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Linda Erickson oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, March 5, 2003

Linda Erickson (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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

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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Ms. Erickson arrived at USF on July 1, 1964.

First contact with USF

Two years prior to coming to USF, Ms. Erickson had worked at the graduate program and student personnel administration in Syracuse, New York. During the fall of her second year at Syracuse, students were notified that Mr. Raymond King of USF would be visiting the campus to interview students for positions in the residence halls in Tampa. Upon hearing of King's visit, Ms. Erickson was not interested as she was planning to seek employment after graduation somewhere in the northwest. Despite her plans, one of Linda's friends suggested that she interview anyway for the resident instructor position as she had never before interviewed for this kind of job before. Ms. Erickson was the last to sign up for an interview, which took place in the late afternoon on a Friday in February. Throughout the interview, Ms. Erickson was shown many brochures with pictures of what the USF campus looked like as well as educated about the history of the University. Six weeks after the interview, Ms. Erickson finally received a call from Dr. King asking her to come to USF for another interview. Appreciative of the offer, Ms. Erickson told Dr. King that she had no intention of working in the south or the east and that she was planning to move to the northwest. Not taking Linda's refusal to heart, Dr. King pleaded with Ms. Erickson that before she completely decided not to come to Tampa, that she talk to Betty Cosby who was the director of student personnel at Syracuse; she later became the Dean of Women at UF. Having snowed in Syracuse for months, Betty told Ms. Erickson that it would be nice to get out of the cold weather and to just take Dr. King's offer of a free trip to Florida to see the USF campus.

Ms. Erickson reluctantly visits USF

"When we drove into the campus I had this strange feeling that I was going to accept the position here and in fact, was totally ready to make a commitment after I had been here [USF] a day-in-a-half. Everything about [the University] was just really exciting to me." Once making the decision to take the resident instructor position at USF, Linda's family was not overly happy, however Ms. Erickson reassured them that she would only be in

Florida for about two years. At her retirement party thirty-two years later after coming to Tampa, Ms. Erickson told this story to all of her friends and colleagues.

Physical appearance of USF campus and surrounding areas in 1964

In 1964, Ms. Erickson does not recall a Fletcher Avenue. “Fowler was a narrow two-lane black top road, which virtually nothing on it.” The University Restaurant and the Campus View Motel were virtually the only stores and buildings on Fowler Avenue. At the time, there was no interstate that intersected either end of Fletcher, “It simply looked kind of like a wasteland.” When Ms. Erickson saw the campus for the first time, she noticed that because so much of the land was part of the campus and was undeveloped, “it looked like miles of undeveloped land.” Having grown up in the Northwest and living in Upstate New York, Ms. Erickson immediately noticed how the landscape of Florida was so flat, “I could not even imagine that the world could be this flat.” The weather was so hot and the “campus looked like a few small buildings in this great expanse of land.” When Ms. Erickson first visited the campus, she came through the main entrance on Fowler and thought it was extremely impressive. From the entrance, one could see a long road (referred to as All University Drive) that ended at the Administration building; flags would fly on the building as well. “It was really all impressive to me, I thought, how neat to have a brand new university.”

Feeling of excitement about USF during interview

Citing the new environment and interesting people as two factors that encouraged Ms. Erickson to come to USF, she immediately abandoned her previous thoughts and could not wait to be part of the “excitement” of the University.

Resident Instructors taught courses

In the mid-1960s, resident instructors taught courses; Ms. Erickson taught two sections of Behavioral Sciences and met early on with Dean Edward Martin who was the Dean of College of Basic Studies, and Les Malvis Coordinator for Behavior Studies, “Everybody was excited about what they were doing, it was sort of a new concept the idea of living and learning in a community. An interdisciplinary approach to learning, instead of choosing one of ten social science courses to meet a liberal arts requirement, students took a behavioral science course, which was already an integrated course.” Not only running a resident hall, she was excited about being allowed to teach at a collegiate level.

Spirit of New, Excitement and Community

“Everything was new and that everybody here was excited about doing it about what they were doing and the sense of community that I felt.” Ms. Erickson first felt this wave of excitement during her interview in 1964, when she met with several different groups including students at the University. “Each group or each individual [that Ms. Erickson met with] added to the sense that I had, that this [USF] is a really good place and I would really like to be apart of it.”

