



NORA CRUZ QUEBRAL: WRITER AND THINKER PAR EXCELLENCE

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Writing about Dr. Nora Cruz-Quebral, writer par excellence and pioneer of development communication in Asia, is one big hurdle as the prospect of your article not earning her smile of approval looms as a possibility.

She would not have graduated with a BA in English magna cum laude from the University of the Philippines in 1950 without basis. Writing has always been one of her forte, alongside her ability for sharp, critical analysis and conceptual thinking. It was this foresight and her sharp analysis of developments during her time that made her pioneer the development communication academic programs at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) in the early to mid-70s.

Acknowledging the influence of Wilbur Schramm on her thinking, Nora, more commonly addressed by her younger colleagues as “NCQ”, was no conventional thinker. Her nonconformist streak leaks in the stories she would share intimately about her more youthful days at the UPLB campus.

Banking on her writing and language skills, Nora started her career at the then University of the Philippines College of Agriculture (UPCA, now UPLB) as copy editor of the UPCA journal *Philippine Agriculturist* in 1952. Prior to that, she had worked as debate stenographer of the Labor Management Advisory Board, fresh from graduation in 1950. She had also worked as secretary at the Claims Service of the US Army while still a student in 1945-46.

In October 1954, UPCA established an Office of Extension and Publications in order to put extension in place as an additional function to instruction and research in the then 45-year old agriculture campus. Nora was one of its three Filipino staff members, with an American, Prof. A.J. Sims, as their head. In 1957-59, she became the officer-in-charge of the new extension and publications office, which would later evolve into an academic department in 1960 and eventually to a full-fledged College of Development Communication in 1998.

The history of the UPLB College of Development Communication is in a large part the history of Nora’s career in the academe, along with that of the development communication program and its practice at Los Baños. The Office became the Department of Agricultural Information and

Communication in 1962; renamed Department of Agricultural Communication in 1968; renamed again as Department of Development Communication in 1973; and elevated to the Institute of Development Communication in 1987 prior to its elevation into a full-fledged College in 1998.

She took the helm of the department in three separate terms, with one or two-year gaps, totaling 17 years from 1966 to 1985, before she chose to take an early retirement after 28 years in the academe in 1988. This was when she chose to devote more time to professional practice and research, setting up the Nora C. Quebral Development Communication Center, Inc. (NCQDCCI).

It was under Nora's leadership when her department faculty developed and orchestrated the proposal for a Bachelor of Science in Development Communication (BSDC) in the early 70s, after she had delivered her landmark 1971 paper[1] in an UPCA symposium in honor of its outgoing dean-turned Director-General of the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific Dr. Dioscoro L. Umali. The Master of Science in Development Communication was approved in 1973 by the university council of the then newly reorganized UPLB, just made autonomous from its Manila-based central campus, UP Diliman. The next year, the same council approved the BSDC program, asserted by Nora as a communication curriculum that departs from the Western and largely American mold. The PhD program in devcom subsequently got approval in 1976.

What makes the BSDC curriculum different, Nora and her colleagues asserted, is primarily the inclusion of 24 units (eight courses) of technical electives (later this decreased to 18 units or six courses) which equip the would-be devcom professionals with the "what" to communicate, not just the "how" of devcom. These courses may be in agriculture, nutrition, forestry, and other technical sciences offered in the university and whose units allow enrolment of devcom students. Meanwhile, students learned the "why" of devcom in nine units of social science electives that would give them a firm grasp of development and social change processes and concepts, on top of core devcom courses where these are also tackled. Nora likewise insisted that the curriculum should have both an internship and a research component, defining devcom as both "the *art and science* of human communication linked to a society's planned transformation from a state of poverty to one of dynamic socio-economic growth that makes for greater equity and the larger unfolding of individual potential" (Quebral, 2001, reprinted in this issue; italics supplied).

Today, all three programs have graduated nearly a total of 2,000 BS, MS, and PhD degree holders in development communication or devcom. Likewise, a Master of Development Communication (MDC) is offered via distance mode at the UP Open University, while state and private colleges and universities all over the country have replicated or adapted the academic programs developed by Nora and her faculty.

How Nora ever thought of developing the devcom academic programs, she

traces to the history of her career at then UPCA, the developments in the communication discipline at that time, and her graduate studies in the USA. She earned her MS in agricultural journalism at the University of Wisconsin as US International Cooperation Agency and Philippine National Economic Council scholar in 1956-57, then her PhD in communication at the University of Illinois as Rockefeller Foundation scholar in 1963-66. She had hoped to be mentored by Wilbur Schramm in her PhD studies, who unknown to her, had already moved on from the University of Illinois to Stanford University even before she pursued her MS. Like Schramm, she was an institution builder, aside from being an institution herself. She blazed her own trail in communication studies, developing the devcom academic programs aimed to bring up a unique breed of communication professionals. These programs remain sustained and are flourishing till today.

Nora has her share of accolades and scholarly work/publications; but for her, the greatest rewards and accomplishments are to practice, study, and continue learning in devcom. Being able to build an institution, help strengthen the devcom profession and scholarship, and witness its rewards in her junior colleagues, her former students and their students, are just the fruits of the seeds she planted and nurtured in the earlier stages.

She asserts that adding “participatory” to devcom is redundant, because devcom by nature is participatory and aims to empower the marginalized. If it was less participatory and empowering in its beginnings, it was because it was conceptualized in the context of the prevailing development and communication concepts at that time, eventually evolving with the changing views in development.

Today, Nora is Professor Emeritus at UPLB CDC, enjoying serving as consultant and expert in development communication as the opportunities arise, and guiding and interacting with devcom scholars. Her center (NCQDCCI) has undertaken a wide variety of devcom projects in health communication, environmental communication, and agricultural communication. She remains to this day an analytical adviser and expert in the action research projects of the College, and a productive scholar.

Cel Cadiz is First Dean of the College of Development Communication, University of the Philippines Los Baños, from 1999 until the present. Although she was the most junior member in her faculty in 1978, she did not have the privilege of having Nora as her professor, but from 2003 till the present she has enjoyed working more closely with her in consultancies and projects at the university. celcadiz@yahoo.com

[1] Quebral, N.C. (1971) "Development Communication in the Agricultural Context", paper presented at the symposium "In Search of Breakthroughs in Agricultural Development" held in honor of Dr. Dioscoro L. Umali, December 9-10, 1971, College, Laguna. Originally published as "Development Communication", *Solidarity*, Vol. 7 No. 6, June 1972, p. 39-44, and reprinted as "What Do We Mean by 'Development Communication'", *International Development Review*, Vol. 15., No. 2, 1973/72 p. 25-28.



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