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Laurence E. Monley oral history interview by Nancy Hewitt, August 8, 1985

Laurence E. Monley (Interviewee)
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Hewitt: I am speaking with Dr. Larry Monley this afternoon as part of the Silver Anniversary Oral History Project. Dr. Monley came to USF as a professor of Chemistry and is now a professor of Education. Let me ask you first of all, what was your first contact with the University of South Florida and what made you choose to come here to work?

Monley: Well, I had a friend that was with me when I was in graduate school at the University of Florida. He had been in contact with the two schools that were opening up at that time. It was Florida Presbyterian and the University of South Florida. They both opened at the same time. I had really not followed closely the developments. The chairman of my department called me in one day and asked me if I knew Dr. Ashford. I didn't know him, but apparently somehow he had received some word of me being in the chemistry area and so he asked me to come down and see about joining the initial faculty. After I got down here that seemed like a possibility of providing a little bit more security for my family. I was teaching at East Tennessee State at the time, and they were in a bad situation because they had ten or eleven schools that couldn't change their salary structure unless all of them changed at the same time. So there wasn't much prospect for financial advancement at that point. I thought there would be a little bit more here.

Hewitt: Do you remember what your first impressions of the campus were when you arrived at USF?

Monley: When I came there were three buildings. I could not actually get into the Chemistry building, which was where all the sciences were going to be taught
because they had just finished polishing the floors and they put the ribbons across. Until the Board of Regents' representatives came in and accepted the building officially, you couldn't get in to see what was going on. That was quite interesting. The first year we had a big mound of sand over where the old library building was. It was about as high as the present building is. It sat there for two years just so the weight of it would compact the ground enough to build a structure that would support the library books. Every time we went out to the parking lot it was like a sand storm because we didn't have all the nice grass areas as yet. The sand would come along and we would have little pits in all the paint of the cars. Everybody was repainting their cars all the time. So it was kind of out in the boon docks, but now everything has grown up around the University.

Hewitt: When you arrived, was your appointment both in the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Basic Studies?

Monley: Almost everybody had joint appointments at that point in time. My previous experience had not been one that really supported the concept of the basic studies area, but under Dr. Clark's leadership when the science program in the Physical Sciences was really a good, solid academic program... It wasn't a substitute for those who couldn't handle the basic material. It was a good, solid course. So I stayed with that. That was for a couple of years. Then as it evolved a little bit we had the opportunity to decide whether they were going to stay with the Basic Studies College or with the Liberal Arts College. Since my training was primarily in chemistry and I was rather interested in the upper level work and introductory graduate work, I went with the Liberal Arts College.
Hewitt: Now given that the school had just opened when you arrived, a Chemistry department would mean more sorts of lab equipment and that kind of thing than most departments. Did you spend the first year trying to put those labs together or were the materials ordered already?

Monley: There were a lot of materials that were ordered thanks to Dr. Clark. He was hired earlier and had gone through a series of catalogues and had done a lot of consulting with different people. What we needed for our first year was pretty well supplied. Where we ran into difficulty was when we started our junior year. That was in 1962. Then we needed to tool up for those more advanced courses at the junior and senior levels. There was a good bit of misunderstanding about that because they had thought they had supplied all of our needs when they came in with the original allocation of the materials. Of course we had some difficulty in getting that squared away and so on. That is a matter of perception I think. A lot of people don't realize how much equipment that it really takes to do a first rate job with lab sciences.

Hewitt: A lot of people who I have interviewed have mentioned that they taught various courses in the Chem lab including things like sculpture classes and various arts and theater classes. How did you go about having the Chem labs be set up for chemistry courses and having all of these other people have courses moving through there? It seems that it must have been a constant pace.