USF dormitories-- 1964

Ms. Erickson accepted the position of Resident Instructor of Gamma Hall in 1964. Alpha, Beta and Gamma were the three original dorms on the Argos side. On the Andros

side, the residence halls had just opened, and included Delta, Ata, Zeta and Epsilon. Ms. Erickson is not sure if all of the dormitories on the Andros side had been built yet, because at the time, the Argos side of the residence halls had more dormitories.

Overflow of students who wanted to live on campus

Interestingly enough, there were more students who wanted to live on campus than dorm space available. In fact, if a student from out-of-state was enrolling at USF, they were required to live in the dormitories. Because there was not enough dorm space available for students, Gamma Hall was tripled and all of the overflow students were sent to live in the hall. In a regular semester, Gamma Hall could accommodate between 400-475 students, in 1964, the Hall was holding between 550-600 students. When Ms. Erickson became a resident instructor in Gamma Hall, she was “only twenty-three years old and wet behind the ears.” Needless to say, helping to run an overcrowded dorm and teaching two college courses was certainly an overwhelming experience for Ms. Erickson particularly since many of the students who she was responsible for, were older.

Responsibilities of a resident instructor

In the mid-1960s, resident instructors duties included coordination of hall activities, hall government, assisting RAs (Resident Advisors), providing academic support programs and general administration support for the operation for the hall.

Women dormitory rules

In 1964, students living in dorms had many rules to follow such as being in the residence by 11 PM. Students also had to sign in and out so that resident instructors and advisors could track their comings and goings. Signing in and out of dormitories was a major issue of debate in those years. Although overnights were strongly discouraged, if a student wanted to spend the night somewhere, they had to have written permission from their parents; these rules only applied to Women’s Halls at USF. “There were a lot of responsibilities that focused on those requirements [hour requirements]”. Male visitors to female dormitories were only permitted in the lobby; women would then be called to meet their visitor in the lobby. Under no circumstances were males allowed in women’s dorm rooms. “There were no men, no alcohol—things were pretty clean.”

The Standards Board for dormitories

If a student was late and arrived to the dorms after 11 PM, they would have to take up the violation with the Standards Board, which was a student run judiciary group that would hear infractions and then set appropriate punishments. Furthermore, if a woman was out of a residence hall for an entire evening without permission, this was considered a “serious infraction,” and would be immediately reported to the Dean of Women. In several cases, women were dismissed from residence halls because of their overnight absences and lack of permission.

Fire drills/trash shoot fires

One way in which resident instructors would know if one of their residents were missing occurred often during mandatory fire drills. In those days, residents were permitted to smoke in their dormitory rooms. As a consequence of smoking in the dormitories, Ms.

Erickson recalls that Gamma hall would have recurrent trash shoot fires. There was a protocol for fire drills, which included students lining up by particular living units in order that roll could be taken. Invariably, Ms. Erickson notes that there would always be several students missing from the dormitories and once they were identified, resident instructors would have to contact hospitals, state patrols and even jails to make sure that the students were not hurt or arrested. Sometimes, roommates could provide knowledge of the whereabouts of their fellow suitemates. If a student could not be located, then the resident instructor would have to call their parents, "Many a night you were up well after midnight going through this process because of a fire, or a fire drill or following up. Or sometimes a roommate would come and say my roommate did not come in 'I don't know where she is.'" The requirement of residents signing in and out benefited some students who had either been in accidents or were in jail and had no opportunities to make a phone call. "Those were days that I could hardly even imagine existed in the 20th century in retrospect it seems so antiquated now."

Bailing residents out of jail

On many occasions, Ms. Erickson would have to go to the local jail and bail one of her residents out. Usually her students were arrested because they were underage and drinking alcohol. Times were certainly different in those days, and very often, police would release Linda's students to her custody if she promised that they would show up for their court appearance; Ms. Erickson would also attend court with her residents. Unlike today, in the 1960s, student affair officers acted in *loco parentis*, whereby they assumed the role of a parent. "It was pretty different than dorm life is today."

Resident Instructor of Gamma

Ms. Erickson was resident instructor of Gamma Hall from 1964 to 1965.

