

6-11-2003

John Belohlavek oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, June 11, 2003

John M. Belohlavek (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/usfhistinfo_oh



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [Other Education Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Belohlavek, John M. (Interviewee) and Greenberg, Yael V. (Interviewer), "John Belohlavek oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, June 11, 2003" (2003). *Digital Collection - USF Historical Archives Oral Histories*. Paper 66.

http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/usfhistinfo_oh/66

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Digital Collection - Historical University Archives at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digital Collection - USF Historical Archives Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

This Oral History is copyrighted by the University of South Florida Libraries Oral History Program on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the University of South Florida.

**Copyright, 2008, University of South Florida.
All rights, reserved.**

This oral history may be used for research, instruction, and private study under the provisions of the Fair Use. Fair Use is a provision of the United States Copyright Law (United States Code, Title 17, section 107), which allows limited use of copyrighted materials under certain conditions. Fair Use limits the amount of material that may be used.

For all other permissions and requests, contact the UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA LIBRARIES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM at the University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, LIB 122, Tampa, FL 33620.

USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
USF 50th History Anniversary Project

Narrator: Dr. John M. Belohlavek (B)
Current Position: Professor of
History

Date of Interview: June 11, 2003

Audit Editor: Danielle E. Riley

Date Audit Edit Completed: December 12, 2003

Interviewer: Yael V. Greenberg (G)
Location of Interview: Tampa Campus
Library

Transcriber: University of Florida

Final Editor: Jared G. Toney

TRANSCRIPTION

G: Today is Wednesday, June 11, 2003. My name is Yael Greenberg, Oral History Program Assistant for the Florida Studies Center. We continue a series of interviews in our studio here in the Tampa campus library with USF faculty, staff, students, and alumni in order to commemorate fifty years of university history. Today, we will be interviewing Dr. John Belohlavek who came to USF in August of 1970 as an assistant professor of history. His current title is Professor of History. Good morning, Dr. Belohlavek.

B: Good morning.

G: Let's begin by you taking us to the year you arrived in Tampa and what circumstances brought you to the University of South Florida.

B: In the winter of 1969/1970 I interviewed in Washington D.C. with a group of faculty from the University of South Florida. I had interviewed with a number of other institutions at our national conference in Washington. I didn't know, frankly, much about USF because it was such a new school, but I was terribly impressed with the faculty who were in Washington. I decided to come down for an interview. They invited me down. What was equally important, I think, at that was that my wife had also just completed her

Ph.D., hers was in education. It was important for the two of us to get jobs. The job market in history at that time was still fairly good, it was about to collapse, but at that time it was still fairly good, so the possibility that the two of us could get employment at the same institution was obviously very important to us. At that time I was twenty-six years old, so was my wife, [and] we had no children. The possibility of coming to a new institution like South Florida, coming to Florida, a growing institution in what we considered to be an exciting and growing place, was really too good to resist. Of course we also felt that we made these phenomenal salaries of \$11,500, which at that time was just an amazing amount of money. So, the lure of coming to Tampa was simply too good for the two of us to resist. My wife at that time, Marsha Mann, who is still in the College of Education, we decided that this was the right move for the two of us.

G: What impressed you in that initial meeting in Washington of the USF faculty? What impressed you?

B: That's a good question. There were bona-fide characters in the history department at that time. I mean that literally, there were genuine characters: bizarre, weird, wacky, diverse. It was certainly overwhelmingly of course a white and male faculty at that time, but the politics of the faculty, their views on life, and remember this is a 1960s faculty, so they bring pretty broad views to the table. I like more traditional institutions that I had interviewed with, and I had interviewed with a number of schools. I was really taken by the faculty that I met with at that time, and even more so when I came to the campus and met with them. Again, I was very impressed. At that time, remember the model of the university has been accent on learning; so the emphasis was on teaching, not on research. I was really taken that this was an institution and certainly a faculty that truly cared about

learning about educating its students. Since that was my first priority as well, that truly impressed me. In fact at that time the history department had student representatives on its interviewing and hiring committee.

G: What did the campus look like in 1970 the first time you saw it, first impressions of the campus?

