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Max Dertke oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, August 6, 2003

Max C. Dertke (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Year of arrival

Dr. Dertke came to USF in 1967 as an assistant professor of psychology.

Circumstances that brought Dr. Dertke to USF

USF recruited him from the University of Miami, where he had just finished his doctoral work in psychology. At the time, he had a friend who worked in USF's psychology department. He asked Dr. Dertke if he was interested in a job as an assistant professor. Dr. Dertke was one of five assistant professors hired by the psychology department. The department had just received word that they were starting a Ph.D. program. His training was in experimental psychology. He was fortunate enough to fill a niche that the department wanted filled in something he was interested in at the time. He was interested in teaching and being part of a doctoral program in psychology.

What did Dr. Dertke hear about USF while he was at UM?

He knew a little bit more about USF than others because his friend worked at the University. He had not been to USF or Tampa. Dr. Dertke says USF had a reputation of quality teaching because President Allen wanted an institution that would be famous for its teaching quality. USF was small and not as prominent as UF. The University, other than being known for its emphasis on teaching liberal arts and quality teaching, was pretty much unknown.

What did the campus look like in 1967?

The first time he saw the campus was on a recruiting visit. There was a lot more sand and fewer trees. The administration and library buildings existed. There were almost no dorms. The medical complex was sparsely populated.

Surrounding area in 1967

Fowler Avenue was two lanes. One could rent horses near 56th Street to ride through the area. Fletcher was also a two-lane highway. "If you wanted a relatively decent lunch, you had to drive for miles because there was just one restaurant, the University Restaurant. It was not primitive, but it was a lot different." UCH existed, but it was much smaller.

The early psychology department

The psychology department was housed in the physics building. Dr. Dertke says there was a push for the psychology department to become more prominent. There were few resources in those days. “It was a department which was on the make.” Dr. Dertke says the department’s environment was very collegial and friendly. The faculty was small enough so that everyone knew each other.

“Eat President Allen protest”

Dr. Dertke had a student who was an activist against the Vietnam War. He was a member of a group that decided to shake up the administration. The students thought Tampa needed some involvement with what was going on in the world. They made banners and marched on the administration building carrying spoons and forks. They were going to eat Dr. Allen—that was what they wrote on the banners. Dr. Dertke says President Allen did not see the humor in the incident. He had minimal contact with Dr. Allen.

Expense of starting a Ph.D. program in psychology

Dr. Dertke says it was expensive to start a Ph.D. program in psychology, especially because of the psychology laboratories. When they moved into the social and behavioral sciences building, the entire bottom floor of the building consisted of psychology labs for physiological psychology and surgeries. The bottom floor had animal care facilities, which housed Rhesus monkeys, rats, pigeons, etc. Dr. Dertke says it was all quite an investment.

Why did USF want a Ph.D. program in psychology?

He thinks USF wanted a Ph.D. program in psychology because the University was catching up with the idea that it was going to be more than a teaching liberal arts university. Dr. Dertke says when this happens Ph.D. programs begin and the institution becomes more involved with health sciences.

What kinds of courses did Dr. Dertke teach in the early days?

He taught introductory psychology and introductory statistics. Since his research was in an area called operant behavior, he taught courses in operant behavior, which is one type of the psychology of learning.

His classes in the early days

The classes were smaller. However, the classes quickly expanded because psychology is a popular undergraduate major. It is an entrance point for a lot of professions.

His students in the early days

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, USF students were “certainly not the radical stereotype of Berkeley students.” Dr. Dertke remembers a fellow colleague saying he thought USF should import some SDS members so USF could be contemporary with what was going on in the world. He says USF students were a little bit more conservative and laid back. “It was not a hectic time, at least in my experience.”

Dr. Dertke as a draft counselor

He was a draft counselor. He was in the army and had been stationed at a main recruiting station where physicals and mental tests were given. He knew all of the things kids could do to get themselves into trouble by trying to avoid the draft. He counseled students.