Appointed Assistant Dean of Women/Major responsibilities

In 1965, Ms. Erickson was appointed Assistant Dean of Women. At that time the student affairs structure consisted of Dean of Students, Dean of Men and Dean of Women; the structure was gender specific. There was no Dean of Men in 1965 and in essence, Ms. Erickson functioned as both Dean of Men and Women simultaneously. As Dean of Women her major responsibilities included, participating in discipline hearings (mostly related to resident hall infractions of drinking and lateness) and acting as an advisor to students with disabilities.

Handicapped students at USF

Handicapped students were defined at USF in the mid-1960s and early 1970s as either having some physical disability that caused a person to be confined to a wheelchair, or possessing a severe visual problem. Interestingly enough, USF had more enrolled handicapped students than any college or university in the country because of the flat terrain, which made it easier for students in wheelchairs to move around. Also, in light of the University being so new, it was built with elevators and ramps to accommodate deliveries and ultimately became a by-product that benefited students in wheelchairs. Finally, the lack of snow and ice in Florida helped to bring students with disabilities to the USF campus, "Students from all over the country were referred to USF for admission

and actually everyone of those students [handicapped] had to be interviewed personally by me. One of the things that I had to determine was that they would be self-sufficient with the support services that were available, that they would not require an attendant, that they would be able to somehow get class notes if they used a tape recorder, that they would be able to function independently in a university community.” Students with disabilities were permitted to only enter certain majors, for example, students who were confined to a wheelchair or blind, were not admissible to the College of Education because they were not eligible for teacher certification in the State of Florida. As an advisor to students with disabilities, Ms. Erickson recalls being told by the dean that there was no point of putting handicapped students through an education program, because they would not be able to get a job in the field. This certainly is different today, “It is kind of fascinating to look back at a time when we were exclusive in terms of persons who had any kind of disability.”

Learning disabilities not recognized

In terms of learning disabilities, they were not even recognized in the mid-1960s and early 1970s. In fact, Ms. Erickson had never heard of students with potential learning disabilities until much later in her career.

Policy of College of Education toward students with disabilities

The policy of not allowing students with disabilities into the College of Education was not state mandated, but rather decided by the dean who thought the policy was in the best interest of the student because if they could not be certified to teach and get a job, it did not seem right to accept them into the program.

Other kinds of support services to disabled students

In addition to the flat terrain and elevators, USF did not offer disabled students many other kinds of special services. However, Ms. Erickson provided readers to blind students in order that class material could be read. While USF’s landscape and facilities were more amenable than other universities, some buildings were more difficult to access by a wheelchair. Therefore, Ms. Erickson often helped disabled students with their schedules because many times elevators only operated by keys. “I helped them [disabled students] build class schedules that would allow them access to where their classes were and to provide enough time for them to get from class to class because sometimes they could not take classes consecutively from one hour to the next.”

Disabled students living in USF dormitories

Yes, as long as disabled students were self-sufficient they could live in the dormitories.

Involvement with Mortar Board

Prior to Ms. Erickson’s arrival at USF, the University established a local women’s honorary group called Athenaeum, which became a prototype for an organization called the Mortar Board. The Mortar Board is an academic and service organization, similar in structure to a sorority. Rather than just being an honorary group, The Mortar Board held regularly scheduled meeting and was involved in university service projects. One of Ms. Erickson’s responsibilities was to be an advisor to Athenaeum. After the University had

been in existence for five years, the institution was eligible to apply for accreditation. Along with this, interest developed for Athenaeum to file for affiliation and become an official Mortar Board chapter. Ms. Erickson assisted with the groups' petition including filling out paperwork, which listed statistics about the university. Representatives also visited USF to see the chapter, and a year later after meeting the requirements of the Board an official chapter was designated at USF. Athenaeum became the Athenaeum Chapter of Mortar Board in 1972. At the time, this group was gender specific and was made-up of only women; today it includes men.

History of Fraternities and Sororities at USF/Formal Accreditation of USF

While Ms. Erickson was not directly involved in the establishment of fraternities and sororities at USF, she does offer many insights into the history of the institutions. In order for fraternities and sororities to be permitted at universities in Florida, the institution had to be accredited by its regional accrediting association. Prior to USF receiving accreditation, local fraternities and sororities organized as prototypes of chapters. Once USF hit the five-year mark, the prototype chapters looked at national fraternities and sororities with the hope of affiliating with them. In 1966/67, many of the prototype groups were installed as chapters of national fraternities and sororities at USF.