Monley: It really wasn't all that difficult because most of our labs were set so that we had reasonable amounts of storage for the number of students that came through. Now we couldn't do that under the crowded conditions that we have now. Initially, for example, in the Quantitative Analysis Lab, each
student would have his own storage space for his berets and all that. So he would just put it away and as long as you weren't actually there, they would just use the table tops and that was it. We had a number of misconceptions that had to go through a lot of changes the first few years. In fact one of the kinds of things where they eventually ended up with the Geology Lab which was a lab that had no electrical connections or any of that. It had glass table tops and they expected they would put a room of about 30 analytical balances in there and people were expected to run in, weigh something, and then go trudging back through the stock rooms and down the hall and so on like that to where they would use the chemical. Obviously that didn't work out too well. They did recognize that they needed an analytical balance area, but it wasn't quite what they really planned. The other thing that was rather interesting was that they realized the dangers in Chemistry labs because sometimes you have need for a shower or this type of thing. So we all had showers in the lab, but we didn't have any drains under them.

Hewitt: Careful planning! It must not have taken too long for the showers to fill up that way. When you think about those early years at USF, what would you say was the relationship between faculty, administrators, staff, and students?

Monley: It was more a group of people that were interested in doing whatever they could do toward a common goal. We thought that this was an opportunity to set in motion a first grade university. There wasn't much in the way of concern about who got credit for this and that type of thing, so it was more a big team. Dr. Allen provided excellent leadership in that regard as far as the faculty was concerned. If you were meeting him socially, he would
know about the different things that other members of the family were doing, so we were all working together on that. As I have mentioned to you earlier, even in the listing in the directory, there was no distinction between secretaries and full professors and this type of thing. They were all listed the same way. Then there was a little asterisk to say that this was part of the teaching faculty, and you will notice that when they went through the administration way, there is a small space in there for the president's office and that is sandwiched right in among the library and all the other activities. It wasn't overloaded with the prestige administration. I should probably give you more details. The social activities tended to hold all the faculty and staff together rather extensively so that it wasn't just the faculty who were looking at the University as a major activity, that was a center of activity for the entire family. Much more so than at most universities that I have seen. Of the total number of full-time faculty appointments, there were only 80 of us to start. In addition to that we had all of our maintenance groups and so on. I don't know how many we actually had in total, but it was a very close-knit group, and we all had the feeling that there was some kind of adventure that was going on. It was a privileged to be part of it and to actually do something that wasn't going to be done again for a long time. I'm not real sure whether that spirit still prevails or not.

Hewitt: Do you think that the faculty actually had significant input into the creation of policies, departments, and programs at that early date?

Monley: Oh yes. No question about it. In fact during the first Christmas vacation it was a normal, expected day for those of us who were supposedly on vacation (for classes were not being met) . . . We would start meeting in
one group around about eight in the morning and we would finish there and go on to another group so that around about ten at night we would be through with the meetings for the day and then start all over again the next day. I don't think they could get that kind of dedication from a group again, but everyone knew that whatever we did those first couple of years would dictate the general direction of what was going on, and it was a significant effort made to see that whatever was happening in one branch of the University, the rest of them were involved with it. It wasn't that they just knew that it existed, but you were involved with it. We had discussion as to whether this was the best way to go or not. One of the kinds of things that came out of that, in about the third or fourth year ... Harry Kendall and I had taught a course the first semester in Chemistry as well as Physics, so that if you finished the year by taking one more semester of Chemistry or one more semester of Physics, well you would have a whole year of that subject and we would team teach that. He would teach one day and I would teach the next day. Whenever the students would get short changed because some of our backgrounds were a little different in presenting it, before they would leave, the other would get up and point out the things that were significant in their disciplines. When we tried to do that with a larger group we had to have a total of eight people. Four Chemistry faculty and four Physics faculty paired off working together. At that point it fell apart because already we were beginning to grow to the point that specialization was the thing of the day.

