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James Heck oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, August 28, 2003

James Heck (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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

Narrator: Dr. James Heck
Current Position: Executive Director for
WUSF Advancement (Retired June, 2003)
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Reasons for coming to USF

“Cold Weather” (Laughter). Dr. Heck was Dean and Director of Ohio State University’s campus at Mansfield. He left in the winter of 1978. 1977 and 1978 were very cold years and during the second tough winter his wife mentioned that they might want to look into a job down south. He looked in The Chronicle [The Chronicle of Higher Education] and saw a position advertised for USF. Dr. Heck got together his resume and letters of recommendation and sent in an application at the end of February 1978. He did not hear back from the university. Dr. Heck forgot about it for months, but in the second week of May he got a phone call from Bernard Mackey. Mackey was the Assistant to Vice President of Academic Affairs Carl Riggs at the time. The committee wanted Dr. Heck to come down to Tampa and interview in person for the position. He met Carl Riggs and the committee, stayed for about two days and then went home. Once again Dr. Heck didn’t hear anything from the university for a while. About a month later Bernard Mackey called again and asked Dr. Heck and his wife to come visit the campus. He was offered the position and accepted.

Dr. Heck began his new job in early December. “At that time the university had campuses at St. Petersburg, at Sarasota which included New College and the university programs.” There was also program at Ft. Myers and an outreach for continuing education. Dr. Heck was responsible for coordinating the departments on campus and faculty off campus. Very shortly after he started the university opened the first new building at the St. Petersburg campus and started planning the campus in Ft. Myers “entirely parallel and contiguous with the community college.” The community college maintained the facility and provided services while USF provided faculty and academic programs.

They then started discussing plans for a Lakeland campus. There was a senator from Lakeland that wanted a campus there. USF established a campus with the community college there as well.

Sarasota was a more complicated situation. New College had been private from the middle of the 1950s until the early 1970s. They had been having financial problems and asked the state to take over responsibility. The BOR for the private New College would

turn themselves into a foundation that could raise money to make up any shortfalls from state funding. New College was very expensive because of the level of faculty student interaction. The student body was very small, about 450 in the late seventies and only about 650 in the present. About 1982 or 1983 Dr. Heck's new provost decided that campus heads should report directly to the provost rather than a dean (which was Dr. Heck's position). Dr. Heck had been on the president's staff when he arrived and had an interaction with the president's staff; he even sat on the board of Tampa General Hospital for four years representing the president. They rebuilt much of the hospital during that time.

The provost decided to have the campus heads report directly to the provost, the Office of Regional Campus Affairs was eliminated and Dr. Heck became Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs. Dr. Heck had many responsibilities including applications of technology in the instructional environment, supervision of academic computing, and the library and public broadcasting. This meant that the directors of the library, academic computing and public broadcasting reported directly to Dr. Heck.

Around 1986 the Public Broadcasting general manager retired and Dr. Heck took on the general manager's job as an additional duty. They brought public broadcasting into a school of extended studies and learning technologies all for continuing education. For four years he was dean of extended studies and learning technologies.

In 1990, President Frank Borkowski wanted to increase the size of the portfolio for vice-president of public affairs. The operation was somewhat small so he decided to move public broadcasting out of the school and into public affairs. President Borkowski offered Dr. Heck either the option of being dean of the school of extended studies and learning technologies or becoming full time head of public broadcasting. President Borkowski also mentioned that since Dr. Heck seemed to be having such a good time with public broadcasting, he should consider that position very seriously. Dr. Heck agreed and became the head of public broadcasting at USF.

Since Dr. Heck's background was in education the dean at the College of Education gave him an appointment as a professor, even though he never taught there. He appreciated the courtesy of their acknowledging his background and giving him the courtesy title of Professor of Education. He held that title until his retirement in June 2003.

Need for Dean of Regional Campus Affairs in 1978

Although he isn't certain, Dr. Heck believes that since there were three different locations and so many different issues there needed to be a real effort for coordination and people really needed someone they could talk to about important issues. He had a very good background in regional campus management, having been the director of the Ohio State campus at Mansfield for seven years he knew the field well. The administration wanted one office that people with questions could come to and sort out issues. This improved the relationships between faculty outside Tampa and their departments. There was occasional tension between faculty and their departments because faculty at the regional campuses were beholden to their departments in Tampa but sometimes communication

was not very good. As dean, one of Dr. Heck's first tasks was to establish a formal communication system that departments and teachers had to go through. This allowed the faculty to feel more of a connection with their departments and the departments felt better informed.

Other challenges to heading regional campus affairs

“Coordination with the New College foundation, that was a very interesting and challenging experience.” There were problems with the experience because they had been an independent entity and they were not very excited to be directed from the outside. They had become used to directing themselves and it was a difficult transition. The new head of the foundation had a military background; the perception was that he would take orders from the president and no one else. This made relations between the dean of regional campus affairs and the head of the foundation somewhat difficult.