Ms. Erickson recalls one particular Saturday night in 1966/67 where there were so many installation ceremonies of fraternities and sororities, the staff of the Office of Student Affairs had to divide themselves and attend the functions separately in order to provide coverage; Ms. Erickson attended the installation of the Tri-Delta sorority. "It was a very exciting time, but it was just happening so quickly.

Formal Accreditation of USF, additional information

The formal accreditation was one of those milestones that triggered more opportunities." The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools was the formal institution charged with accrediting universities in the State of Florida. During the first five years of operation as a university, USF was not accredited formally but was in a unique category however, meeting all of the criteria necessary (for accreditation) except for age. Despite accreditation, USF students who graduated prior to the formal decree were accepted into other schools and graduate programs. "There did not seem to be certainly in that day and age, any significant disadvantage to it. Things were less...I do not want to say formal, but there was a little more latitude than there is today. If an institution is not regionally accredited today, it is a major disadvantage and the students degrees do not meet the requirements really for admission to graduate schools."

Natural disasters at USF—Tornado of 1966

One year before the tornado of 1966 struck Tampa and the University, USF was going through a period of construction, "That was a fact of life at USF, more buildings would open every fall than you could almost visit." In 1965, construction workers had inadvertently cut a main cable to the campus and every time it rained or there was bad weather, the University would have a power outage. At the time no buildings were constructed with windows and, therefore, when the power went out classes had to be cancelled; Classes could only be cancelled by the President of the University. In the

years following USF's establishment, the authority of canceling classes was later transferred to the Office of the Chancellor and the Board of Regents (neither is local), however in 1965/1966, the President of the University had sole authority. The tornado occurred in the spring of 1966. Coincidentally, the Dean of Women and the Dean of Students were both attending a professional conference in D.C. and the Board of Regents were arriving in the Tampa airport and being met by President Allen. Charles Wildy, then Dean of Men, was also on route to the airport to greet the Regents members. As Ms. Erickson was getting ready to go on campus, she noticed it was raining and blowing so hard that the wind blew her against one of her apartment walls causing her to be drenched with water. Realizing that she could not go to campus all wet, Ms. Erickson went back into her apartment to change her clothes, "The pebbles were flying off the roof, lights that were on poles near driveways had been torn loose and were flying around...garbage cans, lawn chairs, I saw a door fly overhead totally intact but just flying overhead. Having come from the state of Washington, I had no idea what was happening, absolutely none." While in her apartment getting dressed, Ms. Erickson received a "frantic call" from the university operator telling her that the power was out on campus and everyone is calling and asking if the administration should cancel classes. Not having the authority to make the decision, Ms. Erickson told the university operator that only the president of the university (John Allen) could make the call. Relating to Ms. Erickson that the president was not on campus, Ms. Erickson told the operator to contact the next person according to the chain of protocol in order to make the decision to cancel classes. Having already tried to reach other university officials, the operator explained to Ms. Erickson that she was the first person with any authority that she had been able to reach. Realizing that a decision had to be made, Ms. Erickson immediately asked the operator if the president always cancels class when the power goes out. Responding equivocally, Ms. Erickson told the operator to "Cancel classes but do not ever tell anybody that I told you to do it."

Ms. Erickson makes her way to campus during the tornado

Eventually, Ms. Erickson was able to make her way to campus and saw fire trucks and police cars coming from Fowler Avenue into the University. "There were cars upside down and in ditches and I thought if these people could not see, I wonder why they did not pull off the road—I had no idea this was a tornado." As Ms. Erickson drove on to campus and made her way into the office, the staff "breathed a sigh of relief" as she was one of the only staff people in the administration building. The majority of the staff was caught en route or at home.

