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Richard W. Mitchell oral history interview by Nancy Hewitt, July 23, 1985

Richard W. Mitchell (Interviewee)
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Hewitt: I am interviewing Dr. Richard Mitchell, Professor of the Physics Department at the University of South Florida, as part of the Silver Anniversary Oral History Project. First of all Dr. Mitchell, what was your first contact with the University of South Florida and what made you choose to come here?

Mitchell: Well, I was interviewed by Harry Kimball for a possible position here. In the spring of 1962 I came down to look over the campus, I spent the night at the local motel and the next day I talked to some of the deans and other officials seeing what the program was. The reason I decided to come here was two things. It was interesting to me that there is a college in its inception and I had some chance to orient programs to make it a good college as opposed to just fitting in with some program that is already going on elsewhere. Plus the fact I have been mostly interested in teaching rather than research and that was a primary consideration here. As a matter of fact, the hierarchy, the dean of the college, Dean Cooper, was mostly interested in teaching. He didn't seem to want to spend much time doing research. That met with what I wanted to do. I turned down more lucrative jobs, that is, universities that had prestige, where there would have been practically all research and very little teaching.

Hewitt: Do you remember what your first impressions were of the University when you saw it?

Mitchell: Really, a university to me is not a collection of buildings or campuses or something like this. There were very few buildings and I don't have any distinctive impression of it being pretty or ugly. These things are not
usually considerations. It's a place to work. I would rather work with good students in a desert waste than lousy students who didn't want an education in an oasis. My impressions would probably not be very helpful.

Hewitt: When you first arrived, the College of Basic Studies was still the main focus of education at USF. Did you teach in Basic Studies as well as in Natural Sciences?

Mitchell: No, I didn't teach any of the basic studies courses. I taught just the combined Chemistry/Physics courses at that time and the labs that went with it. Later the advanced courses in Physics.

Hewitt: Was there actually a physics program already in place when you arrived or is that something that you helped to develop?

Mitchell: I believe the conditions for a major had been set up. I presume that it would have to be, even at that level, because they are into the second year; but we did make changes as we went along as to the core structures that we felt that would be most important. We were looking towards two products. One was the B.S. for the student going to find employment. His background in physics should be different from one who plans to go on to graduate school. So we tried to have a dual program that would meet both those needs.

Hewitt: How many faculty were actually teaching physics at that point with the combined Physics/Chemistry curriculum?

Mitchell: When I first arrived, I believe there were five or six and each of the next trimesters we added one more. We started from five.
Hewitt: Was the undergraduate and graduate program in the Natural Sciences then a fairly popular one with the first students that came to USF?

Mitchell: There was no graduate program as such at that time. That came about later. I don't remember what year we started our graduate program. You very rarely attract people from other areas into physics. More people go from physics into education. The reason for going into some other disciplines when changes take place is that they find difficulty handling what they are trying to do, so they look for something that they can handle. So this would mean that you practically never get someone dropping out of a program and then going into physics because I believe that the statistics show that this is more difficult than the other courses that they might take. Occasionally we did get some from engineering coming into physics, but this was later because we didn't have an engineering . . . I guess we had an Engineering Program that would take two years of engineering here and then go to Florida because I did actually teach an engineering course on two different occasions.

Hewitt: So you taught a little bit of chemistry and a little bit of engineering, but mainly physics. They talked about having interdisciplinary courses here, but it sounds like you were just sort of an interdisciplinary teacher.

Mitchell: Dr. Cook, who was a very strong advocate of interdisciplinary courses, his concept of the ideal course would be one that would teach a little bit about a whole lot of courses, surface knowledge rather than in-depth knowledge. He seemed to be terribly worried that people would learn too much in some area which is an unfortunate way to think about it. To me it's a dumb way to think about it. I can't think of a better word because of all the people
that I have known who were extraordinarily well educated in a given area, I
have never found one of these people who were so sharply focused that they
didn't know how to move out into other areas. And you just don't find
scholars who cut themselves off from all other areas of thinking. But I did
agree with this concept of a broad education. As a matter of fact, it is
kind of strange. When I was at a previous university, which was an engi-
neering university, I was always fighting for a more liberal education so
kids would be exposed to psychology and philosophy and just to know what was
in those areas. There weren't enough opportunities for that. When I get
here, the dean doesn't want them to learn very much in their own area. In
fact, he would have like to have had someone come in and teach a combined
geology/physics/chemistry/biology, all the sciences available. And his idea
was to look for someone that had been trained in all of those different
areas to come in teach such a course, which again, is ludicrous because in
order to have a good course, you would need someone who had a great depth of
knowledge in all those areas to know the important aspects that should go
into this amalgamated course. It's sort of like some people seem to think
if a person goes through trig, does "A" work, and understands it perfectly
that they should be able to teach trig. Of course they could teach people
what they have learned, but the thing these people don't understand is that
a person that just learned trig and turned around and taught it wouldn't
understand the importance of the different parts of trig because he wouldn't
see how it would fit in to the later education.