B: [It was] not exactly what I had come to expect I think. Not that I had been misled, but I think one thinks of Florida as lush and tropical, very green, lots of palm trees, and we were coming out of Nebraska. Nebraska of course is painfully flat, but it is fairly green. I mean Lincoln, Nebraska has a lot of trees and in many ways it's quite attractive. To come to Tampa, and I think we were pleased to see the water, we were pleased to the palm trees but the campus itself was frankly quite stark and quite barren. The buildings looked like they were kind of early Stalin. I mean they were just grim. You wonder what architect they had commissioned to build these things. They were unimaginative, dull, colorless, incredibly institutional. Of course there were, relatively speaking compared to now, some more than thirty years later, far fewer buildings on campus. So, you had this kind of yellowish, whitish brick baking in the sun. [There were] very few trees, a lot of sand, a lot of sand spurs. Again, the furthest thing you can imagine from a tropical field, and a lot of asphalt so that when you came on campus you could literally see the heat rising from the parking lots. Of course they had wisely brought me down in January from Nebraska to interview. At that time, of course coming to Florida in January, it was lovely. One overlooks the starkness, the barrenness, everything else, and is quite taken really with the people. The campus itself frankly was not terribly attractive, and has become much more attractive, most certainly, over the last three decades. Now, while I

don't think anybody would say it's a beautiful campus, there's no comparison to when you go back thirty years. There frankly isn't. It's a much more attractive campus.

G: You were hired as an assistant professor of history.

B: Yes.

G: How was the department organized in the 1970s? Let's talk a little bit about who was already there in terms of faculty.

B: The department's organization remains, by the way, very much the same as it was thirty years ago; it hasn't changed literally at all. We have a departmental chair and we have an executive counsel that advises the chair. That counsel is a four-member counsel that's elected by the faculty. It's a department that relies very heavily on democracy. The foundation of the department rests in democracy. The chair has power but is certainly is not all-powerful. A chair is not a head. The notion of the chair doing things without the approval of the faculty I think is just alien to our culture, which is one of the reasons I think that we have chair limitations. We have bylaws. We have basically, if you will, a charter, a constitution for the department. A chair is limited to two three-year terms. You cannot serve any more than that. Many of us have taken our turn, if you will. I did for six years. I certainly think it's a great idea because it limits obviously any abuse of power. So in terms of the structure of the department, it really hasn't changed much at all. One thing that I mentioned a few minutes ago, the notion of student involvement, [was that] certainly the 1960s were heavily student oriented. We had student involvement to a tremendous degree in the early 1970s. Now, that faded with time. Certainly as the decade passed, which I said was the decade of the 1970s, student involvement became less and less to the point where we invite students to participate in

our activities but they no longer had votes, but at one point and time they actually were very much a part of the department and voted. The structure has largely however, except for that element of student participation from a voting perspective, has remained largely the same over thirty years. The power base again remains largely the same, and that's in the department itself rather than with a committee or chair. The faculty itself, of course as you would imagine, over the thirty years has changed dramatically. We have moved largely from a faculty whose first priority is teaching to a faculty whose first priority is now research. We also have far fewer characters. Frankly we had, as I mentioned again a few minutes ago, we had some people who were really pretty amazing. The kind of things that you would do in the late 1960s and early 1970s in terms of parties, activities, the kinds of things you would do with students now versus then let me simply say you wouldn't do them now because you would probably find yourself either fired or in jail. So, those kinds of activities were fairly commonplace in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Again, it was just a different world and a different environment. We had a number of faculty, again, who were very, very much involved with teaching and the students. It was a much tighter environment. A lot of faculty of course had students call them by their first name. There was just, if you will, an intimacy that existed then. Of course it was a much smaller university; I was 15,000 versus pushing 40,000. Our Sarasota campus, Lakeland campus, Ft. Meyers campuses were either nonexistent or very small. St. Pete was frankly very, very small and housed of course in the old naval station over there on the water. So this was a new campus, but even saying that it was a much smaller campus, and so your opportunity to interact with students and relate to them was much different and the culture encouraged that. That was the John Allen presidency, emphasis on

teaching, emphasis on student-faculty involvement.

G: In terms of diversity in those early days were there female professors in the department, were there African-American students and faculty?

B: The department I think has struggled with that over the years. When I first came there was one African-American faculty member and one female. They left soon after I arrived. The university I think, again, has struggled with that whole diversity question and we have too as a department. It's not because history hasn't wasn't African American and/or female faculty, historians just as a rule tend to be more liberal. They tend to be more socially conscious, if you will, about those kinds of issues. We have tried to hire African-American faculty, and periodically we have had African-American faculty in the department, although sadly very few. We have been much more successful I think in terms of women. We have had women faculty members either temporarily or permanently, if you will, on tenure earning lines over the thirty years I've been there, and especially over the last twenty. I mean in the 1980s and 1990s especially, we have hired a number of female faculty members. Sadly for us we've hired very talented people and in fact we've lost them. That's not our fault. We've erred to the side of goodness here, and I think [we] have lost people to some very good schools, to places like Duke and UCLA and Wisconsin and Minnesota. I mean those are fine institutions. I mean you hire good people and hope you can keep them, but if they receive offers from schools of that caliber you're almost to the point where you say congratulations and good luck and let me help you pack and I wish you success in your career. Our most recent hire now in nineteenth century U.S. history, which is my field, is a woman. We welcome her aboard this fall, now in the fall of 2003. Certainly we have several female faculty members of