Tornado damage to USF

In terms of the damage caused by the tornado, one of the women's residences had the roof blown off by the wind; students living in this particular residence had to be relocated immediately to other dormitories. All of the phones on campus where multiple lines came in were dependent on electricity to ring. Therefore when the power went out, the phone did not ring and the only way an operator could tell if there was a phone call was to pick up the receiver and see if anyone answered on the other end of the line. "We knew we would have a lot of parents calling and wondering if their sons or daughters were ok." Once Ms. Erickson relocated displaced students, one of the first tasks she began was to set up phone stations where each student would have an opportunity to call

their families; relocated students were given priority and then other students living in the dormitories could call home as well. “It was just unbelievable, in the parking lots trees had come down cars had been blown...I called it [the sight] a tree sandwich there would be a car with a tree in the middle and another car had been blown on the top of that. So it was car-tree-and car but not major damage to other buildings.” Aside from some minor flooding caused by the rain, the only major damage was to the one women’s residence.

Damage to faculty homes in Carrollwood and surrounding areas

Some of the faculty who lived in Carrollwood suffered tremendous damage, with their homes “being destroyed to the ground.” The Ward Duplex’s on 50th street suffered severe damage and looked as if no one had ever lived there before, “there were just piles of kindling wood with little things that were totally untouched. There was a piece of wall board that had a roll of paper towel holder fastened to it with the paper towel roll still sitting there in the middle of rubble that was totally unidentifiable as a place to live. It was really unbelievable.”

Clean up and recovery on campus

Despite the damage to other parts of Tampa, it did not take the University that long to recover and clean up from the tornado. The roof of the women’s residence was immediately patched up so that students could move back to their rooms quickly. While the disruption of activity only lasted a few days, people all over campus talked about the tornado for a long time. Ms. Erickson believes that because the buildings on campus were fairly new and strong that they might have held against the wind better than if they had been older structures. Overall the University did not suffer as severe damage as Carrollwood for example.

President Allen

“John Allen was a man with a vision.” When Ms. Erickson arrived to USF in 1964, she noticed that Dr. Allen knew every staff member and most students by name. Not even being at the University for two weeks, Ms. Erickson recalls passing Dr. Allen on campus and him already knowing her name. “It was his vision that built the University on an interdisciplinary study idea, the community idea.” In those days, there was no faculty senate, student government or A& P council; faculty, staff and students were organized into one body. Dr. Allen felt did not “benefit educationally from spectator sports, but rather benefited from sports in which they participated.” Furthermore he stated, “We will not spend our precious dollars on intercollegiate athletics as they are known on most campuses, and instead we will emphasize intramural activities and facilities for student participation.” Lighted tennis courts, Olympic-size swimming pools, and a golf course were some of the intramural structures that were constructed, which were all in-line with Allen’s philosophy. In terms of physical appearance, Dr. Allen was “tall, soft-spoken thoughtful and was a wonderful person, I feel privileged to have been here [at USF] when he was President.” Except for USF’s current president Dr. Genshaft, Ms. Erickson has served under every university president.

Opposing opinions to Allen's philosophy of no spectator sports

In the early days, Ms. Erickson feels that few if anyone opposed Dr. Allen's philosophy of having no spectator sports on campus for the majority of the original faculty, staff, and even students supported the president's viewpoint. In its beginning stages, the University was certainly not large enough to support football, as it was known at other universities throughout the state. Periodically, people on campus and throughout the community would bring up the subject of football, as a team was ultimately desired. Toward the end of Dr. Allen's tenure at USF (retired in 1970), the topic of sports would pop up with some frequency.

Support of fine arts rather than sports

Rather than supporting sports programs, Dr. Allen believed in the fine arts programs and felt that, "We should nurture the arts and that this [USF] should be a place that showcased the arts." The Fine Arts building was one of the first original buildings to be built on campus and included a recital hall.

Non-university community feelings toward USF

In the first few years of USF's existence, Ms. Erickson recalls that the institution was not very popular with the community. Prior to her arrival, the John's Committee had just finished their investigation of communists and homosexuals on campus. In addition, the Board of Regents was concerned about Fontana Hall (residence hall of campus), which had just been built.

USF suffered many blows in the early days including one from a Board of Regents member who was also a judge named Kovachevich. During one of the Regents meetings, she let it be known that university dormitories were, "the taxpayers' whore houses. I do not think we were exactly popular in the community in the early days because of those things. In fact, I think we suffered from not having really good community relations until Betty Castor came here." Betty Castor helped to "mend the community fences." Concurrently, Ms. Erickson feels that today the University receives much more community support than it did in the 1960s.

