lack of advanced degree did not limit Pasca's ability to contribute to both the study and practice of psychology.

In addition to her work at Roosevelt, Pasca served as a consultant to the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists, the American Association of Medical Record Librarians, and Science Research Associates. She belonged to the American College Personnel Association, the American Psychological Association, and Psi Chi (the national psychology honorary society). At Roosevelt, she taught statistics, psychological testing, social psychology, abnormal psychology, and introduction to psychology. She made frequent guest lectures in Chicago and appeared on local television and radio programs discussing psychological topics.

A Scholar and Practitioner

Pasca was a scholar and researcher, contributing important work to college counseling on topics that even today are cutting edge. For example, in 1965, she presented a workshop at ACPA entitled "Culture Conflicts and the Psychological Problems of College Students." An article of the same title was published in the *Journal of College Student Personnel* in 1966. In 1968, the *Journal of the American College Health Association* published her article entitled "Psychological Significance of Common Physical Symptoms." In 1974, she co-authored an article entitled "Innovations at University Mental Health Services," published in the *Journal of the American College Health Association*. Her scholarly work was flavored with the same sense of bluntness and humor that her University communications were. For example, the first sentence of an article entitled "Roosevelt University Student Stress: Discussion and Recommendations" reads "The title of this discussion should be "Money."

Pasca clearly designed her research so that results could be generalized and recommendations implemented to assist college students. A good example of this is her paper "A Business Career for the Negro Male," published in the *Journal of Negro Education* in 1969. This article describes "a cooperative venture between a university and a business," a program which she implemented at Roosevelt University in an effort to assist "bright Negro students...fill responsible positions in industry." Her article considered issues of recruitment, counseling, faculty relationships, and business preparedness, and provided poignant vignettes such as the story of a young man who was initially considered a thief when he took his uniform jacket home to be laundered. She discussed the level of unpreparedness of both the students and the business settings that were receiving them. Despite these bumps in the road, Pasca concluded that the program was a useful one, and the last paragraph notes the planned expansion of the program from nine students to fifty to seventy-five. It is unclear if that expansion occurred.

Additionally it appears that she was a significant support for an untold number of students in her roles as counselor, advisor, and advocate. Much of what was written after her death noted the many students she had helped. In her file in the University Archives, there is a poem entitled *In Memoriam: to Alyce Pasca*.

In part, it reads:

I came

that hour many hours ago,
broken,
my will to live snapped by despair
I heard your soft words.....
basked in your compassionate faith
for many hours after that first hour
many hours ago
Later, I went once again into life
reborn
mended,
confident,
willing to live,
daring to breathe
That was the way I went

A Founding Mother of CCAPS

In 1961, the American College Personnel Association was considering a new organizational structure. It had been decided that the 1963 Convention programming would stem from a series of groups called Commissions, each with a particular focus on an area of student personnel work. Commission VII was formed to attend to issues of Counseling, Testing, and Advising. In 1961, then-President-elect of ACPA, Melvene Hardee, wrote to Pasca to ask if she would become one of the founding members of the Commission. Hardee wrote of the importance of the perspective of the functional areas "in higher education in the years ahead" and noted that Pasca would "ably represent" the "national constituency" of this new Commission.

"A true humanist"

Alyce Graham Pasca died suddenly at the age of 52 on June 10, 1975, of a cerebral hemorrhage. She had served at Roosevelt University for 33 years and her loss was much mourned. Her death notice in *Jet* magazine stated that she was "highly respected in the medical profession and loved by the numerous students she guided to successful careers." The then-President of Roosevelt University, Rolf Weil, noted at her memorial service that she had helped "literally hundreds of students." Otto Wirth, Vice President of Academic Affairs, who had worked with Pasca to establish the Honors Program at Roosevelt, praised "her straight-forwardness, her understanding, and above all, her unselfish giving to others." He went on to say "She was an upright and decent human being. She was sincere in her purposes and rooted in an unbending intellectual integrity. In honoring her, we are doing honor to ourselves."

Speaking of honor, I am honored to be walking in the steps of Alyce Graham Pasca. She was a founder of my professional organization, my University, and served the same role in my department as I am currently fulfilling. She made significant scholarly and practice-oriented contributions to her University and to the field of college counseling. And she did these things as an African-American woman in the 1940s to 1970s, undoubtedly facing discrimination and doubt regarding her abilities. I hope to learn more about her in the coming years, but for now, I am pleased to have her as my predecessor in so many important realms.

***Sue Stock** is a former Chair (2002-2004) and Directorate Member (1997-2000) of the Commission for Counseling and Psychological Services of the American College Personnel Association. She currently serves as the Director of the Counseling Center at Roosevelt University. This piece was prepared for the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Commission for Counseling and Psychological Services in 2011.*

ACPA - College Student Educators International

ACPA is a registered trademark of the American College Personnel Association

National Center for Higher Education • One Dupont Circle, NW • Suite 300 • Washington, DC 20036 • USA