

# Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies (MAIS) Case Studies

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Volume 2 *Recognizing Trailblazers, Leaders, and Mentors*

Article 5

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2021

## Laura E. Metcalf: Agent for Change

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### Recommended Citation

Ramey, Chevon Nicole (2021) "Laura E. Metcalf: Agent for Change," *Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies (MAIS) Case Studies*: Vol. 2 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/maiscasestudies/vol2/iss1/5>

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## **Laura E. Metcalf: Agent for Change**

Chevon Nicole Ramey

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### **Abstract**

In an effort to recognize and honor the leaders of the interpreting profession as well as interpreter educators, this article is being written in collaboration with the 2020 cohort of Western Oregon University's Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies. This article chronicles the life, professional career, and leadership of Laura E. Metcalf, BEI Master, Court, Medical and Level V; RID IC/TC, CT. She has worked as a teacher, interpreter and leader in the field across the United States, inspiring and encouraging others to reach their full potential.

In life, we face situations and circumstances that we do not like or agree with. They may not always have a direct effect on us, however, the same options always present themselves. Do we simply endure the situation and go along with it because that is just how things are? Do we sit back and complain about the situation without taking any action to change it? Or do we take action by offering suggestions on how to improve or change the situation? Or take an even more proactive approach and become an active agent of change? Laura E. Metcalf was faced with this same dilemma early on in life and throughout the beginning of her professional career. It was her decision to be an active agent for change that has solidified her in the ranks of leaders of the interpreter education field.

### **Background**

Laura (known as Lauri to most) was born to Deaf parents and began interpreting in an unofficial capacity at an early age, as most CODAs (children of Deaf adults) do. She tapped into her capacity to teach at a young age as well, teaching sign language classes in the second grade. Upon entering college, Lauri first majored in speech pathology. The program did not promote the use of sign language however and she decided to change majors and ultimately graduated with a degree in early childhood. During her undergraduate studies Lauri did some interpreting here and there and was hired to teach sign language to speech pathology graduate students. She entered the interpreting field with her first official job as an interpreter in the public-school system in the early 1970s. It did not take long for Lauri to realize that she would much rather be the teacher in the Deaf Ed classroom. She continued working as an interpreter while pursuing graduate studies in Deaf Education at University of Northern Colorado. After getting certified Lauri spent the next 20 years as a Deaf Ed teacher. In those 20 years she taught at several different schools, developed a Deaf Ed program and taught sign language and Deaf Ed courses at the area university or community college. She also continued interpreting along the way. Lauri eventually ended up moving to San Antonio, where she currently resides. She had been teaching interpreting classes for a few years prior to her move. She had become burned out from teaching Deaf Ed and all of the fights that come along with it regarding the use of sign language. It was at this time that San Antonio College was looking to start their program. Lauri was not interested in being hired on initially, however she agreed to consult and help put the program together. Lauri was ultimately hired to run the program and recently retired after 25 years.

## **Accomplishments**

There are a number of accomplishments that Lauri has attained over her 45+ years of being involved in interpreting and interpreter education. The greatest one, according to Lauri, would be her work in establishing the Interpreter Training Program at San Antonio College (SAC). The program has graduated an astonishing number of skilled and qualified interpreters. According to the most recent numbers Lauri could recall, almost 15% of the interpreters in Texas graduated from SAC. The program has had a marked impact on the field of interpreting.

## **Leadership**

When it comes to leadership qualities, humility, empathy, and respect are at the top of Lauri's list. Respect for the Deaf community. Humility in knowing that you have an influence on the next generation and that should not be taken lightly. As a leader Lauri has demonstrated these qualities and instilled them in her students as well. Passing along that respect for the language, people and culture, as well as for colleagues and students of the field.

When one is seeking to advance their skills, even in leadership, mentorship is key. Carol Patrie served as one of Lauri's main mentors. When it comes to seeking a mentor, ensure that their leadership style and approach matches that of your own philosophy, Lauri advises. She indeed found that in Patrie.

Something Lauri warns against, when it comes to leadership, is to be careful not to abuse the power that comes with being in a leadership role. Be careful not to state your beliefs as facts, to not abuse your influence. In leadership it is important to be open to new ideas and not feel like you are the expert.

## **Mentoring**

As a mentor, Lauri feels as though she benefits from the mentor/mentee relationship as much, if not more than the mentee. Since retiring from her position at SAC in 2018 she has been working with students and novice interpreters. She enjoys seeing them grow in their skills and confidence in their work. While mentoring for SAC as well as the Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI), Lauri is always on the lookout for individuals she believes would serve well as future leaders and teachers in the field. She continues to develop leaders by helping them realize their potential and what they can contribute to the field. It is a common saying at SAC in the

Interpreter Training department that ‘We grow our own.’ The majority of the faculty and staff are products of the program. This is a testament of Lauri’s passion of pouring into the next generation of leaders.

### **Charge from Mom**

Lauri has been a broker between the Deaf and hearing world throughout her life. Her mother challenged her early on to do just that. Everything she has done in her professional career has been a reflection of that charge. Teaching the hearing world about Deaf culture and teaching the Deaf community about the hearing world as well.

### **Interpreting**

Lauri enjoys sharing interpreting stories to illustrate a point or concept to her mentees or students. Having an anecdotal, real world connection helps drive the point home and also helps bring the Deaf consumer to the forefront and serves as a reminder that we are dealing with their personal lives.

### **Message to New Interpreters**

“Interpreting is challenging. It requires a lot of work and practice. It is not just about the prettiness of it. It rarely comes easy. You must put in time. You have to do the work. In order to be successful, you must do a lot of that work alone, in the practice zone.” – Laura E. Metcalf

### **Conclusion**

Mahatma Ghandi said, “Be the change that you wish to see in the world.” Lauri has not traveled the entire world effecting change, however in the course of a 10-year span, she moved to six different cities across the United States effecting change in each one. She has truly had an impact on the interpreting field and Deaf community.

There is some change that needs to occur within the current climate between the interpreting field and the Deaf community. This change needs to be rooted in respect, one of the qualities Lauri mentions every leader must possess. Let us all strive to be agents of change.

## **About the Author**

Chevon Nicole Ramey, BEI Advanced and Medical, B.A.A.S Psychology at Texas A&M University – San Antonio. Chevon currently works as an interpreter educator at San Antonio College and has been working as a certified interpreter in Texas since 2011 in the following settings: community, medical, post-secondary, educational, VRS, performance, platform and conference. She obtained her Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences in Psychology from Texas A&M University – San Antonio and is currently pursuing her Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies at Western Oregon University.

## **Acknowledgements**

To the amazing faculty at Western Oregon University I say thank you for your unending support and guidance.

To my cohort, you all are fantastic, and I could not imagine doing this program with anyone else.

To my family and friends, thank you for your love and support.