Cecil Mackey

According to Ms. Erickson, Cecil Mackey, who became USF's second president after John Allen, was an extremely intense person full of high energy, "He was always going like a twelve cylinder job, 24-7." His mark on the University included bringing it back to a more traditional style of a university. For example, the College of Basic Studies was dismantled and three new colleges were established including, the College of Arts & Letters, the College of Social & Behavioral Sciences, and the College of Natural Sciences. Basic Studies requirements were also replaced by core requirements. In many ways, Dr. Mackey was "forward thinking and brought many new people in to the university." Joe Howell (became vice president of student affairs and Herb Wunderlich (previously dean of students at USF), were just two examples of Mackey's idea to begin a restructuring of the University. Furthermore, the offices of the dean of men and women were also reorganized into a non-gender specific unit called Student Affairs. "The vision

in that time [Cecil Mackey's presidency] brought a lot of changes." Burt Hartley and Dr. Riggs were both hired under Dr. Mackey's presidency.

Creation of summer orientation program, FOCUS

From Ms. Erickson's perspective, one of the major developments in Mackey's tenure was an idea that Joe Howell had to create a summer orientation program for the University. While today it would seem unimaginable for a university not to have an orientation program for new students, in the early days, orientation was done two days prior to students beginning their classes. Sitting through hours of speeches, students would then see their advisor and register for classes. Joe Howell was eager to establish a program where both students and parents would come to USF in the summer and experience a more intensive orientation program. In addition, Howell wanted to make students more familiar with the campus and coursework so that when they arrived in the fall, they would already feel a sense of comfort. One of the programs initiated prior to the development of FOCUS, took place in the summer of 1971 and consisted of two dinners of parents of freshmen who lived in the Tampa Bay area; both Ms. Erickson and Dr. Howell were involved in the coordination of this event. During each dinner, Dr. Howell gave a speech, which today is often referred to as the "Famous Freshmen Experience Speech," and was so popular it was passed on many years after his retirement becoming a USF tradition.

Ms. Erickson organizes a formal summer orientation program

In the fall of 1971, Ms. Erickson was sent to Stillwater, Oklahoma, to meet with a small group of colleges that had preexisting summer orientation programs. During this period, Ms. Erickson notes that only eight or nine universities in the entire country had established orientation programs. Once Ms. Erickson returned from Stillwater, Dr. Howell asked her to create a proposal for a summer orientation program at USF. Realizing that the program would need support from the administration, Dr. Howell called a meeting and explained that the University was going to try something different and that in order for the program to succeed, it needed encouragement. In the summer of 1972, the first summer orientation took place with both freshman and parents staying in the dormitories for three days and two nights. Transfer students were also given a separate orientation, which also helped to foster community relations. At that time, Tampa had an evening edition of the *Tampa Times* and the night of the opening of the freshman-parent program, the University was given the lead editorial, which was titled, "*Someone is Doing Something Right at USF.*" USF was the first school in Florida to have a summer orientation program and later was invited by the Board of Regents to lead a presentation on the subject. After the presentation, the Board of Regents decreed that all state universities in Florida must develop a similar orientation program. "Since USF was new and kind of the step child, Cinderella of the state university system, that [orientation program] was a major coup for us." Last summer (2002), the orientation program celebrated its 30th anniversary and continues to be a success. While the name of the program has changed from FOCUS to New Student Orientation, the structure has remained virtually intact since 1972. Recognizing the importance of the program, Dr. Howell told Ms. Erickson, "This [FOCUS] may be one of the most significant things you ever do in your career. In retrospect, it was a contribution to the tradition, to the ongoing

fabric of the institution if you would and something I am really proud of today that I did, that I started.”

While trying to put the orientation program together, one night Ms. Erickson was told that there might be a hurricane. Having no copies of her work, Ms. Erickson attempted to stay up and protect her work by putting the papers in four Ziploc plastic bags and placing the bags on her stairwell with rocks over it to serve as some kind of protection. Ms. Erickson created the FOCUS program while she was Assistant to the VP for Student Affairs (1971-1973).

