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James Vastine oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, August 5, 2003

James Vastine (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Year of arrival

Mr. Vastine came to USF in 1960 as part of the charter class.

Circumstances that brought Mr. Vastine to USF

He attended high school at Bartow High School. John Allen came to his high school to recruit students to USF by telling the students about a new innovative university which was opening in Tampa. He went to the discussion with President Allen. Mr. Vastine became interested in USF. He mailed an application to USF, and it was accepted. He began his association with USF on September 26, 1960.

First impressions of Dr. Allen

He was impressed with John Allen when he came to Bartow High School. "He really gave a good sale on USF; what his visions would be for the university; we would be the pioneers and could set the course for the university," he says. Mr. Vastine says President Allen's words had a real feel to them. "His [Allen's] way of presenting his look at the future of USF convinced me right away that I wanted to be a part of that," he says.

First time Mr. Vastine saw the USF campus

He says there was not a lot to see. He saw the campus for the first time when he came for a visit before classes started. He was astounded about how far out of Tampa USF was, and how little there was around the university. Mr. Vastine was struck by all the sand dunes. He says there was absolutely no grass on the campus. Three buildings were ready when the university opened for classes. He says the buildings had just sand in between them. He says the campus had a very desolate look to it. "It has been fun to watch the changes," he says.

Administration recruits students

John Allen and other administrators went out on the road to recruit students. Also, the first library director, Elliot Hardaway, recruited students.

Students during the first week of classes

Mr. Vastine says students had the typical thoughts that college freshmen have on the first day of classes. Finding their way around campus was not something students were

concerned about because of the few buildings. He says they thought more about what their professors would be like and how their classes would be. Students formed early opinions about classes and professors during the first week. Mr. Vastine says during the first week of classes, students got to know each other. He says students tended to congregate with those in their classes because classes were small and because of the lack of social activities and student hangouts on campus. “There were not a lot of social functions or places to go and hang out,” he says. There was a snack bar in the University Center that became a hangout.

Spirit of the first students

Mr. Vastine says all the students shared the pioneer spirit and vision that John Allen had for the university and for the students.

John Allen’s vision

His vision placed an accent on learning. Mr. Vastine says the accent on learning motto really was there. An early concept that President Allen initiated was the all-university book. Each semester a book was designated, which students read. Instructors included discussions of the book as it fit into the various classes. “[The book] was a nice thing to bring everybody together and to think alike about learning,” he says. Mr. Vastine says President Allen had a liberal arts approach to things.

Early professors

Mr. Vastine had not heard of any of the early professors. He was very impressed with the instructors he had the first year. “They all took an individual interest in every one of us. You were a person not a number. Many classes were small so the instructor could get to know you on a first name basis, know your interests, and where you were in achieving things,” he says. Faculty taught all of the classes. There were no TA’s.

Particular faculty members that stand out to Mr. Vastine

His freshmen English teacher, Edgar Stanton, did all different things in life and always intertwined his life experiences into discussions in class. Another professor that stands out to Mr. Vastine is Charlie Arnade. A history instructor also influenced him. Mr. Vastine decided to be a history major after taking the instructor’s class. The instructor came out of retirement to help teach classes. “He made history so interesting,” he says.

History courses

History was not a huge department then, so the major consisted of history classes as well as international studies type classes. The history major did not encompass all the classes that students have now. It was history very widely interpreted.

Mr. Vastine graduated in August of 1964.

USF’s first graduating class

The first graduating class of USF was in 1963. USF had several students that came from other colleges, so they already had credits when they arrived. They were further along. That is why USF had its first graduating class in 1963.

Work-study co-op education

Mr. Vastine participated in co-op education. One semester (quarter) he worked full-time, and the other semester (quarter) he went to school full-time. He had two meaningful work experiences in the USF library on the work-study co-op program. He says those experiences set the course for him to become a librarian. George Miller was the director of the program. The program received a lot of publicity because at the time the space program was unfolding and many USF students spent time at Cape Canaveral working on various NASA projects. Mr. Vastine heard that the library was interested in sponsoring someone in the work-study program. Mr. Vastine decided to work at the library because he wanted to learn more about the library beyond what he had learned working there as a student assistant.

Library moves to its new building

During the first semester of classes, the library was located in the ballroom of the UC. In February 1961, the beginning of the next semester, the library moved into its new building, now the SVC building. The students were struck by the size of the building and the library collection because they were used to the small collection in the ballroom. The new building had multiple floors and contained many more books than the students had seen in the ballroom. Before carpet became common, the library used unique cork flooring to keep things quiet. Everyone thought cork flooring was a good idea, but it did not hold up, and a few years later, the flooring began to come apart.

What did Mr. Vastine do as a student assistant in the library?

Mr. Vastine worked in the circulation department, primarily shelving books. Since he was a part of the work-study co-op program he was able to do other things and learn the ropes of the library. He got to know other staff members and what they did in their particular work areas. He received a lot of encouragement from various librarians about going to library school. In those days, recruitment was a big deal because the library needed librarians.