course who are with us now, but yeah we've struggled with that issue over the years. We have no African-American faculty. We have Latino faculty, we have Latin American faculty, but the gender issue is one that of course has always been front and center with us.

G: You mentioned that in those early days students were part of the hiring process of faculty. Was that something that the history department came up with or the students, and why was it important for students to be a part of that hiring process?

B: The department saw itself at that time as a community. It literally was a history community. Part of that community was staff members; students, graduate and undergraduate by the way; and faculty of course, both adjunct and tenure earning. There was an intimacy if you will, as I mentioned, and camaraderie that existed because everybody was largely committed to the same goal, everybody was committed to teaching. Teaching was your first priority. We had a course called The Idea of History. It was a freshman-based course that everybody had to take and it was team taught in the College of Education. Everybody took a couple of weeks, so it was kind of an introducing of the faculty to the freshman students. This gave them a chance to kind of pick and choose the faculty that appealed to them when they taught during, at that time it was quarter system. It was an eleven-week sequence of courses. It was a lot of fun actually, it was a lot of fun, but the whole notion of community was terribly important. It manifested itself, again, in different ways in terms of team teachings, in terms of students on committees. In fact I might mention for your benefit, Margaret Martinroe, who was in Dean Sullen's office, was one of those. I think she was an undergraduate at that time and was one of those people who served on the history department's hiring committee, and

was part of that representative community. There were three or four students who served in that capacity. Again, the communication and the respect was pretty amazing. Of course I was also twenty-six years old and new students were twenty-one, so again that was very impressive.

G: Being so young and having a Ph.D., was that difficult to teach students that sometimes were not much older than you were when you began your career here at USF?

B: It posed certain problems. It could have been, I think, much more difficult. I'm a coat and tie guy anyway. I come out of a traditional institution, University of Nebraska, that sought in fact professional behavior, professional attire, professional conduct in a certain way, and that was inculcated in you. I remember this graduate student, one of my colleagues showing up without a tie one time to deal with a discussion session and sent home by the instructor to get a tie; if he was going to be a professional he needed to dress like one. Again, those were different times. You're kind of balancing off, if you will, the 1960s and what were the 1960s in terms of attire, dress, manner with what some faculty members saw as a professionalism that made itself manifest in the way in which you related to students and the way in which you dressed and behaved. So you found that here with our faculty. You really had a mixed bag. You had those faculty who would come in with coats and ties and you had those faculty would come in with shirts and jeans and t-shirts; it was just this incredible mix. I found this at being twenty-six years old I was married, and that was a good thing because then that removed any kind of temptation, well not temptation necessarily but it certainly eliminated the possibility for me of any kind of relationship with students. Frankly in those times of course relationships between students and faculty did occur. So the age difference was certainly

there, but you distance yourself from the students by not allowing them to call you by your first name and by coming across wearing a coat and tie even though there's maybe a five-year age difference. Of course we also had older students too at that time, so there were students obviously my age or older for that matter. You create those, if you will, I don't like to call them barriers but they are distinctions between you and the students that makes it important for you to evaluate them professionally, to teach them, and to make the kind of judgments that are necessary without compromising yourself in terms of relationships or anything else. Where there issues early on? Sure, but by the same token the age issue was important because it enabled you to communicate with them. You understood their music, you were close enough [so that] you were watching the same movies, listening to the same radio stations, you were in the middle of the Vietnam War, and so all those things [connected you to the students]. Of course I had color on my mustache at that point; my hair was quite long, down to my collar; and you did relate to the students in a different way. So there were positives and negatives about the age issue.

G: Let's talk a little bit about those characters that you first met when you came here, who were some of them, their names, what they studied, what was their focus in history?