Student recruitment becomes an issue

Once the FOCUS program was up and running successfully, Dr. Howell brought to Linda's attention the idea of student recruitment, which was beginning to be examined by the university administration. “USF had always been in the situation, if we build it, they will come and in fact they did, they poured in here in far greater numbers that had been projected when the institution was originally started. They thought that we would have 10,000 students by 1970, I think we had 10,000 students by 1966.” By the early 1970s, discussions began to take place about serving the needs of more students. At this time, more state universities were being built and USF certainly felt a sense of competition. There was even some discussion of the state beginning to tie funding to enrollment; the idea of equal opportunity was also starting to become an issue. “Recruitment became something that the administrators that were interested and concerned about and USF had never done this.” Sensing this concern, Dr. Howell felt that the University should create a department, which would solely dedicate itself to recruitment and take students from “the point of contact all the way through the new orientation process to where they were USF students.” With Dr. Howell's persistence, the admissions office was moved from academic affairs and reported to student affairs; a new unit called New Student Relations was also created to meet the recruitment and orientation needs of the University and its students. Adult, minority, military veterans, freshman and honor students' needs would also be addressed in the New Student Relations office. The Office of Community College Relations, which was already in existence supervised transfer students. Ms. Erickson took over as director of New Student Relations from 1973-1981 and was able to maintain control over the FOCUS program as well.

Why did USF feel the need to examine issues of recruitment in the 1970s?

The Tampa Times had a scholar program where several outstanding students from each high school were selected for major scholarships. Once selected, these students' pictures were taken and published along with where each of them would be attending college. At the time, USF was not getting many of these high achieving students who were either going to schools out-of-state or to UF or FSU. Dr. Howell wanted USF to “start making some inroads and getting our share of those students.” Instead of making each student adapt to the university, the administration began looking for ways to become a “more user-friendly organization and place.” In particular for adults who had not gone to college or who were returning to university after being away for several years, these students found it difficult to adjust to the university's services, which had been created for freshman or traditional-age transfer students; in other words, their needs were not

being met. Living in an area with a large military base also proved a new problem for the university as many veterans wanted to attend USF using their GIA Bill, “They have different needs and concerns than traditional-age students who simply go from high school to college.” Increasing minority enrollment was also an issue of concern to the university. As soon as Ms. Erickson became director of New Student Relations, she hired a mature student (Lee Leavengood, retiring June 2003), a veteran, a minority student and a freshman recruitment coordinator (Vicki Ahrens). By state law, senior citizen students can now register for classes if space permits, and not have to pay a single dollar of tuition. Spearheaded by Lea Leavengood, the legislation needed for senior citizen tuition deferment, was one of the areas that the New Student Relations office helped to pass.

Ms. Erickson hits a milestone in the State University System

In 1981, Ms. Erickson became the first Director of Admissions in the entire state university system (SUS).

Reorganization and restructuring of Office of Admissions

During the early 1980s, the University went through another period or reorganization. It was difficult to conduct new student orientations and recruitment when the New Student Relations office did not have access to the admissions records and information; this was prior to the days of computers. “We could be more effective if we combined the recruitment, admissions and new student orientation program.” This restructuring was initiated by Dan Walbolt and was supported by the University. In 1981, Ms. Erickson was appointed Director of Admissions and arrived in the office with a brand new computer system, which was the first the University had ever had. “Of course it [computer system] did not work, it admitted people who did not meet the requirements, and it did all kinds of bizarre things.” Not having experience with new computer systems, in those days, people did not know what to do if there were problems with the system. Overall, the University seemed overwhelmed by the system having not made plans to integrate the system with the normal workflow, “Everyone tried to do what they used to do.” Trying to straighten out the new computer system was one of the first major responsibilities that Ms. Erickson took on as Director of Admissions. The other major goal that Ms. Erickson was charged with was to improve student service. In the 1980s, the admissions office had developed a reputation for not being all that friendly to students. As Ms. Erickson examined the structure of admissions, she realized that part of the reason why the office had developed this reputation was that the person behind the information desk as well as the phone operator had additional responsibilities and deadlines. Trying to complete weekly deadlines, the admissions staff was more focused on meeting these deadlines, rather than serving the needs of the students at the information desk or on the phone. In light of this, the office was completely reorganized internally and the computer system was finally fixed. “I sort of thrive on cleaning up a mess and it was a giant mess, but it was a lot of fun to.”

