

MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTIONS ORAL HISTORIES PROJECT

ANDREW ARROYO

By Shanell Hagood



Ministry. Research. Theory. Practice. At first thought, one or a combination of two of these fields will define a person's career. However, for Andrew Arroyo, each of these disciplines has defined his very long and interesting journey. From a young age, education surrounded Arroyo. His father was a special education teacher, and the expectation was that he would attend college. Before getting there, he went to a public high school in Virginia Beach, VA with a predominantly Filipino student population. "If you weren't Filipino, you weren't cool!" Arroyo exclaimed. However, his college experience was drastically different than high school. Arroyo attended Old Dominion University (ODU), (before its distinction as a Minority Serving Institution) and introspectively stated that while he was a student, he remembered being disturbed that there were only three Black students on campus. He said that was a time that he had no real consciousness about those issues but remembers reflecting on that observation.

While at ODU, Arroyo majored in philosophy and spoke about his love for theory and thinking in abstract, complex ways. After graduating, he felt a call to the ministry, so he began seminary and married the girl he met at 13 years old. His wife was a teacher at an underserved high school, and his ministry gravitated toward that type of work. So, Arroyo did work in community

centers, and he was a property manager for several low-income houses. Even with the work he was doing, he felt antsy, to do more, "It was the spiritual type stuff, but I wanted to know, what more could we do?"

At the time there was a program for HUD homes, this was an initiative that allowed teachers, police officers, and other service workers, the opportunity to buy a home for a low price in a "troublesome" neighborhood. He and his wife took this opportunity to work and live in the community as a part of their ministry. From his work in ministry, Arroyo also published his first book, *Postured for Power*, which is about positioning yourself to lead in God's power given to you; this book was followed by a team edition the next year. However, after a few years, Arroyo had some changes in his spirituality and was looking to leave ministry work. He mentioned a desire to help and partner with people to enhance their lives and the best place he saw fit was the local HBCU, Norfolk State University (NSU). Before getting there, Arroyo took a job at a gym as a personal trainer while going back to school to finish a master's degree in philosophy so that he could get a teaching position at NSU. Arroyo finished his master's degree and became an adjunct faculty member at the local community college. He would later go on to pursue his Ed.D. in Higher Education and reflects on that decision,

I was like, all this time that I'm spending studying this stuff (philosophy), nobody cares. Nobody will ever care, and I could write a paper, and nobody will ever read it, and it's not going to get me anywhere. So, I could study that stuff as a hobby. But if I'm going to get a terminal degree is going to be in something that's going to give me some practical tools.

Arroyo earned his Ed.D. and began his faculty work at NSU shortly after, this marked the next chapter in his career, research and practice in higher education.

<https://cmsi.gse.rutgers.edu/content/msi-oral-history-project>

In Arroyo's position as a faculty member and practitioner at an HBCU, he has done research and written publications on the students he serves. He has two book collaborations: *African American's Student Guide to STEM* and *Black Women College Students: A Guide to Student Success in Higher Education*. Arroyo's motivation to write comes from something he tells his class of freshmen at Norfolk, "...you need to keep reading books until you find a book that reads you back." Arroyo expressed sincere passion about his areas of research. He has a belief that research should inform and contribute to educating underserved students and is proud to be a contributor.

Another rewarding part of being a faculty member at an HBCU for Arroyo is the practice of teaching, mentoring, and interaction with students who would not otherwise have options for higher education. Arroyo finds solace in knowing that at Norfolk they serve a high population of first-generation, low-income, minority students. Ironically, Arroyo has experienced the most rewarding part of his job to also be the most challenging, "So if we have a first-generation college student, and they're driving me nuts because the questions they ask, you know, and, and, even sometimes the attitude because they might not bring the right capital with knowing how to navigate email etiquette or just regular conversational etiquette." Arroyo has ups and downs with his students as a faculty member. However, he keeps in mind the higher-calling he has in serving these students and contributing to their education.

Because of Arroyo's drive to serve these students, he is always looking for ways to better serve them. That is why, even with all of the great contributions he was making as a faculty member, Arroyo listened to that antsy feeling that he experienced before to do more and transitioned to a full administrative role at NSU. He reflected on his transition from a researcher and faculty member as a sacrifice, "...being an administrator, although I've had to sacrifice knowing that I'll be able to put out three books in one year, I know that because of the work that I'm doing, it's going to, allow a lot of other people to do a lot of other work on a broader scale. So that's satisfying." Arroyo is pleased with the power he has had in his position to create change and open opportunities for other faculty members. However, he admits that life in administration is busy.

In his journey centered around ministry, theory, research, and practice, Arroyo has had highs and lows in the variety of ways he has interacted with those disciplines. And despite his long and adventurous career, Arroyo still has a lot that he wants to do with research on MSIs and contributions that he wants to make as a leader at his institutions. Arroyo's drive to continue his work stems from his desire, "to do what's right." He believes that doing what's right looks different for every person and for him, the work that he does changes based on the place he is in at that moment in his life. Right now, that place has him fully immersed in the practice part of his journey.

Minority Serving Institutions Oral History Project

The MSI Oral History Project shares a glimpse into the lives of prominent scholars and leaders across the MSI landscape. This initiative was born out of a class titled "Understanding Minority Serving Institutions," in which students interviewed key figures in higher education who have led Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), work to advocate for MSI inclusion in larger discussion within higher education, or conduct MSI-related research. These important individuals range from faculty in higher education to MSI presidents to those working within nonprofit organizations that support MSIs.