B: I don't think you've got enough time. Let me mention just a few of them, just a couple. [One person is] the man who hired me, Bob Burke. Robert Burke was an amazing guy who was chair of the department at that time. Bob hired a number of people in 1969-1970 including Louis Perez. Lou Perez and I were in the same class. We came to USF at the same time, August of 1970. [We] were both young Ph.D.s, Lou out of New Mexico and myself out of Nebraska. There were several other faculty that came in the class of

1970 if you will. Bob, we like to say, chose wisely in terms of the kind of folks that he singled out and embarrassed and pushed basically for hiring at South Florida. Bob was a young guy at that time, taught Medieval Renaissance history, and was an amazing man in that he was incredibly articulate, colorful, a hard-charging Catholic who had a personal relationship with the Pope. He would fly to the Vatican periodically and advise the Pope on matters of faith and morals and traveled with the Pope to China and all this kind of stuff. Bob was in Tampa for a number of years and then transferred to the St. Petersburg campus where he basically led the history department over there for several years. I followed him in fact to St. Petersburg for a year. What of course is wonderful about Bob, who taught kind of Medieval Renaissance Reformation theory of history, was he was a fraud. Bob did not have a Ph.D., he had not traveled to China with the Pope, he did not advise the Pope. I say Bob was a fraud as an academic, [but] I have a real affection for the guy, I truly do. I tried to maintain contact with him after he left the university. As far as I know he could be a submarine captain somewhere in the Pacific or a brain surgeon in Minneapolis. I have no idea what he's doing now, but you get the idea. I think he had a master's degree, but [he] managed to convince people, and at a time in which the university's checking into degrees was much different than it is now, it was quite loose. So here's a man who became chair of the history department and had convinced everybody, I wasn't the only one by the way who was naive enough to think he was advising the Pope and doing all these other kinds of things, that he was something quite more than he turned out to be. Joe Delegrady, affectionately known as Erotic Joe to those of us who knew and loved him, Joe was one of our true characters. Joe's the kind of guy who would remove all the furniture from his office and put in pillows. He would take the

lighting and put crepe paper, like red crepe paper, in the ceilings so the entire room was bathed in kind of a pinkish-orangish-reddish glow. I think you get the picture. Joe was a character. He was into massage and also would turn off the lights in his class and had everybody lay on the floor and imagine that they were in the middle of the plague in the fourteenth century and there were rats lying all over them. Again, you get the idea. Joe not only was probably the department's leading ladies man, which again would simply be unheard of today; I mean [he was] a fine teacher by the way, a really fine teacher; but certainly a bona fide character and somebody from another point in time. You simply would not have somebody like Joe on your faculty doing what Joe did in the early 1970s. You can imagine, here I was out of Nebraska in my coat and tie and totally taken back by some of the behaviors that you would see. Byron Christian Philippos Ungodus, our resident Greek, [was an] absolutely amazing guy who was from Michigan studying the walls of the Byzantium. [He was an] incredible teacher. I had never seen anybody teach like Byron. He knew I mean everything I think there was know about Greek and Byzantine history. Byzantine History would have forty people in the class. He drove an Alpha Romeo that never started. We'd all go out to the parking lot and push his Alpha to get it started, but he'd keep buying Alphas because he loved the sound of the engine. Again, [he was] very professional, one of the coat-and-tie guys in contrast to say Joe. He was a very professional, coat-and-tie guy who the students absolutely loved, and nobody could tell a story like Byron. You had these bona-fide characters, people who would sing opera in the offices, people who would come in and yell for political causes, the kind of, if you will, behaviors that reflected their ideological viewpoint, their concerns that you just don't find today. People are much more inwardly directed, they're much more self-

focused. They tend not to be as argumentative, not to be as open if you will. They tend to be more focused on their research. They're not as colorful shall we say in terms of their public persona as you had been. Again, part of it was simply the culture and the way in which we related to staff and students and each other. Everybody knew where everybody else stood politically on this and that, so everyday that you came into the office was an adventure. People wanted to come into the office and did. There were a number of others, but suffice it to say that gives you a sense of the kind of people I'm talking about.

G: Let's talk a little bit about the students. Why did the University of South Florida students take history? Why were they interested in taking courses in history? Were there required courses? Being the late 1960s [and] early 1970s and all the things that were going on throughout the world, did that push them more into taking classes about history?