Resistance to computer technology

“There was so much resistance” to using computers as virtually no one had any experience to them. The entire computer system operated on a mainframe, which was so

large, it took up the entire fourth floor of the old library (currently Student Services building).

Ms. Erickson becomes the first women Director of Admissions

In her forty-three years of service to the university, Ms. Erickson never felt any kind of discrimination because she was a woman. “I was the first women Director of Admissions in the state university system (SUS), and when I went to the state meetings, I was the only woman in the room and it was a little intimidating at first.” Having no prior experience in admissions, Ms. Erickson had to work hard to win the respect and support of her staff that knew she did not have any experience with the admissions process. “We had a theme that was called “work smarter not harder,” because the majority of admissions workers felt that they were overworked and underpaid. While it is true that almost everyone feels that they are overworked and underpaid, in the 1980s, many state universities were going through similar financial crunches. Eventually, all of the Office of Admissions managed to settle their computer and financial problems, and became a “superb, student-oriented office.”

Final position at USF: Assistant Vice President and University Registrar, 1986-1996

Once again, Ms. Erickson arrived in this new position with a new computer system as it had now migrated from admissions to student records. Similar to her previous position in admissions, the computer system had several major glitches including not being able to calculate transcripts correctly. In the late 1980s, a strong alliance between the Office of Admissions and Office of the Registrar had developed with many functions overlapping or requiring close cooperation. At the time, the Registrars Office had continued to report to Academic Affairs. While many student functions were completed in conjunction with both offices, in general, Ms. Erickson noticed that the two staffs had little “good will” toward one another. Therefore, a decision was made to have someone coordinate both offices that then would report to the same vice president—Greg O’Brian of academic affairs.

Growth of USF leads to development of telephone registration system

As USF continued to grow rapidly, it retained the same registration system, which registered students in a “distributive processing environment on a machine called an 8100.” Incidentally, the machine was not designed to accommodate 20,000 registrations and a million drop/adds. In terms of registration, the one thing that bothered Ms. Erickson the most, was that the lines seemed to be “over the curvature of the earth...the lines were so long, that you could not see the end.” By not providing better registration services, Ms. Erickson felt that the University was doing a disservice to the students. Similar to the beginnings of the orientation program, Ms. Erickson had learned that several schools were in the process of trying telephone registration. A strong proponent of telephone registration, Ms. Erickson always battled resistance because there was no available funding for this new program. When Ms. Erickson was approached by the administration to consider the registrar position, she told them that she would only accept the position if she would be guaranteed financial support for telephone registration; this was agreed upon. In 1989, USF launched its first telephone registration after much testing both in and off campus. Students of all academic standing were brought on

campus to field test the registration before it was made available to the public. Early evaluation of the system included minor problems such as the system not confirming a student's social security number after being entered. "It [telephone registration] never failed, it never crashed." Even during the late 1980s, Ms. Erickson had visions of taking the registration on-line, however it was too early and most people did not even know about the Internet yet. "Telephone registration is another contribution I think I provided leadership for and that I am proud of."

New facility

Both the Registrar and Office of Admissions moved into a new facility where they shared space and were better able to serve the needs of prospective and enrolled students.

1995-Y2k—Taking USF into the next millennium

With the millennium approaching, it became apparent to Ms. Erickson that once again, the (student record) computer system of the University would have to be updated because the old computer system could not recognize the year 2000. The University agreed and Ms. Erickson remained at USF through the new system changeover called Banner; she assisted with all of the preliminary planning. After being at USF since 1964 and going through several system changeovers, Ms. Erickson decided that she had "paid her dues" and in October of 1996, she retired from the University.

Final thoughts

Ms. Erickson hopes that the University can continue to "reinvent some sense of the community that USF had in its early days where people discussed, but respected different opinions. Where they were willing to help one another, people were friendly." This quality that the University had then "would be worthwhile to carry in to the future." Ms. Erickson feels privileged to be a part of USF's early history, and hopes that she has made "some contribution to its future."

End of Interview