Male in a female dominated profession

He says all of the librarians were very encouraging about him furthering his library career. He says as a male in a female dominated profession, he never felt out of place from day one.

Library personnel that stands out to Mr. Vastine

Mr. Vastine got to know several catalogers, such as Roger Lewis. He knew Mary Lou Harkness. The library staff was close-knit and took Mr. Vastine into their ranks. He felt at home with all of them. The Special Collections librarian, Margaret Chapman, was always willing to share special collections items with Mr. Vastine.

Mr. Vastine goes to FSU for library school

Since USF did not have a library school in the early days, Mr. Vastine went to FSU for his library degree. There were a few classes offered in library science at USF, but not a degree. The library program at USF was in its infancy stages.

Going to library school and then being drafted by the U.S. Navy

He was at FSU from September of 1964 until he graduated in December of 1965, the height of the Vietnam War. There was a draft. He went one semester longer so that he would not have a big load of classes his last semester. The draft board was not pleased that he was not taking a full load the last semester. They were going to pull his deferment and draft him. He begged them to give him one more semester and then they could do what they wanted to do. Two weeks after graduating in December of 1965 he received a draft notice. Two weeks later, he was a part of the U.S. Navy. He spent four years in the Navy as an enlisted soldier. He came home on leave at Christmas time. He would always go to USF and the library to see people that he knew. The librarians would always ask him if he was out of the Navy yet. They would tell Mr. Vastine, “When you get out, come back and let us know, because we would like to have you.” In 1970 he was out of the Navy. The library asked him if wanted to work there. A cataloging position was available and the library interviewed Mr. Vastine on the spot. Bob Bradley, head of cataloging, was on vacation, but was called in to interview him. Mary Lou was on vacation in Virginia. They contacted her about Mr. Vastine. Two weeks later he received a notice that the library had hired him.

Elliot Hardaway

“Even though the library was on a first name basis, we always called him Mr. Hardaway. With his demeanor you just couldn’t call him Elliot,” says Mr. Vastine. He says Mr. Hardaway was very friendly. Everyday Mr. Hardaway came around to the different departments to see how things were going. He talked to staff on an individual basis. “He was a really great person to work for. He was involved with the staff and made you feel important,” says Mr. Vastine.

Elliot Hardaway’s vision (bringing faculty and staff together)

His vision was to bring librarians and faculty close together. One of things he wanted in the library was a faculty/staff lounge. On the fifth floor of the library there was a snack bar, where faculty were invited to relax, and librarians were encouraged to have lunch or breaks so faculty and staff could interact. There was an active group of bridge players, including faculty and staff that would play in the lounge. Mr. Hardaway wanted to bring together faculty and librarians. “It was a good vision, and something we strive for over the years—that faculty-librarian relationship,” he says.

Growth of USF while Mr. Vastine was absent

Mr. Vastine says the growth occurred much faster than ever projected. USF enrollment was projected to reach 10,000 in 1970. Mr. Vastine says enrollment was close to 20,000 when he returned in 1970. Mr. Vastine says the number of buildings that were built during the years of his absence changed the entire look and atmosphere of the campus. There was still a demonstrating environment in the 1970s. The students had changed from when he was there in 1964. He says with more and more buildings, faculty members were further and further away from each other. He says this caused USF to lose some of the cohesiveness that was present in the early days. “It seemed that faculty and

students stayed in their own department area or building and didn't exchange with other disciplines as much as the early days," he says.

Original library building plan

The original plan and vision was that the original library building would become the undergraduate library and a new building would be the graduate library. However, plans changed.

The new library building

In 1975, the new library building opened. The contract was originally designed for five floors and a basement. The bid came in so low that they decided to add shelves and two additional floors. It was completed months before it was supposed to be. However, there would be no money until the summer to move into the new library, so the building sat empty for months.

The moving process

There was a planning crew that planned the entire move. USF hired a moving company. Books had to be moved in order. Every shelf in the old and new buildings was marked. Labels were on the books so the movers knew where items needed to be placed. The movers knew exactly where the books were supposed to go. All of the furniture needed to be moved as well. To move the furniture, the company erected an outside elevator on the old library building and built ramps up to the windowsills. Everything went out through the windows and down a buck hoist into full-size moving vans. Everything was labeled with the appropriate floor and room number. It took one month to move the entire building. "I think it was a remarkable achievement," he says. Regarding any small or inconsequential accidents that occurred during the move, he says, "It was a relatively smooth move considering the complexity of it all."

Library dedication

The library was dedicated in April of 1966. Margaret Meade came to the event with her walking stick.

Mr. Vastine's responsibilities as a cataloger

For some time he did copy cataloging. He looked at a book that USF had and then found copies at the Library of Congress or other libraries that matched the same book. Then he put the two matching books together and created records. Everybody took part in creating catalog cards on typewriters. He spent time typing catalog cards and doing them in the exact format that catalog cards required. Then cataloging evolved into taking Polaroid photographs of records and then converting those into catalog cards. Then they were able to generate catalog cards from computers using different vendors. He spent one year in cataloging.