B: Well, history was not a requirement. History was an option that you could take to meet a social studies requirement, but it wasn't a requirement. We've added a history requirement to our liberal arts curriculum relatively recently. So no, back in the early days they could take history as an elective because they had to take a social studies elective and history was one of the choices. At the time they could take ancient, medieval, European, and U.S. as their options. Because our faculty was so strong in all those areas, enrollment was not an issue to the department. We had incredibly high powered, hard-charging, colorful faculty members. If you were a student at South Florida you could find something for everyone, I mean whatever your interests were. Again, we had some bizarre faculty with bizarre behavior. There's one story that I won't go into an great detail, but suffice it to say that a faculty member ending up

positioning himself in a prone position in front of the door and the students walked over him. I think this was some suggestion of equality or whatever. Issues of language and politics, I mean you just didn't know what you were going to get when you walked into a history department classroom. There were people standing on chairs and tables, I mean people dressing in costume, I mean it was just amazing. The students themselves, I think, were there because they wanted to be there. They didn't have to be there, there were other electives they could have taken. We were on a quarter system and so you were teaching three courses a quarter, so we were on a three-three-three load, which was quite heavy frankly. So, you had a lot of students and not much time for research, but that was okay because the only people who were really, really engaged in research were two young faculty members, Lou Perez and myself. Everybody else, generally, was focused on their teaching. So it was okay, and we gave the students a lot. The students were quite good by the way, the students were good. They cared, of course part of it probably had to do with the fact that, as I said, the Vietnam War was still going on in the early 1970s. The students were interested, attendance was rarely an issue, and they came to class. Again, they weren't particularly sophisticated in the sense that did they know a lot of history, no; but did they want to learn it, oh absolutely; and they were a lot of fun to teach. In fact a number of them are around now in a variety of capacities, it's also fun. They're in the Hillsborough County Public School System, they're lawyers in town, they're judges in town, they own businesses. One of the nice things about being at South Florida is that because so many of our students come from the Tampa Bay area you encounter your students, and you kind of mark the passage of time by looking at them, their families, their success. That's very nice to see.

G: In those early days were the classes predominately for undergraduates or did the history department have a master's degree and Ph.D.? When did that come into fruition if it wasn't available then?

B: We've always largely been a service department and certainly we had a bachelor's degree really through the 1960s, and then we introduced the master's degree in the late 1960s. The program has almost consistently been successful. There have been little bits in the screen and small downturns, but basically we have had sixty or seventy people in our master's program. It's been strong. We've had some very good students come through at the graduate level and go on in fact to degrees at places like Stanford and Duke and Southwestern, so we're quite proud of our graduate students. Our graduate program serves several purposes: One is to provide people with a background obviously to go on for a Ph.D. Second is to train teachers in the area and reinforce their learning and help them toward a master's degree, and thirdly is to provide a degree for those people who are simply interested in history and want to know more about history and are doing it for themselves, it's a self-directed self-improved kind of thing. We've never had a Ph.D. program, which I think is a subject of some sadness for many of us in the faculty who had hoped over the years that we would get one. Certainly until recently, with a faculty in the low twenties and with solid foundation in U.S., European, and Latin American history I think we felt we deserved one, if not in every field, at least in selected fields. [We felt] that we could handle one and do it well. Certainly there are a number of institutions in the country that have Ph.D. programs with smaller faculty. At the same time, we recognize the politics of all of this and we recognize that there are other institutions in the state; FSU, UF, now FIU, that have Ph.D. programs. The

question is do we need another Ph.D. program. Our feeling has always been yes we do, and it's basically because the Tampa Bay area is well over two million people and we're servicing those people in our area and there's enough interest in having a program.

Unfortunately again, I think the politics of it have determined that at least in the near future we will not. I think that's unfortunate, I truly do. As far as our undergraduate program goes we have 350 majors. We have consistently had a large number of history majors throughout the time I've been at South Florida. It's been a very popular major. Again, it's a mixed bag. Some of our students are very good. Some of our students come to the major late; some of them make the decision early; some make the decision, unfortunately I think, on the rebound in some cases because they have not done terribly well or they rejected other majors and history seems like something that they can do and seem to be interested in. I think in any given class that you have, upper-level or seminar, the majors in your class will be a mixed bag. Certainly I've been very pleased over the years with my students, I really have. I talk to people from around the country. I talked to a colleague that teaches in California, in fact just this past week, he's approaching retirement and he's lamenting the quality of his students. I can't say that. I don't lament the quality of our students. I think they're quite good frankly. It's been fun to teach at South Florida, which is why I have no plans to retire any time soon. I love teaching and I love the students. If they weren't fun to teach, if they weren't bright, and if they weren't interested in learning I think I'd probably retire.

G: Are there differences between students at the University of South Florida and other major institutions of our size and of our caliber? Is there a difference in the student that comes to the University of South Florida as opposed to other universities?