Hewitt: I assume that you actually helped establish the program of the Chemistry department since you were there so early. What direction did you want to see the Chemistry program go that might be either innovative or different from the traditional Chemistry department?
Monley: Generally most Chemistry departments are, for the first four years, a matter of so many prescribed courses. You go through the routines and that is it. We had an opportunity for a lot of the students to work in the labs with the faculty. We really didn't have research funds as such. Officially the school was designated as a four-year school. So officially they were saying that we weren't planning graduate level work, but at the same time, even in my interview, there was some kind of indication and discussion as to how loads would be adjusted when you started handling graduate level work. We had a problem with the legislaturedesignating it as a four-year school, but at the same time, we felt like a different kind of basis for the first four years was important. We wanted it to be a solid basis that had everything that other more traditional programs had, but we worked a lot more closely with the students individually. Many of the students that were in the first group, by the time they had graduated, they had already had the equivalent of a couple of years of research experience working in individual labs.

Hewitt: I notice on the form that you filled out for me that you mentioned early on that you were a member of both the Space Committee and the Academic Regulations Committee. Could you explain what the Space Committee was?

Monley: At that time the Space Committee was the one who decided whether this laboratory could be used for a Chemistry class or whether it would be allocated for some other purpose. One of the earlier problems that we had with the Space Committee was trying to provide backup services so that over in the basement of the UC, where we had audio/visual and where they repaired the TV sets and monitors, everybody was beginning to build an empire. So if we could expand and get half of this next building coming up assigned to us
and so on. So we had to go through and make allocations of space, and it was good place to lose alot of friends. There was input on that Space Committee, representatives from all the different academic as well as administrative areas, so it was not a case where somebody or I decided that this would be a great Chemistry school and give two or three reasons that the Chemistry building was built first. We thought that you could teach biology and physics in a chemistry laboratory, but you could not teach alot of chemistry in some of the physics laboratories because they didn't have the kind of equipment and so on.

Hewitt: That committee must have been incredibly busy those first few years as the University was adding buildings.

Monley: They really were. The Space Committee was involved in making decisions on the priority of which buildings would come first and this type of thing. You can see trying to choose between a Fine Arts Theater and a Physics building. That is a difficult choice, so there was alot of give and take in those different things.

Hewitt: Now what did the Academic Regulations Committee do? What was their responsibilities?

Monley: Well, the Academic Regulations Committee is still functioning. Whatever rules and regulations that the University provides to maintain the quality and the standards of academic excellence that we initially set out for, that's the amount of times you can miss, and all kinds of details. If a student comes in now and he fails out because of low grade point, in order to get back in he has to petition the Academic Regulations Committee; and then they look at it to see if there are any extenuating circumstances that
you can set the regulations aside for the benefit of the student. So it is
a case where the students have an opportunity to be considered on an
individual basis—whether or not some family breakup or illness in the
family or some unforeseen circumstance or maybe a few years have elapsed and
it looks like we now have a mature student instead of a kid that is just
wasting his dad's money. So all those are considerations and whatever the
University regulations are that might be set aside for the benefit of the
student. Of course if we can get one who started out wrong and is now going
to do a good job, then the purpose of the University has been realized to a
great extent.

Hewitt: Now you have a couple of newspaper clippings here that we were looking at.
One involves registration of students in that very early year. Since now
students are getting adjusted to computerized registration and you barely
see faculty members when you register for courses these days, could you just
describe what registration was like for students in those early days?

Monley: They had some kind of a general orientation program, similar to what our
Focus programs are now, so you had a general idea of what college was to be
about. Within the assigned duties of all faculty members, you got involved
as an advisor for a group of students coming through and so you worked
through that advising function trying to sort out whether or not somebody
who thinks he is interested in science, but might have to go back and take
some remedial work because he didn't get that interest in science while he
was still in high school. He is just now getting it, and this type of
thing. So there was a great deal of informal advising, assessment of the
student's interests and abilities. I think a fairly significant effort on
the part of most of the faculty to try to get students to take a broad
outlook first rather than to say, "Well I want to be a neurosurgeon approach and what do I have to do to get to be one." All of our programs were geared so that it would meet those kinds of requirements, but we didn't set everything else aside. In those days when you signed up for courses, you paid for a certain minimum number of hours. I think it was something like 12 hours. If you took 13 hours, that didn't cost you any more. If you took 15 hours, it still didn't cost you any more. And so the fee structure was that it encouraged students to try areas where now the situation has been modified a bit, trying to make every course cost accountable. We find alot of nonaffluent students coming out. They would say that they think a course in European History as an elective might be fine, but they couldn't afford the extra $50 to take that. I think in that one administrative decision, which was done at the state level, that way of charging for the courses has undermined the idea that a university is not just place to go to get what you have to have, it's a place to go to find out what you can be. That's quite a big difference in the outlook. We would try to counsel the students and sometimes even match them with particular interests and so on. If there was an English professor that was noted for his poetry or something like that and the student had indicated some interest along those lines, we would try and match these things, which, of course, the computer doesn't do very well.