Student demonstrations

He says a demonstration contingent did exist on campus. There was an SDS chapter on campus. There were active people. There were things occurring on campus, but not as much as elsewhere. He remembers two demonstrations. The sheriff at the time, Malcolm Beard, was one of the most powerful politicians in the area and the state. He came out to USF to meet with people because President Allen was concerned about demonstrations on campus, although none were violent. He remembers one evening when Arlo Guthrie was featured at a student-sponsored rally on campus. USF approved the event, but the administration told the students that they had to end the program at midnight. Dr. Dertke received a call sometime after 11 p.m. from a friend saying, "Hey, you'd better come over to the rally, there's going to be trouble. We hear that the students aren't going to end at midnight, and they're going to march on the administration building." Dr. Dertke headed to the campus. Arlo got word of the same thing, and told the crowd that they do not want to cause trouble. Arlo tried not to excite the students. A small contingent of students said they were not going to turn off the amplifiers. Then over the crest of the hill came Malcolm Beard's deputies dressed in fatigues. They were carrying shotguns. Students threw rocks at the deputies. This incident occurred shortly after Kent State. Dr. Dertke says this event on the USF campus was the most noteworthy incident. "Relatively speaking, it was a relatively quiet campus."

How did the administration handle professors who demonstrated?

He says the administration handled professors who spoke out fairly well. The administration's response was intelligent, but at times a little too restrictive. He says the response never became extreme. He does not remember any incident where the administration said "you can't say that in class, etc." He says the administration never hampered what they were doing.

Cecil Mackey's vision

USF started to grow rapidly. Cecil Mackey followed John Allen as president. He brought a new crew of administrators with him from FSU. "Cecil made no bones [about it]. This place was going to grow, become prominent, and challenge UF and FSU. He grasped being in a metropolitan area in a rapidly growing area, [and] being where there were already hospitals, etc. He knew that [USF] could take advantage of that." Dr. Dertke says when Cecil Mackey became president, it was also a time when higher education was better funded. President Mackey wanted growth, Ph.D. programs, and research dollars. He was a runner. People would see him on campus. "President Allen had the image of being a little more aloof. Cecil was involved."

Faculty interaction in the early days

“There was more faculty interaction in the very early days because we were smaller, there weren’t that many Ph.D. programs, and [there were] not that many distinguished research professors with national or international repute ... But, I think that changed. There was a clear division between the soft sciences and the hard sciences.”

In 1972 Dr. Dertke becomes an associate director for the division of university studies

With his new position, Dr. Dertke still maintained his faculty position. During most of Dr. Dertke’s professional life, colleagues told him that he had some administrative competence. Taking the associate director position was an opportunity for him.

Division of University Studies

The division was an early creation. It contained a recruiting office as USF began to place more of an emphasis on student recruiting. The division contained academic advising for new students. The division’s motto was outreach in general to the public.

Dr. Dertke begins teaching in the criminal justice department

Dr. Dertke left the psychology department when the department of criminal justice was created. He had an interest in criminal justice because of his interest in social psychology. He started teaching for the criminal justice department while he was in the division of university studies.

Dr. Dertke becomes director of the division of university studies

The director of university studies left the position. Dr. Dertke was given the opportunity to become director after a year.

New components added to the division of university studies

The division added the admissions office. Dr. Dertke was chair of the undergraduate admissions committee. The division included the counseling center. As the director, Dr. Dertke says it was quite a lot of responsibility. He made the transition from full-time teaching faculty to almost full-time administrator.

Why did USF want to begin recruiting more students?

“The road to prominence as a university lies with the quality of your students and the quality of your graduate research programs. Mackey realized that, so he put money into it.”

What kinds of students did USF want?

USF wanted national merit scholars and bright students. USF wanted the types of students that went to UF. “It was a significant investment and still is. I think it worked. The complexion of the student body has changed. The impetus of the start of that change can be dated back to that time.”

How did USF recruit students?

USF recruited students in a variety of ways. For example, USF had a program that allowed bright high school students to take university classes for credit, which they could bank. If the students came to USF, or anywhere in the Florida system, they could use those credits. USF worked out those relationships with the nearby high schools. This is one example of putting more resources into scholarships for national merit scholars and bright students. USF hired someone who realized that they should recruit older students. USF went after populations that it had not served well before by recruiting, creating programs for them, and providing them with resources.

Counseling Center

The counseling center at USF is there to meet students' psychological and social needs. If students were in trouble, they could go to the center without cost. The center offers group therapy, individual therapy, and counseling. At the time, the counseling center was not housed with career services. The counseling center grew rapidly. Dr. Dertke says it was quite a good facility, equal to what other institutions were offering, certainly institutions in Florida.