B: Well, I think there is and we have to be realistic about that. The average SAT, let's say an institution like Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas or Stanford, both private institutions, both small and one large; I mean I think the overall entering population of those schools those people, if we're to place an credibility in the test scores suggests, they have brighter entering classes. Now, that doesn't mean that we don't have bright students based, again, on the test scores. We do, we've got a lot of bright students coming into our program. I think the difference is simply the overall numbers. If you're looking at a school like Stanford, literally every student who comes in to a place like Stanford or Harvard or Trinity is going to be a very naturally bright and talented student and certainly in position to learn. At South Florida, while you have a number of bright students you also have some who are going to get by as much on hard work and commitment and energy as, if you will to use the term, native intelligence, again, based on the test scores. You know what, for me that's okay. I would much rather have frankly somebody who has less native intelligence but cares deeply about what they're learning, puts forth the energy, I mean truly loves the discipline, loves what they're studying, makes a commitment, and works hard and makes a B rather than somebody who's doing a drive by, takes your class, get a C+ and is happy with that and walks away and who may in fact be brighter. So, it's a trade off in some ways in terms of the students at South Florida. That's why over the years I've generally been satisfied with them, because many of the students who, again, are probably not going to be Rhodes Fellows are good students and go on to very successful careers. I applaud certainly the notion that South Florida is attempting to get more students who reflect higher GPAs and higher SAT scores, again, as majors of ability. But overall I think our students have

been quite solid I think. You know, again, do we find as many of the really bright students in the liberal arts as I would like? No, of course not. Am I sorry to lose these people to medicine, to the sciences, to engineering? Yeah, sure, and certainly you see that occurring in the 1990s and after the millennium. We had more students probably committed to liberal arts in the 1970s. I mean I understand that. That's a matter of economics, it's a matter of job opportunity and where we're going with careers and vocations in a new century, but the students have been good.

G: Over the years how have the course offerings in the department of history changed, or have they stayed the same throughout the years?

B: Well, what we've done is we have I think been very flexible in the department in terms of modifying our curriculum. We are not staid, we are not running in place, and not only have we changed I think to meet the changing nature of American society and American culture, which is to say that we've added courses for example on American women. Now, that course wouldn't have existed in 1970, but it exists now and has existed for some time. We teach far more courses that are, if you will to use the mantra, RCG (Race Class and Gender). In the liberal arts of course that's important for us to deal with those kinds of diversity-based issues. We offer far more course now, either catalogue courses or special topics courses that deal with issues of race, class, and gender than we did twenty-five or thirty years ago. Our catalogue was fairly traditional. Again, it doesn't mean that we didn't incorporate those elements in our courses, but now again if you look at the amazing diversity of the USF population, which is to say the significant number of Asian students that we have, the significant number of Hispanic students that we have, Middle-Eastern students, African-American students,

it's like the rainbow coalition. If you look out over a survey of 150 or 200 freshman the diversity is incredible, and I think [it's] wonderful and very positive for the institution. So, what we've tried to do as a history department is to understand that there's an interest on the part of those students, probably in who they are and they're background, they're roots, where they came from, their contributions to American society. So, you include elements of their history in your courses or you certainly structure courses perhaps specifically aimed towards them. Now again you have to have faculty who match up with those interests. You can't artificially create those kinds of things, but I think we genuinely try to be responsive in terms of our changing student population.

G: Let's talk a little bit about Vietnam. Were there student demonstrations on campus and can you talk a little bit about that and the history department?

B: There were demonstrations on campus prior to my arrival. Of course the issues in and around Cambodia, the incursion in Cambodia, Kent State, those kinds of things sparked a reaction here on campus. The faculty in the history department, with few exceptions, was not surprisingly opposed to the war particularly by 1970. The department wore its politics on its sleeve. The administration at the time was certainly more conservative than the history faculty. We did not lose faculty, which is to say we didn't have people fired over the issue. Were there differences of opinion? Oh, absolutely. Did the war manifest itself in different ways in terms of the way in which different courses were taught, outpourings of sentiment, certainly attitudes towards speakers on campus or whatever? Oh yeah, most certainly. You know the department has always had, if you will, a liberal point of view. It doesn't mean we don't have and haven't had conservatives in our faculty, we have, but the department overall is manifest of a liberal

viewpoint. This means that it has been liberal in its domestic view toward government and civil liberties to the rights, and it has been likewise liberal in its foreign policy views in terms of Vietnam especially.

G: Were there any other political situations occurring in the world that really affected the history department or the history department view or their outspoken view in addition to Vietnam?