Hewitt: I was never terrific in physics. It doesn't strike me as the kind of thing
that you can teach on a surface level.
Mitchell: No. We have it in-depth as far as going into many, quantitative calculations that we do for the engineers is not important. As a matter of fact on several occasions I taught courses to people who didn't have much of a scientific background—agricultural majors at Texas A&M who were somewhat unsophisticated, I think, is a term I might use. And then I taught a course in St. Petersburg to some housewives, and I was impressed with their ability to grasp concepts and think about them. They seem to think of those concepts alot better than some of the students who are so involved with working problems that they would lose site of the concept in terms of trying to remember how to work the problem. So you can, I would say, teach surface physics to some extent, to give someone an appreciation of alot of things that they wouldn't appreciate otherwise, but to really do much with it, of course, you need the in-depth study.

Hewitt: Could you comment a bit on what the relationships were like between faculty, staff, students, and administrators in those early days when the campus was much smaller?

Mitchell: My impression was that there seemed to be a general camaraderie between the faculty members. We all knew each other because there weren't very many of us. So we would get together at a picnic or a faculty/student softball game, so I knew most of the people and I didn't find any of them that I didn't get along with. The relationships between the deans, department chairmen, and the faculty members... The faculty members in Physics, we all got along well with the department chairman for the first six or eight years. We had a great rapport with the chairman. The chairman had a very poor relation with the Dean of Natural Sciences, as did the chairman of every other area. I think there is a history of the chairman of every area
of Natural Science resigning essentially in protest. It was Dean Ashford. It was a bit unfortunate. There were things about Dean Ashford that I didn't like. In fact, I wouldn't like to put on tape all the things that I didn't like about him because I might have to prove them in court which would be a long process. The one thing that I feel in his favor as opposed to later deans who have come along was that he really did want to build a strong, Natural Science Division. It is just that he didn't recognize some of his limitations, and the methods that he used to accomplish his results I disagreed with as opposed to the later deans. I feel like they are not as interested in building a great university as they are in not rocking the boat as far as their superiors are concerned and looking good on paper. They worry about having a look if they do something not right, whether they believe it's being right or wrong. That's maybe not unnatural because other universities that I have been to the deans and the people who are in higher positions work alone quite often at the college, so they have a love or an interest in the college. Here these have been mostly political appointment it seems to me.

Hewitt: Did you have any contact at all with President Allen? Did faculty tend to see people that were high up in the administration?

Mitchell: Actually I did run into him a number of times, and it happened on one occasion, through some of my community contacts, I had some knowledge about an unfortunate situation involving a student and his teacher that was going to lead to . . . It would have ended up in the papers and it would have been unfavorable publicity. I happened to know Sheriff Blackman at the time. I played bridge with him. He contacted me and told me about the situation. I asked him to hold off till I could see Dr. Allen, and I was sure he could
work with the family and resolve the situation without going through the channels that would lead to publicity. That is the last I heard of it, well, not quite. The next year I got an extra one hundred dollar raise from Dr. Allen. He asked that I be given this. These things mean more to me than the actual money. It's nice to know that when you do something you are appreciated, which I haven't felt for the last twelve years except very recently as far as that of department chairman. The last two years I felt like the department chairman showed his appreciation for what you did, but until then I didn't see any. This is a bad situation.

Hewitt: Was there more contact between faculty and students in those early years when everybody was brand new?