Ft. Meyers campus

The campus has not existed since 1996. It started as a continuing education center in 1972 when they were located in a public school facility. There was a desire to establish a full campus and around 1981 they got funding from the state for a permanent educational facility. The community college was right next to the sixty to eighty acres of land that USF was given. They initially built four buildings but this was part of a longer-term process.

The two colleges had some trouble coordinating what was fair practice between the community college and USF. Most of these problems were budgetary and the relationship between the two campuses was generally good. The USF Ft. Meyers facilities were turned over to the community college in 1996 when Florida Gulf-Coast University was established.

There were no permanent faculty there at the time and the part time faculty had to drive there. The teacher would leave at around ten or eleven in the morning, the drive would take about five hours (I-75 did not exist at the time), the instructor taught a three-hour class and then got a hotel room. After spending the night the professor would leave in the morning to return home. These faculty members were using up about twenty-four hours to teach a three-hour class, plus the expenses of an overnight stay and meals. In order to circumvent this problem they then established “Heck Airlines.” The university leased a nine-passenger plane that flew out of Tampa International every day. Faculty could go there, park their cars, get on the plane at three, and get to Ft. Meyers by 4:00 or 4:15. A van from the Ft. Meyers campus would pick them, they would teach class, eat and fly back to Tampa. The faculty would be home by 11:00 pm. The cost of this endeavor was high, about \$100,000 a year, but when compared to faculty time involved, cost of meals, gas, and hotel it was a great savings for the university. This continued until I-75 opened, then they began to use a mini-bus that left from the USF library. The time was about the same, the instructors left at 3:00 and returned around 11:00 pm.

Where was Dr. Heck's main office?

His office was in the administration building. They moved once inside the building but never out of the building until the regional campus office was closed and he moved to academic affairs. He traveled a lot, at least two or three days a week. Ft. Meyers was a long trip and a long day. But these things needed to be done in order to keep communication up between the campuses.

First impressions of Tampa Campus in 1978

“Nothing like it looks like today, I can tell you that. It wasn't unattractive, but it wasn't really attractive.” The campus was “fairly stark” and the gardens around campus did not exist. There were many trees, but the trees were small and there were fewer buildings. It was in its early stages and over the years the campus has grown into a great academic university.

USF's technological changes

Dr. Heck's office was the first to buy a word processor for his staff. He bought a Wang word processor for his assistant in 1980 and Dr. Heck believes that was the first example of USF word processing in a post-typewriter format. While associate vice-president, Dr. Heck was also a special assistant for technology. He started a grant program (maybe with \$10,000 dollars to spend) to find a few faculty members that were interested in working with computers. The faculty would present proposals of what they wanted to do with a computer, then a decision would be made as to which proposal would work out the best. Those faculty members selected would get a personal computer. Dr. Heck specifically remembers one project in anthropology and one in education that were successful. There were others that weren't as successful, but you need to experiment to see what works.

The central computing operation was separated into academic and administrative halves. The administration side kept records for the university. The academic side still used punch cards when Dr. Heck first came to the university.

Did the University support technological advances on campus?

The university supported technology as much as funds would allow. “The institution has always been badly served from the standpoint of capital to invest in what it does, and it has persevered in spite of that somehow managed to get it done.” There has been more than one incident of people buying their own equipment because the budget would not allow much flexibility. Technological change has “happened in spite of the fact that the state has been substantially behind in even a reasonable level of support.” Money raised by foundations and given through grants and private companies has been a source of progress.

Reflections on Presidents of the USF

Dr. Heck was appointed by President John Lott Brown, making him President Brown's first major appointment after assuming his position. Dr. Heck liked the president a lot, he was “very bright, a fine scholar...he worked well with people.” Dr. Heck worked with President Brown directly for four or five years. When John Lott Brown retired, Frank Borkowski assumed the presidency. Dr. Heck did not have the same level of interaction

with President Borkowski that he had with President Brown but they got along very well and President Borkowski was interested in broadcasting and continuing education. President Borkowski especially enjoyed the Jazz program and would come into the station at night to listen to the taping.

Betty Castor was “wonderful.” Dr. Heck believes that more than anyone else, President Castor understood how important broadcasting programs were to a university. Most people have difficulty getting past the numbers, because there are only a limited number of people at USF. But the USF radio and TV station reach over a million people a week and “that’s an enormous impact.” Dr. Heck remembers a time in the mid 1980’s in which a member of the president’s staff wanted to get rid of the radio and television station because of cost. Luckily this did not happen. By the time President Castor came the importance of the program was clear and there was a real effort to bring faculty and staff into the broadcasting arena just to let them know what is going on.

Broadcasting at USF

The radio station began in 1963 as a ten or one-hundred watt student station. There was one staff member and every other person involved was a student. Through much of the sixties the student’s actions on radio weren’t “consistent with what the university thought was appropriate.” Meanwhile there was an effort to increase the power of the station. By 1972 it had reached 100,000 watts and many people in west and central Florida could listen in. President Mackey decided to make the station professionally operated. The president brought in a general manager and there were problems with the students who had been used to operating the station on their own. Even up through the mid-1990’s there would be the occasional *Oracle* article discussing whether or not WUSF should be student run or not.