B: Vietnam was the watershed. Basically, I think [there are] ripples from that over the years. For example, if you try to bring somebody like Henry Kissinger on campus that sparked a reaction among a number of history faculty who were a part of, if you will, a protest or boycott of Kissinger coming to campus and folks like him who were immediately linked with the Nixon and Ford administrations. You also of course have Cuba as a flash point too. Over the years, while certainly the faculty are not pro-Castro, they certainly are sympathetic with improved links with Cuba. When we have attempted to bring people from Cuba to campus the history department has generally been in the vanguard of promoting those kinds of ties, supporting people from Cuba to come to campus, and of course that has prompted in some cases reactions from the community; less so from on-campus groups than from the community. So I would say those are probably the two issues that have been the ongoing causes of history department faculty involvement if you will in broader campus affairs, Vietnam and its residuals and the ongoing issue of Cuba and how we should relate to Cuba.

G: Were faculty members who spoke out against the war or any other political issues, were they ever chastised by the university?

B: Yes, if you were on the left it was a problem, particularly if you were on the far left and

outspoken, [but] not in our department necessarily, although there were issues clearly before I came. Again, others might be better suited to talk to those issues. I don't want to create urban legend, but it's my understanding in fact that was the case with the department. Some people left. Either they were encouraged to leave or they were forced out. I do know that in other departments where you had people supportive of the international stuff, revolution in Nicaragua, or particularly were left wing when it came to Latin America, again those people felt pressures to leave the university or encouraged to leave. I think the reputation of several departments, not just ours, but several other departments I think in arts and sciences of being, if you will, not anti-American but certainly supportive of particular causes that were not necessarily popular with the administration. Again, remember this is a university that had been censured in the 1960s by the Johns Committee and had this shadow hanging over it, which we're again talking about. Now we're revisiting the subjects of some forty years ago, but that censure represented a broader attitude held in Tallahassee by certain politicians and held locally. It placed faculty on this campus in an environment in which their views clearly were not mainstream. When they spoke out against the war they spoke out for what were considered to be left-wing causes. They were taking unpopular positions and put themselves then at some risk.

G: In those early days, you talked about faculty interaction. Was there a greater amount of faculty interaction between different departments than there is today?

B: [Yes] without question.

G: Why do you think that's the case?

B: I think one has to do with size. Again, if you had less the size that you are now, there

simply was smaller faculty. You had fewer buildings and so the faculty were housed in tight quarters in the same buildings, so you had more departments. In a building like social sciences you probably had maybe eight or ten departments and maybe more. That could kind of be interesting, but you had a number of faculty all in one building. Now there are probably half that number of departments in that building. So invariably you would simply run into people. It became just a question of socializing. There was a snack bar on the fourth floor and so faculty would just go to the snack bar and you would run into people from all kinds of departments just getting a cup of coffee in the building. It was simply a matter of size, intimacy within the building, having a social place where faculty would gather and talk, plus because the accent was on teaching. People would talk about what they were doing in the classroom. Now again that doesn't mean that there isn't cross-pollination in terms of disciplines now, there is, but we're not encouraged, there's not incentive to teach a cross-discipline at this point. People basically carve out their own little niches. They teach what they want to teach and what they feel expertise in, a particular area. I think that intimacy has been lost quite frankly. It doesn't mean it doesn't occur, it just means that it's much easier. For example, if someone is hired in sociology they may in fact be doing work in an area that I'm interested in; but how will I know who what person is, they're officed in Cooper Hall, I don't know who's being hired in sociology, [but] at one time sociology was officed in with us and you met the person who was being hired in sociology because they were officed ten feet away from you. Now, of course like I said, the geography has changed dramatically. We have moved away, I think, from that for a variety of reasons.

G: With the recent focus towards research rather than teaching how has that affected your

work and the work of the history department? How has that changed? Has it changed the history department?

B: I think it has. The research is a markedly different area I think. The emphasis changed in the 1970s. I think Cecil Mackey in the 1970s is the one who changed that. When Cecil came in, a very bright fellow and an economist, he recognized that if South Florida was going to be competitive at the national level, or for that matter even the state level it probably had to ratchet up the research component of what the faculty were doing. So, the notion of having South Florida as an institution that de-emphasized Greek life, that de-emphasized athletics, that de-emphasized research, that placed it as almost exclusively a teaching institution was in fact in many ways a noble idea but to what extent was it practical in a broader context of competitive universities. Mackey believed that we should change the mission to a more traditional one. He's really the one I think who started us down this path, for better or for worse, of being a traditional institution where we have Greek houses on campus, where we have a division one football team, where we have all the things that are part and parcel of a traditional institution. Research, because research was not terribly important in the early 1970s, became increasingly so as the decade moved along. There has been conversely, unlike teaching I think, there has been greater opportunity now to cross-pollinate in terms of research so that you find people, for example, in your discipline of anthropology. You find historians who can communicate and do communicate about local projects with sociologists [and] with political scientists. While the area of teaching has probably suffered over the past three decades there is a lot of discussion, particularly in liberal arts areas I think, among scholars as to what he or she may be doing in terms of research.