Mitchell: I don't know how much of this would be because I was younger. I doubt any of it really because being as involved with students as I have, even every now and then I have to say, "Hey fellow, you're not 18 anymore." I'm thinking like a student and sort of seeing myself as one, so perhaps that wasn't it, but I know I spent . . . I like to play tennis and there weren't alot of fairly good players around that I knew, so one time or another I would run into students who like to play and I generally, for the first four or five years, there were two or three students that I got to know very well through competing with them on the tennis courts. Then in the study of physics you have got to know the physics majors better. The classes were smaller. The faculty was smaller so all of us were involved with all of the students and I knew all of the physics majors pretty well. Today the faculty members don't all get involved with the students and very rarely know who the physics majors are. I haven't been doing as much with the
graduate students, so I really have very little contact with those students.

Hewitt: You mentioned playing tennis with students and your interest in sports. I have heard that the original idea at USF was that there wouldn't be any intercollegiate sports at all. Was there an attempt to have more student and faculty participation in sporting events early on?

Mitchell: There was an emphasis on a strong intramural program so that all of the students would profit from the money that went into athletics. I think the consensus of most of the faculty, at the time, was that this was a good thing for the faculty. Not the students, who seemed to desire to have a team which would represent the college like the basketball team. There was some push towards a tennis team and a soccer team. This met with very little resistance because it is not a terribly expensive operation, and it didn't seem like you were diverting a large portion of student funds that wouldn't be enjoyed by all of the students. The atmosphere I think also had a ... I remember one of the faculty members in physical education who I knew had to work pretty hard to get a track program. He wanted to have some track students compete. This again, is relatively inexpensive. We ended up with a cross country team. We're talking rather minor in terms of money compared to what we put into our basketball program. The philosophy I think was the right one, and I think it was a tragic mistake when they decided to have the basketball program here because everybody knows the basketball players are not students at USF and the apathy of the student body towards turning out to watch basketball means that it is a very poor investment as opposed to the University of Kentucky. Now that has served some real purpose and has even produced money because it brings people together. I'm
sure these people contribute in many ways to the University. When they have just the practice sessions, they'll have 12,000 people in the stands. It's just about a full house. Everybody comes out to see what the team looks like. There is tremendous interest in it and possibly that interest could be generated here in some sport, but it hasn't so far. I think that it's been given a decent trial, and I think the results substantiated the fact that it was a mistake, but we seem to be continuing with this mistake and will for some while.

Hewitt: There is one other question on sports that I wanted to be sure and get on tape. You mentioned before we started the interview that there were a couple of faculty/student softball games in the early years here.

Mitchell: Yes, at least two of the first four years the faculty played the student body in a slow pitch softball game. We enjoyed that very much because the older fellows beat the students badly. This is probably because they didn't have . . . I think the active students were obviously better athletes, but the desire to knock the ball as far as possible hurts you when you play slow pitch because it is a little harder to make contact with the ball. The fact that we couldn't hit is as hard perhaps helped us.

Hewitt: Did you serve on any university committees in those early periods where USF was really undergoing alot of changes and alot of new developments?

Mitchell: I served on the Natural Sciences Committee which had to do with the formulation of policies for the Natural Science division. I served on that for about three or four years, but it seems that I don't fit in too well on committees for some reason because I find that I get impatient with things not being accomplished and the more people that you have working on a
project, the longer it takes, the less efficient, and the less that gets
done. Plus the fact that I don't think in the same way as administrators
do. For instance, I remember one meeting where I probably first incurred
the wrath of Dr. Ashford. We were trying to decide . . . The Mathematics
department did not want to give college credit for college algebra. It was
machine talk, I believe. The Biology department wanted to move their
Biology program to the freshman year. It was at that time a sophomore
course. I felt like the Biology department should be allowed to contact
their students in the freshman year, and I saw no reason why the algebra
shouldn't be taught. I could see why the Math department might not want to
give college credit towards a math degree. That would make sense. They
were expected to get this in high school. But as far as people outside of
the division taking the course, college algebra is a decent course with alot
of meat in it and could be valuable to them in their lives. So I was a
little distraught with him when the dean decided that the biology would have
to stay a sophomore course and the math course would be a machine-taught
course. I pointed out that in other universities where I have been, it
seemed that the college algebra took considerably more intellectual effort
or capacity to do well than freshman biology. It didn't seem to make sense
that we were saying in effect that the math course wouldn't come up to the
level we expected from a college course and biology was too strong a course
to have in the freshman year. It made very little sense to me. It was
never presented to me in a way that did make sense. I had the feeling that
I attended these committees to say, "Oh great wonderful leader, you are
doing a fantastic job," that is all he wanted from me. He never really
wanted any ideas.
Hewitt: Did you basically try and stay off committees after that?

