

Julie Utterback
Intro to American Studies

Interview Transcript

Julie Utterback: Will you please state your name, your job title, and the name of the organization you work for?

Melissa Cromer: Melissa Cromer, Secretary Senior, and I work for Animal Poultry Science.

JU: Where are you originally from and what did your parents do for a living?

MC: I'm originally from Blacksburg, and my dad was a construction worker, and my mother worked in the factory.

JU: How long have you worked here?

MC: Twenty years

JU: Wow. How did you get into this job?

MC: Worked my way up from the bottom. I worked as a wage and then fell into the position; people were willing to train me.

JU: What kind of training was involved?

MC: Accounting, learning computers, basically that was about it.

JU: Where do you live? What costs are involved for you in getting to work?

MC: I live in Pearisburg, which is about twenty-five miles west from here. It costs me approximately close to two hundred dollars a month in gas to travel, commute back and forth.

JU: That's a lot. Would you describe in detail a typical day at your job?

MC: I do a lot of correspondence, a lot of copying. I do a lot of data entry, lots of over-nighting stuff for the labs, paying bills, and filing.

JU: And this is all for like all the professors and everyone in the Animal Poultry Science department?

MC: Yeah, and I have a lot of correspondence, like I deal a lot one on one with the students. As you can see. (A student came in to talk to Melissa before the interview began.)

JU: Yeah, what do you like best about your job?

MC: Dealing with the kids, the students. I like the students. I like people.

JU: How would you describe your interaction with them?

MC: Positive. I mean, I enjoy it; most of them are very pleasant to deal with, you know. I think it keeps me feeling young; I still feel like I'm going to school.

JU: Have you had any negative experiences with the students?

MC: No, no, not really, not really. I mean, sometimes they get upset when they don't get exactly what they want, when they want it, but you know for the most part, no, nothing, that I would say would be bad.

JU: What do you like least about your job?

MC: The building. I don't like the way it's sectioned off, I think it's very isolated. You know, kind of dreary.

JU: So you feel kind of like, when a lot of people aren't coming in, it's like lonely?

MC: Yeah

JU: Could you tell me about a time when your job really frustrated you or you were tempted to walk away from it?

MC: When I got one of my new professors, who is very demanding, very, very high maintenance professor, you know. Dealing with him is probably the most stressful part, but for the most part they're all really good people to work for, but, you know, there is a few in particular that are very- they stress me. You know they can walk in the room and I'm just like, you know, stressed instantly. But it's because they're very- they're procrastinators; I know when they walk through that door that it's something that's got to be done right away, or yesterday, you know. As a matter of fact this morning I came in, and one of my professors was- she came storming in here at 8:15 and had to have a packet put together and ready to go by 8:30.

JU: Fifteen minutes.

MC: For her class, you know. She procrastinated to the very last minute; so, those things are very frustrating.

JU: Yeah, because you have no control over it.

MC: Yeah, so you know, on days that it seems like they come in abundance, are days that I would just as soon walk out that door and never come back. But then I look at it, and I'm like, I can't do that, but yeah.

JU: Could you tell me about a time you felt you couldn't speak your mind?

MC: Right now. I don't think that the leadership in this department is very open-minded. I don't think there's an open door policy. Even though we're told there is, I think things are swept under the rug. And I think you just pretty much have to say to yourself, you know, I think you would be highly punished if you spoke your mind about things.

JU: What advice would you give to someone who was considering your line of work?

MC: Be sure that it's something you want to do, you know. It's tedious; a lot of times it's redundant. There's not much excitement to it, you know. I enjoy my job, but if I were younger and had it to do over again, I don't think I would have chosen this line of work. I think I would have gotten an education, and took a different approach. But, you know, I'm so far into it now with my benefits and things that you know it's almost too late for me to change midstream. But other than that, just be sure that it's something you want to do.

JU: So, do the benefits really make it worth it?

MC: Yes. Ninety percent- or I would say ninety percent of the people that are employed at Virginia Tech are here for the benefits. It's actually not the pay, I mean the pay is decent, but it's the benefits that the University provides.

JU: What do you think is important for people to know about what you do?

MC: That there's one of me, and all of yall (laughs). I think the professors and the students forget that I'm not just working for them, that its, you know, I have eleven professors that I work for, plus their lab techs, plus their students, you know, so it's not just a few people; there's a whole network of them there, and I think a lot of people just think when they ask something of me that they don't understand that there's somebody else in line in front of them, that asked me for something. I think people don't realize that I have to divide my time. Sometimes that becomes very difficult.

JU: Do you have anything else you would like to share, any stories or anything?

MC: No, I'm sorry, I'm a boring interview (laughs).

JU: No, you were fine.