Hewitt: There is also another newspaper photograph of you and Dr. Gessman and Dr. Whitaker standing with President Allen, I guess right after the Johns Committee report came out. What was your experience of the Johns Committee in that era of USF history?
Monley: Well, the Johns Committee was somewhat like the McCarthy era in national politics, where a man who was influential, politically at the state level, decided that he would monitor the standards of morality and so on for the University. And certain things he didn't think were acceptable. They would have secret meetings and committees down at the Holiday Inn and all that to see if they could find somebody that was a little communistic or something of that nature. Or somebody who said that they would sign it, but they didn't believe in it when they signed the loyalty oath and this type of thing. It was really a bad situation because it undermines the essential freedom of the University professor to say what needs to be said. If you can't bring up new or controversial ideas on a University campus, then you really can't bring them up anywhere. So that effort didn't work out too well. Finally with Dr. Allen's resistance here and a lot of places finally counteracted that political influence, but Senator Johns was very powerful in the state legislature. His private committees were used as weapons to spy upon everybody. The University needs, of course, to have that freedom of speech, but you get that attacked from both sides. Shortly after that the law still said that people who were known communists and so on were not to be given the facilities of the University for speaking. Following through the guidelines that he was given as an administrator, why Dr. Allen cancelled a proposed visit by somebody who was admittedly a communist. He was under a widespread attack from the American Association of University Professors and this type of thing. Dr. Allen was the one that was being attacked although he was only following the law. We had one of our faculty members get up in that meeting of the professors in that organization, and he explained Dr. Allens' position and said that we shouldn't attack him for being involved personally when he is only enforcing the law. He has no
choice. He either does that or his job is gone. He was always outspoken and in favor of freedom of speech wherever he could legally do that. An interesting quarrel to that is when someone came to Dr. Allens' defense. Some of the other younger professors that are still with the University took the position that this one defending Dr. Allen ought to be dropped out of the organization simply because he had a different view. So the enthusiasm goes rampid, and whenever you get a mass movement of that type, that was it. But organizations of instructional, professorial groups at that time were concerned about that kind of thing. We need to protect the freedom of speech because then if you have a new idea you can present it without being attacked. That is what a university needs to be able to do. Now, of course, our representatives are concerned about salaries and mundane things.

Hewitt: Well, we haven't been scared by something like the Johns Committee in a long time. It makes you think about those issues more closely.

Monley: Yes. At the state level it was the same type of thing when I was Chairman of the Chemistry Department. I was interviewing some prospective staff members from one of our sister schools in the university system. I got a long distance phone call, unsolicited, from other members of that faculty where they called to warn me that he had certain radical views and so on and so forth like that. It's kind of scary. As it turned out, for other reasons, he wasn't considered. It is scary to think that somebody behind the scenes can blackball a person without any professional basis for that.