Mitchell: No, I still felt like that perhaps even though that was a battle lost, the war hadn't been lost and perhaps there was some contribution I could make to the University. So I did serve on another committee which I have forgotten the name of. I didn't really accomplish anything. I stayed on the Natural Sciences Committee for another year and then in effect dropped off because of differences between the dean and I over the graduate program which was starting out. We were all drawing up the guidelines; everybody was setting up a graduate program in Natural Sciences. This is maybe the fifth or sixth year. The Dean's concept was that each department should write out what constituted a masters program in their area. Then after doing this, each of the other departments would check over what all of them were doing and would pass on it or not. The point that bothered me was that no one outside the Physics department would really be competent to decide whether the Physics program was a good masters program or not. I felt like I couldn't really decide whether the Biology department had a good masters program or not. I felt like wasn't competent to make that decision, and if they weren't competent to set up a masters program, then they really weren't competent to be college professors. Unfortunately, the Dean's comment was that maybe if I didn't feel competent that I shouldn't be on the committee, which irritated me so I rephrased my statement. I said I believed I was as competent as anyone in the room. As a matter of fact if it was important, I could make a competent assessment of the Biology program, but it would take a lot of time and study on my part, which was not worth while since I had confidence in the people in Biology being able to do this. After that, I resigned from the committee. I felt like I really couldn't contribute much to the University within the framework of that committee.
Hewitt: But the graduate program did get set up shortly after?

Mitchell: It did get set up. As a matter of fact we had so few people at the time that I felt compelled to set up a research program to help take care of the graduate students. So I did set up a nuclear magnetic resistance experiment and had a graduate student the first year. After he finished his masters degree. There was no one who wanted to take on some problem that I had in that field. They were turning towards electromagnetic waves and microwaves that Dr. Block had going. I think Dr. Clapp had a program involving solid state physics. Dr. Kendall was doing some work in the study of atmospheric electricity. The following two trimesters were being handled ... We also got one more faculty member during this time. Since they decided to go into these other areas, I don't know whether they felt like I asked too much of them or whether they just didn't find the nuclear magnetic resistance studies attractive. After that time, I folded my attempt because I didn't enjoy doing that, and I didn't feel the need for it because we did have faculty to handle the graduate students that we had. I still took part in the graduate courses. As a matter of fact, the textbook that I selected for the graduate course in mechanics, which seems a little strange because this is seventeen years later, I would think that more attractive ... There is no other area which the textbook hasn't changed a dozen times. It is an unusual and outstanding book, but I am surprised that some of the people who are teaching haven't made changes with the new books that have come out during that time.

Hewitt: A lot of faculty have told me that from the late '60s to the early '70s there were a lot of changes at USF, not only in terms of growth, but in terms of the atmosphere on campus and the kinds of missions that the University
supposedly had, that there was a shift away from the "Accent of Learning" and towards more research and publication. Did those shifts affect you at all?