Early criminal justice department

The criminal justice department began as a research-funded program. USF recognized the need to make the program its own department. There had always been criminology programs offered through the sociology department. USF wanted to start a criminal justice department to serve the needs of the community and those in law enforcement. Criminal justice is a popular undergraduate major, and USF realized the need to have it. Dr. Dertke and others created a course called Man, Crime, and Society—the American Criminal Justice System. Dr. Dertke says criminal justice was a moneymaker. The program began to evolve more and more into a criminology department, with less emphasis on training law enforcement people or giving them master's credentials.

USF starts a Ph.D. program in criminology

A few years ago, USF started a Ph.D. program in criminology, which is very successful.

Dr. Dertke takes a sabbatical and studies criminology at FSU

As the University reorganized and the Division of University Studies changed, Dr. Dertke had the opportunity to have a sabbatical. He went to FSU for a year. He took courses in the criminology and psychology departments. He had a particular interest in capital punishment.

Dr. Dertke returns to USF

When Dr. Dertke returned to USF after his sabbatical, he taught a seminar on capital punishment.

Dr. Dertke is asked to be the acting deputy director of the Florida Mental Health Institute
Carl Riggs, then the academic affairs vice president, told the director of the FMHI at the time that Dr. Dertke had administrative competence. At the time, FMHI was loosely

affiliated with USF, but was going to become a part of the University. The director needed someone who was more familiar with faculty matters and what was occurring on campus. He asked Dr. Dertke if he had summer employment. Dr. Dertke could have taught a course, but he was not committed to anything. The director asked him to come over and see what it was like. At the time, FMHI had three residential units for severely emotionally disturbed individuals, including units for adults and children. FMHI was a therapeutic facility where people were treated. A certain amount of training occurred at FMHI. The institute trained workers for health and rehabilitative services for the state. The state built FMHI on the university campus. The state's idea was that the institute could draw upon the University and get the University's competence in mental health. FMHI was an isolated part of the campus, with its own buildings, swimming pool, gym, and physical plant. FMHI had several hundred employees and several million dollars in state funding. The state thought it should let USF run FMHI.

The first director of FMHI

Jack Zusman was the first director of FMHI.

Dr. Dertke becomes acting deputy director of programs for FMHI and then permanent deputy director

In the summer of 1984, Dr. Dertke decided to take the position of acting deputy director of programs for FMHI. Dr. Dertke says working at FMHI was very fascinating. Dr. Dertke says he must have been doing a good job at FMHI because he was asked if he wanted to apply for the position of permanent deputy director. The institute conducted a national search. He was offered the position in 1985. Dr. Dertke says he was fortunate enough to become the second-in-command of the FMHI.

Why was FMHI not affiliated with USF at first?

Dr. Dertke says nothing in FMHI's funding or mission mandated that FMHI work with the University. "Universities are sometimes tough entities to work with." Dr. Dertke says FMHI was not affiliated with USF at first because they were two different entities in the state, both funded separately.

What were Dr. Dertke's responsibilities as acting and permanent deputy director?

He was responsible for being the executive vice president. He was the administrator in charge of whatever faculty was employed at FMHI. When the University decided to absorb FMHI, USF discussed bringing the faculty of FMHI into the University. Working with the psychology and sociology departments on campus was a big part of Dr. Dertke's early responsibilities as deputy director. He also worked with other departments on campus where employees at FMHI could become university faculty members in the appropriate departments their respective jobs would place them in. Dr. Dertke says to ally FMHI employees more closely with what was occurring on campus, the employees could either be absorbed part-time into existing departments, or through their own departmental structures. USF wanted to ally FMHI employees more closely with what was occurring on campus through teaching opportunities, but primarily through research.

In 1988, Dr. Dertke became director of FMHI when the first director, Dr. Zusman, stepped down.

In 1990, Dr. Dertke's title changed from director to dean and director.