Hewitt: Now when did you shift from the Chemistry department to the Education program?
That was about '66 I guess. At that point in time we had a number of joint programs going with the College of Education. All of those programs which were programs in the sciences were approved by the science department as meeting the science requirements that we thought were basic and essential for preparing a teacher. Even today that still holds. That was one of the kinds of things which I think underlie the original group of people that it was a university standard for that preparation of teachers, not just the College of Education. There has been, historically, a good bit of antagonism between colleges of education and colleges where subject matter is their bread and butter. When I taught at East Tennessee State College, we had a professor from the College of Education there who maintained that you could teach Chemistry even if you did not know Chemistry. That if you knew how to teach, that you could teach what you didn't know. Well, I wasn't in the College of Education then, of course, I took a dim view of that. When we first came there was so much emphasis on basic education, and we all had joint appointments and the opportunity to really know some individuals on both sides of the fence became clear. And so I was doing an awful lot of work with teachers at the time. When one of our faculty, who was in the College of Education, decided to transfer to Florida Atlantic, that left an opening. Someone in the College of Education went to the Science supervisor at the state level and asked for recommendations. So out of that I became involved with the College of Education. At that point in time I was already involved not just with the teachers, but with the development of the talented students. The State Science Fair and the State Science Talent Search are programs that are part of the activities of the Florida Foundation of Teacher Scientists. I was the first representative
from the University of South Florida to be involved in that. Since I had previous ties with Florida State and the University of Florida I knew a lot of science professionals. We had rotating assignments on that Board of Directors. They were three years and they rotated in many of the off years. All total I spent nine years on that Board of Directors. I was chairman of that group a couple of times so that we had the responsibilities of setting up the guidelines, doing the recruiting, recruiting qualified personnel to judge the quality of presentations and this type of thing. To give you some kind of an idea of how successful that particular program was, we had one year a competition at the national level and of all the states, there were 13 categories and we had first place placement in 9 of the 13.

Hewitt: Now was that considered part of the University outreach program or was this something that you were just interested in?

Monley: Everyone was expected to represent the University to whatever constituency you happen to have. Cisco over in Speech would be out working with all kinds of debating activities and this type of thing. That was expected as a normal part of our situation. Now, whenever you get involved in that, well they think of that as something that you shouldn't do unless you are assigned to do it. That was rather the anticipated result of the approach to it at that point in time.

Hewitt: Now a lot of people have mentioned that in the mid-'60s the College of Basic Studies began to be dismantled, although I guess it was several years before it was fully dismantled, and there was a general shift in the balance between teaching and research in terms of expectations about what faculty should be doing. As someone who was both in the Natural Sciences and in the College of Education during that period, did those sorts of changes affect
the kinds of programs that you dealt with or the kinds of things you wanted
to do personally?

Monley: No question about that. In fact doing the kinds of things that I was doing
with teachers--while it might be something that they commented on favorably
and say that it was good that you were doing that--the changes were such
that they said that it really wasn't the kind of thing that we should
encourage our faculty to be doing. We ought to be encouraging our faculty
to be doing laboratory research so that your name will be on that
publication. That somewhere in North Dakota or Liverpool and so on, they
will begin to be aware of our existence. So along about the mid-'60s there
was a very strong transition and even today if you get a qualified person in
one of the science areas, the presumption is that he is a qualified teacher
and that he is doing a good job of teaching, but if he just does that the
chances of him ever getting any advancement is not very good.

Hewitt: What do you think were the forces that put these changes in motion, given
that the early vision of USF was so clearly an accent on learning in the
meaningful sense of that phrase?

Monley: I think here, although myself I'm not a laboratory researcher, at that point
in time I had directed more graduates students than the rest of the faculty
and the Chemistry department combined. But clearly if you are going to be a
major state university, a really serious part of your mission is to develop
new learning. That scholarship program for the faculty to develop new
learning. In most cases the historical pattern has been that if your
emphasizing that then you don't have time for the other. We have a number
of excellent researchers that are excellent teachers, that will tell you
that they could not be excellent teachers if they weren't keeping up with
things all the time. And they find the best way to keep up is to be working on the things themselves. But there is a unique distinction between being able to provide the experience of recent years to incoming groups of students and then getting out with your machete and cutting out a new field somewhere. I don't think the University has ever quite come to grips with that as yet, and they have not been honest enough in analyzing it for them to say that they need to have people doing the kinds of things that they do well. We have some teachers that teach well, even though they may not be able to do research, and we need to have some researchers doing research and nothing else because they don't teach well. There are some individuals that are excellent teachers in a small one-to-one exposure with a graduate student, but if you put them in front of a whole class, it's a fiasco. I think we need teachers of all types in all circumstances. So I look at research as a responsibility of the University to teach organized groups outside the University where there happens to be industry or school systems and so on. But to teach those ... They are already practicing the state of the art and what you are trying to do is teach them what could be done beyond the state of the art. You can call that research if you want, but in many ways what research is is a teaching kind of function, but it has never been so identified. That is one of the reasons that you get the controversy.