Mitchell: Yes, I guess they really did. I felt that the accent wasn't more "accent on research" rather than teaching because at any university you must have . . . The functions of a university are to discover knowledge as well as to enlighten the students. This is a legitimate function, and it is pretty hard to keep current in your field and alive with your teaching if you are not associated with the research and doing the research . . . In fact I have never been at any university . . . I have taught at three universities. One was a small church school where there was practically no research activities. I have done some research at every university that I have been connected with and research that has led towards publications in major periodicals in the field. So I don't think it would be quite fair to say that I have no interest or knowledge in that field, although it has been suggested by one of the ex-deans. But the thing that I felt strongly myself was that until the coming of Cecil Mackey, I think would be about the time that I associate with this, that each year when the department chairman would review what you have done through the year and would let you know what he thought of the job you did. In my case it happened that he was complimentary about what I had achieved. This makes you feel better about what you are doing. I think although there were other aspects of it I hadn't been doing as well financially as some of the ones who were involved in research. I didn't realize it because I didn't keep up with such things. I didn't have a great need for the money and felt like I was doing alright because the chairman recommended me for merit increases because he was pleased with what I did. But then about this time the accent turned towards
doing more research and the way that it was done... Somehow it seems that we have gone back... In the early days of physics, if I can digress just a moment. The old Greeks believed that you shouldn't bother doing experiments and getting data and facts. That if you sat and thought about things that you would eventually come up with all the answers in the universe. It seems to me that the higher we have... perhaps not only this college, but maybe in others... feel like they are the only ones who understand how a university should be run. The faculty department heads shouldn't really make any decisions because only they, in the exalted position and knowledge, know what should and shouldn't be done for the University. And you don't have this delegation of authority that I would think... In other words, I see a department chairman and if he is a good one, he should delegate authority to the members of the faculty. He should be responsible to the dean. If he thinks that a program in physics is weak, he should either change the chairman or get him to change his ways and on up the line. But now I feel like the presidents, vice presidents, and deans like to reach down and make changes within the college that they feel are important. And on what basis they feel they are important, I don't know, because it would seem to me that if one were out to build a great college that we would look at some of the fine colleges in the United States and ask what makes these colleges good and try to emulate those parts that make it good, rather than feeling that some individual is going to make some fantastic contribution here to this college which will make USF a great college. You notice you see the names of the administrators in the paper making their contributions all the time, but these contributions amount to very little as far as making this a great university. I think that it has hurt the University terribly. It has hurt the faculty. A lot of the faculty people seem to
have sort of a hopeless attitude, "What can I do." You either play the
game, which amounts to having alot of publications, and this hurts two ways.
The faculty people will milk their research. Without looking around I could
give you names of people who had presented this same paper five or six
times, different places under different names, changing practically nothing.
Maybe changing a little bit and publishing it in two or three different
places. Well this is not helping in any way advance a state of knowledge.
This is not significant or worth while research. Yet it shows up on the
books as great activity and great creativity on the part of the faculty.
They sense everything has to be documented because only the provost or the
vice presidents or the deans can decide who should be rewarded and who
shouldn't be, not the people who are close to you doing the work, who are
really the only ones who can judge. So they have to have a formula on which
to base their merit raises and increases. The formula has been, just like
in all bureaucracies, when you get far removed from a problem and try to set
up ways of judging the problem, the judgement tends to be very bad and the
rules turn out to be ludicrous. And that has happened here as that bureau-
cracy has grown starting with Cecil Mackey and I believe, Dr. Brown, who has
gone even beyond, transcended what . . . It's funny, one time, since I
didn't get along with Dr. Ashford too well, he hurt me financially because
of my disagreement with him. I thought that whoever the next dean is, he
will have to be a better one. I couldn't have been more wrong in my own
personal evaluation of him. I felt like when we lost Mackey, we would
certainly get someone in here who will be better. And he is better in some
respects, I'm sure, but as far as what he has done for the college, I feel
like we haven't gained, we have lost.
Hewitt: So would you say that the best years at USF were the first ten years?

Mitchell: Again, it depends on how one measures best. If you talk about the volume of people that turn out with degrees and the like, all I really know is that the physics students that we sent out we have kept up with. The ones that we sent off to graduate school, all of them did well and made it which indicated that he got a decent education here at USF. I also remember during that time some of the USF people were picked for the College Bowl, which is a TV program where they debate against other colleges in terms of surface knowledge. Knowledge of a type is required and the brighter students generally win those College Bowls, and I think that USF did extraordinarily well on it. If USF were represented on a College Bowl today, we wouldn't even... if they selected some people, I don't think that we would do as well. I do not believe the students are getting as good an education. Of course I can only speak for what I see close by in physics. The philosophy of the people who guide the University bothers me because I feel like, and of course this was true when I first came here, I don't feel that there really should be a College of Education associated with any university. I think the College of Education should be somewhere else because this is not a body of knowledge to be disseminated, and you can see this is so if one notes that you could take a freshman student and put him in a graduate course in Education and if they have done reasonably good work in their field, they'll easily get A's on these graduate courses. How can you start with a graduate course when you haven't had the undergraduate material if there is a body of knowledge where we must learn fundamentals before we can go on to the more exotic ideas of the field. So in that sense, I'm not saying that a lot of the courses are not important. I don't think it belongs in the University and the needs of both the people who are
our guests teaching in that field as well as the, maybe the high schools are such that it leads to a proliferation of courses which are not college level courses.