As the radio became structured it added a classical program, a jazz program overnight and two “tent-pole” programs: “Morning Edition” and “All Things Considered” on National Public Radio. They began to develop a larger audience, which continues to grow. By the late 1980s and early 1990s the radio station was beginning to have “a substantial impact.”

The television station started in 1967 as a means of televising university courses. In the 1970s and 1980s the program schedule was not very good. In the 1980s the school and the television station worked with a committee of people in Ft. Myers to develop a public station in Ft. Myers. Stations went on the air in the fall of 1983 but the program director was programming two stations, a full PBS station and the station here that was a secondary station. Ft. Meyers did well and they eventually got a separate staff.

The program director retired around this time. Bill Buxton was asked to become program director for the station. He had some interesting ideas and when he took over in 1988 the station was reaching about 280,000 households and by 1995 they were reaching over 500,000 households. He was able to provide a station that the Tampa area was interested in and the station grew. The new university in Ft. Meyers took over the TV station in 1996.

Importance of TV and Radio on campus

Dr. Heck can't really know for sure. The radio station was an interesting thing for students at first. It was a student activity and then federal and state funding allowed the university to invest money in the operation. The television was an extension of a closed circuit television operation. At one time studios were in many buildings and they sent images back and forth, this became obsolete in the early 1980s and was shut down. The broadcast station came from the closed circuit television experience.

Major Challenges to WUSF radio and TV

Facilities when he arrived in 1978 and when he became responsible for the stations in 1986 were housed in a basement in the old library (which is now the SVC building). The end of the basement had been the bookbindery and by the late 1970s bookbinderies were obsolete, books could be bound commercially very inexpensively. They put two television studios, one about 600 square feet and the other about 1200 square feet, (which had a pillar right in the middle of it).

The radio station had three studios, a main studio, a radio reading room and another studio. All of the TV and radio studios were cramped in one small space in the SVC basement. In 1981 or 1982 the university was eligible for state funding for a facility. They proposed a new radio and TV facility. The proposal was unsuccessful because the state had just funded WEDU in downtown Tampa, some legislators could not see the benefit of another public television station. The following year they asked for a radio facility, since the state had not done that they agreed. The university was awarded planning money (Dr. Heck believes that it was in 1983) for the radio station. The construction money came the next year and the equipment money the year after that.

At that time the construction of new buildings went through the state and USF had very little say in the design process. Someone decided that the designer should be a minority architect and they hired an architect with little to no experience designing a broadcast facility. The university received and rejected proposals many times, making many changes. The architect was upset with their changes and assumed that the university's opposition stemmed from his status as a minority architect. This didn't have anything to do with it, he just didn't know what he was doing. The university eventually agreed on a plan for the new station.

The construction of the radio station took longer than they expected and wasn't complete until May 1989. There was still no new TV station. Institutions across the state came together and formed Florida Public Broadcasting Incorporated. They set a priority order to try and get funds for a new facility. USF would come up in the order in 1991 or 1992, but by then the operation in Ft. Myers was relegated to a few small rooms around the campus, they also leased a television station that had been left by a commercial television station when they moved to a new facility. Instead of taking their place in line for WUSF they gave their spot to Ft. Myers and their new television station was finished around 1997. USF was back in the list in 1996, they got the funds for a television wing. After the state mandate to switch to digital Dr. Heck was able to convince the people in charge

of funding in to grant necessary funds for a digital facility rather than an analog facility. This offset the cost of having to switch from analog to digital in a few years. The equipment grant went from 850,000 to 2,500,000 dollars. USF got a state of the art digital facility.

WUSF radio and TV in ten years

That is a difficult question. Dr. Heck wonders about the long-term impact of satellite radio and television. He thinks they will “top out at maybe fifteen, twenty, maybe twenty-five percent penetration because they don’t have some of the flexibilities that some people want and they are also not personalized from the standpoint of community service, and I could be wrong.” Dr. Heck believes that stations are effective in their service to a community.

The radio station has a strong audience and is a great source for news. “To thoughtful people,” it may be a better news agency “than some of the commercial sources.” Digitization is making the television station more flexible and when the digital transmitter goes up they will be able to simultaneously broadcast four channels. Eventually the analog channel will be obsolete and their broadcast will be digital. Congress has asked that they broadcast digitally by 2006, but it won’t happen that soon because many people don’t have the capability to get digital television.

Significant changes at USF

“The impact of the faculty on building strong research programs.” The university’s research portfolio has been growing steadily and significantly. This is happening throughout much of the university, health sciences gets a lot of the money, but grant money continues to grow and spread throughout other disciplines and “that says that we truly are a university to be reckoned with.”

The second impressive thing relates to Betty Castor. She hired a planner to make the school look more like a college campus and she implemented the changes. “This campus is, in relative terms, gorgeous as compared with where it was in 1978.”

What is Dr. Heck most proud of?

“Getting the stations to where they are.”

Final Thoughts on USF

“It’s a place to be proud of.”

End of Interview