Mr. Vastine works in the reference department

After being a cataloger for a year, Mr. Vastine became a reference librarian. A few years later there was a big reorganization in the library. The collection development department was created. Mary Lou Taylor, then a circulation librarian, took a position

that involved organizing collection development. This opened up the need for someone to do circulation. Mr. Vastine decided to become a circulation librarian. He worked as a circulation librarian for three years.

Mr. Vastine goes back to reference and then becomes interim assistant director for public services

After being a circulation librarian, Mr. Vastine went back to the reference department in 1977. He stayed there until 1990 when he was asked to be interim assistant director for public services. The position had never been refilled after the assistant director retired. He agreed to a short-term interim director position, which ended up lasting two and a half years. It was an interesting experience, but he does not think he ever wants to do it again. He went back to reference and swore that he would never leave again. Mr. Vastine is still with the reference department.

Reorganization/collection development

The provost of USF at the time suggested that collection development was something real universities do and that USF should do it as well. Collection development involves the idea of bringing librarians and faculty representatives together to talk about, buy, and put together a collection that meets the needs of each department. Mr. Vastine says the dialogue between librarians and faculty and the departments worked well then and it is working well now. Collection development takes what money is available and makes the best use of it so that the library can purchase what is most needed by the departments. Often the faculty liaison makes the book recommendations.

Major changes in the library over the past thirty years

Mr. Vastine says the first major change occurred when the library switched to OCLC (Online Computer Library Center, Inc) for cataloging. The switch took place around 1975, and “marked a whole new way of doing things.” “It completely changed cataloging as I knew it,” he says. Another change Mr. Vastine says was monumental was beginning the online catalog. “It [online catalog] brought the library into the forefront of the rest of the campus more than anything else we’ve done over the years,” he says. The online catalog led to online databases, periodicals, and the virtual library. He says the online cataloging and the virtual library brought the library into focus on campus like never before.

Mr. Vastine’s favorite aspect of the library

He is very happy with the interactions among the staff members. Mary Lou Harkness established the library staff committee in 1973 or 1974 under the goal of participatory management. With participatory management, and a library staff committee, representatives from the different areas of the library elected members of the committee. They would get complaints, comments, and suggestions from the rest of the library staff and would act on them. Mary Lou gave the library staff committee free reign to talk to anyone on campus and find out about problems that might have occurred and then make recommendations to her. Sometimes Mary Lou would take the recommendations and other times she would not. But, the committee always had the opportunity of looking at a

problem and trying to solve it before it became an even bigger problem. In the first couple of years of the committee's existence they did tackle some "sticky things."

Sit-in occurs at the library

A sit-in at the library occurred just after the new building opened. Students wanted longer library hours. A group of students wanted twenty-four hour library access. They decided to have a sit-in one evening at closing time. When the library was supposed to close there were many students ready to stay for however long they had to. They stayed until 3:00 a.m. when the vice president of student affairs visited and talked to the students. He said, "In five minutes I want everyone out, and in five minutes anyone who is left will be dealing with me in the student affair's office." Mr. Vastine says that in the last two minutes there was a lot of scrambling as people tried to get out of the building. That was the only real tangible attempt to increase library hours.

Car club

He became involved in the sports car club at USF. The club existed in the early days of the university. In the days of the 1950s and 1960s sports cars were a unique and fun thing to get involved with. At the time Mr. Vastine drove an MG. Several people got together and formed the USF sports car club. The club began by doing events called rallies. At a rally an organizer comes up with a written map of a local area the participants will have to navigate. If they followed the map correctly they would get to the endpoint. The club did many rallies in the early days and then the members decided they needed to be a little more adventuresome. They asked for permission to stage events called auto-crosses—a low-key race. At the time there was a huge parking lot on the westside of the fine arts building. They used cones and laid out a tight course, which involved both the driver's speed and skill of being able to navigate a small course. The club got the support of the university police as long as it was carefully controlled. The auto-crosses became fairly routine.

Where does Mr. Vastine see the direction of the library in the next decade?

He says that certainly technology will be the driving force behind the library. One thing he hopes is that as the library becomes more and more high tech it does not lose the high touch that is necessary.

What is Mr. Vastine most proud of in his thirty plus years with USF?

"I think the opportunities through teaching the use of the library class and other teaching opportunities—being able to change some lives of some students. Being able to interact with the students over the years is what I'm most proud of and I hope I've made a difference in their lives," he says.

When Mr. Vastine came to the university as a student in 1960, did he think he would still be a part of USF in 2003?

He says by the time he graduated and went on to library school he knew he wanted to come back to USF. He knew he wanted to watch the university grow after being fascinated by watching it grow for the first few years. He knew he wanted to watch the university turn into a great institution. "It is a great institution," he says.

Closing remarks

He encourages those who have since left the university to come back and see what USF looks like, experience how different it is now, and see what a great place it has become. He says that incoming students are the torch-bearers, and have an important job in taking the university forward and into continued greatness.

End of Interview