Heitt: Let me ask you another question about student life. Do you recall whether there was activism at USF by students in the late 60s as there was up north? If so, was it different here being a southern school?

Mitchell: I never really paid that much attention to the activism unless it made the headlines, regarding some student getting killed or something. I never have felt like the students were involved with causes that I could support. I could support any student who feels like he is not getting his money's worth for the education that he pays. I will be glad to get on his side and support him anyway I can. So I have paid very little attention to it, except to note that we did have a few incidences when the campus had to be blocked off by the police because of the student demonstrations. What that amounted to ... I wouldn't think any ideas that I might have on that would be of any value to anyone that's probably not much different. I believe the students also demonstrated against the mayor or some other local thing in town. They went down and blocked off a street. As far as the effect on the campus, the progress of the school and the education of the students, I couldn't see any connection.

Hewitt: If you have any recommendations for the next 25 years, assuming that is probably when most of these tapes will be listened to again--at the 50th anniversary celebration--what sort of changes would you like to see occur at USF?
Mitchell: I would like to see the college-oriented to having outstanding sources in all of the different areas. Physics is quite a different proposition from some of the other areas. All people who teach general Physics, teach the same course. All people who teach the first Psychology, Philosophy, and History course, that person teaching the course has a great deal more to do with what the course is than they do in Physics. I find that we are restricted. We don't have as good a course in Physics as we should have because we do not have enough time to spend with the students. If the students that we had here were at the level of the students they accepted at MIT and Princeton, I think I could teach a decent course in Physics in the time they allot. With the students that we receive here, they are being severely short-changed. Some of them do quite well, but there is very little help for the middle and lower students because there is simply not enough time. Somebody should know about this and be doing something about this and in all other areas. I don't see anyone focusing their attention on this particular problem or making it important. The department chairman here can't focus his attention on that even if he thought it was important because the thing that he was brought in for was to build a good Physics department. To build a good Physics department we need research grants, money, and research people. They are the ones that build the Physics department. He has done an outstanding job. In fact, it seems to me he has far exceeded what they asked of him, and it seems strange to me that he didn't get a significant raise for going far beyond what they had asked of him. A basketball coach really hasn't come up to the level... He wasn't able to recruit or do much with the people who were recruited and he got a $25,000 raise. I think as long as their priorities are chosen like this, we are not going to have a good school. Of course I understand... If I were
at Ohio State and I saw the football coach get a $50,000 raise as opposed to the poor faculty member, I wouldn't make the same statement because football serves more of a purpose there than any of the sports that USF do relative to the University here. But I would also like to see more delegation of responsibility so that the chairman had the freedom to do more with the . . . probably supervise the course. I think somebody should have to account for what he does, but he should have the responsibility to make more decisions instead of having them made for us. One specific example that I can think of is that four years ago we decided to have a graduate faculty. The committee had the chore to decide how we should select a graduate faculty. They met many times over a period of better than a year. Finally the new vice president came in. He made recommendations and ultimately we ended up with a set of rules and regulations for choosing the criteria for choosing the graduate faculty which I didn't like. For one reason they started credentialing of the graduate faculty, which is a slogan. I don't like to see people misuse English. Credential, I believe, is a noun not a verb. This sort of thing is done all the time, but the important thing was that if anyone asked why do we need a graduate faculty and why do we spend all these man hours on committees trying to do something. It's impossible to do something if you don't know what it is for. We have no need for a graduate faculty. At other institutions, the reason for the existence of the graduate faculty is so the dean will have a list of names and when the graduate degrees are given, he would select from the graduate faculty some member to be his representative to degrees in other areas. This gives you some sort of quality control of degrees. It makes some sense. We have nothing like that here. We didn't even have a graduate dean until the president decided he couldn't handle one of the vice presidents. He didn't
know what to do with him, although I asked for a graduate dean for ten years preceding it. I thought we needed one with functions that he could perform, but even now that we have one, he doesn't perform what I consider the important functions of a graduate dean. Too many activities, wasted man hours, and with people that don't know what they are trying to do because any chairman, if he knows his faculty members, in five minutes could go through and select who should or shouldn't be on the graduate faculty. They should have the ability to do independent research, direct research, and teach the graduate courses. Most places when you get your Ph.D. in Physics, you are automatically a member of the graduate faculty. I was at another university, but I'm not here because I refuse to apply to meet these conditions at what I consider a second-rate university.

