

Computing Educators Oral History Project
Practice interview transcript

Alison Young

Interviewer: Vicki Almstrum

Recorded Wednesday, March 1, 2006

Location: Houston, Texas

Corresponding audio available on CEOHP's website, ceohp.org, under "Short Practice Interviews".

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Conducted during the training session at the 2006 SIGCSE Technical Symposium.

1 [0:00]

2 **Vicki Almstrum: OK! This is an interview with Alison Young from Unitec New Zealand**
3 **conducted by Vicki Almstrum. This interview is being recorded on March 1st, 2006 at**
4 **Houston, Texas, as part of the Computing Education Oral History Series.**

5
6 **[An interesting aspect] of your entire background is what an international playing field**
7 **you're part of now. When did it shift from being more of a national focus to a broader,**
8 **more international focus?**

9

10 Alison Young: That was the mid 1990s. We had spent a lot of time in the late 1980s or early
11 1990s introducing new programmes. Is "programmes" an all right term to use?

12

13 **V: For a particular program of study?**

14

15 A: Yes. I introduced the first undergraduate degree in the country outside a traditional university
16 into my institution. And we were doing this a little bit in isolation -- quite a lot in isolation --

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17 because New Zealand itself is very isolated. And we would ... it was in 1988, 1990, we didn't
18 have the instant communication that we've got today. So we'd have wait, and we'd have to
19 read information, the we'd have to to write and sort wait several weeks until, "What do you
20 mean by such and such?" We couldn't wait that long. So we did it ourselves, which is very,
21 very New Zealand thing to do. Because we're quite isolated, we do a lot of things in isolation.
22

23 I could digress here and go right back to the mid 1960s, where we wrote a lot of software
24 ourselves because we couldn't wait for six weeks for something to come by ship from
25 America. So we would actually take the IBM operating system and re-write it the way we
26 wanted to. That was just not unusual. We just did it as programmers, because we didn't like
27 the way it worked, so we would change it. And it didn't suit the things we were doing. But
28 this is a very -- you've got to understand, think about the cultural thing here -- this was a very
29 Kiwi thing to do. We didn't think anything of it. We just do it, Because -- and I really think
30 this comes from our isolation, our cultural background of people that immigrated to our
31 country, the fact that we were isolated had to do with the type of people that did immigrate
32 were adventurous sort of people anyway to come halfway around the world to set up a new
33 place.
34

35 **V: I see.**
36

37 A: So when we changed to international is when communication got a lot faster in the mid
38 1990s, or the early 1990s, really. We decided, "Hey let's go out and see what the rest of the
39 world is doing as well, and how we can adapt. And make sure that what we're doing is now
40 equal to the rest of the world." Well, we've got the country all on an equal, level playing
41 field. I can say that what Mary is teaching at her institution is the same as what I am teaching
42 at mine is the same as what you're teaching at yours. So that industry knew that if they got
43 graduates from us they knew exactly what they were getting.
44

45 So we decided we really needed to benchmark this information internationally. So we started
46 exploring and finding out what people were doing internationally to bring back and see what
47 we could learn. Now the very interesting thing -- and I hope this doesn't sound too arrogant
48 on our tape here -- is what we learned here is that we were doing very, very well when we
49 tried to benchmark internationally. We found that yes, we did hit the mark and yes, we are
50 doing well. And goodness me, we are actually as good as some places. And this is when we
51 started researching and we started publishing and saying, "Hey! This is what we are doing
52 and we think we can benchmark quite well." That was early 1990s, after we got ...
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[4:11]