Again, I think that's a very healthy thing. Could it be greater? I'm sure it could. Again, it's limited by geology and where we are on campus and by our physical contacts and social intimacy, but I think many of those folks do seek each other out, find each other, and that there is communication.

G: I have two more quick questions. Where do you see the history department in the next decade, twenty, or thirty years; where do you see it going?

B: I think any time you come to an institution you want to leave that institution and that department better than when you came. Now, as I mentioned to you, I have no immediate plans to retire. I still love what I do, and I think when I begin to hear the sound of a voice in a classroom and it's really boring and I realize it's mine then it's time to step down. Thankfully, I'm not at that point yet, but when I leave I want the institution and the department to be better places. Will the institution be a better place? Yes, I think it will be. I think we're a much stronger university for all the things that have happened, all the changes that have happened over the last thirty years. I think our strength in medicine, our strength in public health, our strength in engineering and the sciences is wonderful. I think the name the University of South Florida is going to have real cache and deservedly so in a lot of different areas. Beyond that too, we talked about the appearance of the campus is much stronger and coming from a traditional institution I like the addition of the kind of things we're doing. I like the addition of Greek life in a different form. I like the addition of major athletics. Again, if it's all kept in perspective and under control than I think it's a very positive force. So, I welcome those kinds of things and I think USF is a better place in so many ways than it was thirty years ago.

Having said that, I wish I could be sanguine about the history department and frankly

I'm not. Not only do I see it's not moving toward a Ph.D., which is dreadful for a Research I institution; in fact I'm hard pressed to think of another Research I institution that doesn't have a Ph.D. in history, it's almost unheard of. As recently as just three years ago we had twenty-two full-time faculty and a number of adjuncts, now we're almost half that number. Through retirements and people leaving, the separation of the St. Pete campus from the Tampa campus, and the number of people we will be able to replace I think is debatable given budget issues and our adjunct budget has been cut dramatically. Now, will those things be restored? Will we have the kind of support that we need? Is this a blip in the screen? I don't know. I wish I could be more optimistic about the future of the department; frankly at this point I'm not. I don't think we've been singled out, by the way. I think it's hitting all the liberal arts. I think the limited resources of the university are being put where those people who make the decisions feel the limited resources need to be placed, and unfortunately that's not in the liberal arts, and particularly not in the non-science areas. I think my colleagues in probably sociology, religious studies, government, and a number of other non-Ph.D. departments are feeling the same kinds of things. So, in that regard I came into our department thirty years ago that had more than twenty faculty members. We retained on and off that number, going up and down over the past thirty years, now we're down. Will we be back up by the time that I should retire? I wish I could say in confidence that we could be. Certainly student demand, as we increase the numbers, dictates that we should be. We should have a Ph.D. program. We should have more faculty, not less. Here we are and frankly I'm concerned.

G: If you could leave a final thought about your history here at USF what would you want

to say to future students, future faculty, or past faculty and past students about your experience here at the University of South Florida?

B: My first thirty years have been a great ride. I can't think of anything else I would have rather done as I reflect back. [I've had] wonderful students, some with whom I still retain contact with. [I've had] great colleagues, some are friends and some are colleagues, not both necessarily, but I've been able to work with everybody over the years in terms of faculty and administration. I think for those people who were here over those thirty years, I'd like to think that their experience in South Florida but particularly with the history department has been a positive one and they've encountered good people who have cared about them. I'm hoping that we're hiring good people who care about them. I'm hoping we haven't lost that, that wonderful thing, that sense of community that we had in the early 1970s, something very magical and very special. I don't think we're there anymore, but I would like to think that students who come into our programs, both undergraduate and graduate, are able to find faculty who care not just about their research but about the students and are willing to spend time with them, work with them, heighten their awareness about the past, heighten their intellectual sensitivity and creativeness. [I hope] that people are able to leave the university saying you know what, I was glad I was a history major or I was glad I took history courses because I feel that, as part of my journey through South Florida, I'm a better person for it. I would hope that people would be there.

G: Thank you Dr. Belohlavek.

B: Thank you very much.

End of Interview