Hewitt: When you think back on the atmosphere in those early years at USF and the atmosphere on the campus now, what would you say have been the biggest changes?

Monley: Probably the biggest change is just the inevitable effects of growth--instead of having a number of small units that are tied together...
because the large unit is small enough that you can manage it. If you take the original Chemistry department, for example, there were three chemists besides Dr. Ashford in that first group. That is really not enough for a department, but now we have 20 or 30 people in the Chemistry department, and unless somebody is fairly aggressive about trying to look for new ideas and new associations, he could get lost in just one subdivision of that department. So the growth is perhaps the biggest inevitable change that you begin to become more and more isolated as a consequence of that growth. The other, I think, what I think is a mistake in the approach to try too hard to be absolutely accountable for everything that you do in a uniform way. A history teacher cannot be accountable for what he is doing in the same way that a physics teacher can. They both teach, but the ways that they teach and the immediate consequences and so on, you find that over a period of time your general ideas may be much more influenced by what you have learned about a certain area of history or a certain incident in history, but you can't say now this is worth so many dollars when you go out to interview for a job. If I'm able to do this type of thing in physics, why you can put a dollar value on that. You get immediate response for it. So it's a mixed bag that the growth has been a big factor and isolation resulting from the growth. Then recently the attempts to try to improve the efficiency of the university system. I'm not really sure that a university is by its nature designed to be very efficient. You can't say that this is the way we are going to get new ideas, and we are going to get them the most efficient way. If you already knew how those ideas would generate we would just program it into a computer and be done with it.

Hewitt: With the growth of the University and the isolation that you talked about in terms of people getting isolated even within subfields of their departments,
do you think that there is anything left of the original notions of interdisciplinary education and the all university approach?

Monley: I believe that some joint appointments where you participate actively in more than one department, would be beneficial. I recognize that when it comes to promotion, well then you have several bosses and that has a difficulty with that. But when I first joined the College of Education, at that time I was very active in presenting papers related to science education in the southeastern region and along the Midwest area. Those were the really interesting developments. They said to me, "Do you mean somebody who is really trained could actually be working with the College of Education, not separating those." And I said, "Yes, that is the way we do it and all of our students take their courses from their subject specialists, not from just the education area." In many times, you get the collaboration after the fact, but I think our education is deficient because we don't emphasize that in our interrelations early. Dr. Martin, for example, is listed as Professor of Biology as well as Chemistry now because he is doing research on red tide organisms and things of that nature. Well why should you have to wait until after you have been very successful? In your first year, if he had some training that would bring those things together earlier maybe he or some of the others might be farther along. Instead of being isolated we ought to bring them together.

Hewitt: Do you think that in the coming years at USF that there will be a swing back toward more cooperation among the departments or emphasis on general education? I know that there are now many attempts to try and revamp the distribution requirements and get back towards a more liberal
arts-humanities kind of core. Do you think that is possible once the University had gotten this big and specialized?

Monley: I think they'll make progress because they really are determined in a number of areas, but I don't think it's just the basic core that I think of as being important. I think a lot of times you can get someone who is teaching something that is not part of the basic core, but teaching it for a select group. Dr. Kruschwitz teaches an excellent physics course for non-science majors. These types of things ought to be encouraged and developed to a greater degree than they are. I've heard a tremendous number of favorable comments about that course. When we talk about our emphasis on aging, why it's not just aging in terms of your physical abilities, it's emotional abilities and other kinds of things as well. I hope that it can come back, but I'm not really optimistic. The recent years of history haven't indicated that it tends to go that way.

Hewitt: That is why it's good to get the earliest years on tape so we remember where we came from. Thank you very much.