Why FMHI no longer has adult residences and the decision to integrate FMHI with USF
FMHI no longer has adult residences. Dr. Dertke says to run a three-bed residential unit for adults, one or two psychiatrists are needed. FMHI had two. Nurses are also needed. Employees are needed that can work long shifts, including nights. FMHI had a clinical facility, a cafeteria with twenty-two permanent employees, and facilities for recreation. "Someone had to ask 'are we providing good treatment for these individuals?' Yes we were, probably the highest quality treatment for emotionally disturbed individuals in the Tampa Bay area. What would justify it? Were we spawning new knowledge that could be communicated not only through the state, but also through the nation? I'd have to say no. Then when the bad budget years come, what do you do? It was not a happy time to cut back because there were some very talented people committed to the treatment of the individuals. But, they weren't doing research and the training they were doing, although a benefit to the state, could have been done in different ways. How do you transition something, a several million-dollar entity, where you can't demonstrate teaching consequences? We had some students coming for internships, but not many. My faculty wasn't teaching that much in psychology, sociology, social work, etc., on the main campus." Dr. Dertke says they decided to can use some of the resources that were going into the very expensive treatment at FMHI to make the training more valuable not only to the state, but to the nation, to create research opportunities, and to get faculty from FMHI and the main campus involved in joint activities. What once was an isolated, independent part of the campus, even providing its own heat, light and air, became integrated with the main campus. Faculty received appointments. FMHI had talented individuals, but they were not integrated with the University.

FMHI's talented staff

Bob Freedman is now chair of the Department of Child and Family Studies, which is internationally renown. Bob is among the top ten people at USF who bring in federal and state research monies.

Funding and support for FMHI (both the legislature's support and USF presidents' support)

It was not the job of the University to fund treatment at FMHI. The Institute went after third party payment because almost all of the residents could not pay. Dr. Dertke says during bad budget years, and in times of cutting back, the legislature looked at FMHI and saw that the institute received about seven or eight million dollars in funding. The legislature wondered what FMHI did, and if it was really that important. Dr. Dertke says he asked himself, "Can I justify [FMHI] before Tallahassee in terms of how the [USF] students are benefiting? Not really." FMHI did conduct a lot of training and internships of students. Dr. Dertke thinks some USF presidents lacked the commitment to FMHI. He believes the administration of President Borkowski and a few interim presidents' administrations did not realize the potential that FMHI had. The chief administrator of

the state at the time, Charlie Reed, suggested to President Borkowski that he should eliminate FMHI in order to take care of USF's budget deficit. Dr. Dertke remembers being in a small plane with President Borkowski and Louis de la Parte, who had been speaker of the house and was a very powerful ex-politician. The men were on their way to argue with some senate and house committees, which were seeking to cut FMHI's budget. Dr. Dertke says there were several commissions, which came to the Institute seeking knowledge about whether or not to eliminate it. Louis de la Parte was in charge of one of the commissions. His commission studied FMHI and then reported the results to the BOR and the state. Dr. Dertke believes it was during the airplane trip with him and President Borkowski that de la Parte began to realize the true value of FMHI.

How much money does FMHI receive?

FMHI brings in over twenty million dollars, most of which is federal and state money.

President Castor and FMHI

"Betty Castor realized the potential and did more than any other president to maintain the institute. She realized what it could be, and realized how the state could benefit from a training and research institute that was producing knowledge about mental health."

Concept that FMHI is working on

A few years ago FMHI created a concept called 'drug courts.' The idea is to take people who have drug offenses, divert them early on, and get them treatment in order to prevent the clogging of jails and prisons. Dr. Dertke says an individual had the idea that mental health courts could work. The Institute is heavily involved in research efforts that are perfecting the idea. "In terms of mental health research dollars, this is an avenue through which the federal government and the state can funnel [money]."

USF and FMHI working together

There is far more collaboration going on between FMHI and departments on campus. His successor, David Sharon, has mandated that FMHI faculty will teach. "I know people that are carrying teaching loads along with their administrative and training loads at FMHI that equals a full-time faculty member on campus."

Dr. Dertke retired in 1996.

In Dr. Dertke's thirty plus years at USF, what is he most proud of?

Before Dr. Dertke left the criminology department, students nominated him for the annual teaching award. "I came in second, but I'm probably most proud of almost getting that [award]."

Where does Dr. Dertke see USF in ten years?

"I think if the State wakes up to its responsibilities, by that I mean the legislature, given where we are and what's happening with health sciences, mental health, etc., I see it outstripping UF, not necessarily in terms of student numbers, but in terms of the prominence of its programs."

Where does Dr. Dertke see FMHI in ten years?

“I think it is now what it should be, or what it should have been. It will become more and more integrated with the University. It will probably have a degree program. It will probably spawn some programs and have departmental status within the Institute. I think it will be one of the jewels in the crown.”

Last words of Dr. Dertke about USF

“I would say that it [USF] is a great place where you can do good. I don't know of a better place.”

End of Interview