Hewitt: Could you tell me what you think the role of the faculty should be at a university and what you see as the role the faculty has been at USF?

Mitchell: Since the faculty is the only non-transient part of the University--the administrators come and go--it would seem to me that at the University they should be responsible for the decisions that affect the gaining of degrees and the acquiring of knowledge, the ordinary functions of a university as opposed to the president who perhaps . . . I'm not sure exactly what his role should be, so perhaps I shouldn't say on that. What bothers me most at USF is the faculty has given up any effort to have a say in what goes on, it seems to me. I was on the University Senate in its inception. We spent long hours talking about various problems, forming committees to study things, and did nothing. The University faculty right now, I feel, does nothing because I had agreements in which the dean of our college had cheated me out of a promise of an adjustment to my salary. Then he lied
about it, which are rather strong statements I think, but I have proof of both of these and carried this to the then vice president who refused to act on it. He sided with the dean. He didn't bother to get data on it. Then when I went to the president, he checked with a lawyer to see if I could win my case in court, which I could have, but I didn't want to take it that far. It bothered me that here the people who are responsible for the lives of other people trying to get a degree shouldn't have a certain ethics of morality which I felt was lacking. So I carried my case to the University Senate. The speaker of the senate listened to it and said that we should take that under consideration. I furnished them with the necessary documents proving what I said. He took this to the committee of the senate. He came back and I asked him what happened, and he said that they didn't wish to pursue the matter. I didn't understand why. He said he didn't either and he wanted to take it back to them again. Again he came back and they didn't wish to pursue the matter. I can't imagine any faculty member sitting by. I don't think they should have agreed with me, but I think it should have been investigated and if I had been treated in such a fashion, if the president had ignored this sort of treatment of the faculty member, I think they should have been extraordinarily concerned. If I had been making false charges, then I should have been dealt with. They should have taken action and I think, today, the only time I remember the faculty speaking out is when the then vice president now provost, hired a black man who didn't have the proper credentials to be a full professor. The thing that caused the people to speak out I think was the salary at which he was brought in was higher than the salaries of other people who had been here. The focus was not on this is wrong for the provost to step in and hire a person because he is in no position to know the qualifications of a person outside
his field. The department chairman should make those decisions. The idea of hiring a man because he is black goes contrary to . . . I realize that blacks have been discriminated against. I think if a black and white man of equal credentials, I would go with a black man because he has been discriminated against, but I think we should look for the best person available. The fact that the administration is really giving lip service to this, they don't really believe it because if you look at the number of high paying jobs on campus, vice presidents, deans, and the president, you will find . . . The fact that there are no black vice presidents, no black deans, no women vice presidents or deans, whereas there has been a great interest on the part of the deans and the vice presidents to get these people among the faculty seems to be a rather unique situation to say the least. It makes me feel that the president's record as far as his equal rights considerations are not nearly as good as he would have you believe. It seems to be pure hypocrisy. I presume that you have to satisfy the . . . that we have to look good in this area so we can get grants and other monies, but we don't have to really believe in it because certainly you can't get black people in physics simply because there are not that many qualified blacks. This has been a field black people haven't done well in for a lot of different reasons, but there would be no difficulty, in my estimation, in finding black people and women who can make decisions that would certainly to be much greater than the decisions I have been seeing the deans and the vice presidents make. So it is surprising to me that they are not a greater percentage of black people in administration than there are in some of the simple jobs you understand. You get down where the money is not so great, they do bring women and black people to show that their hearts are in the right place, but not for the high payments.
Hewitt: Well I hope your feelings about faculty participation actually come true in the next 25 years. I think it would be nice ... We'll never go back to the kind of small campus we had where all the faculty knew each other, but perhaps we could find other means to get faculty participation and faculty involvement not only with each other, but with the decision making apparatus of the University. I would like to thank you for participating in this oral history project today. We have been speaking with Dr. Richard Mitchell of the Physics Department.