

5-5-2004

Glenda Lentz oral history interview by Andrew Huse, May 5, 2004

Glenda Lentz (Interviewee)

Andrew T. Huse (Interviewer)

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Lentz, Glenda (Interviewee) and Huse, Andrew T. (Interviewer), "Glenda Lentz oral history interview by Andrew Huse, May 5, 2004" (2004). *Digital Collection - USF Historical Archives Oral Histories*. Paper 133.
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/usfhistinfo_oh/133

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

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Current Position: Retired
Date of Interview: May 11, 2004
Abstractor: Daniel Bertwell
Editor: Danielle E. Riley
Date of Edit: August 5, 2004

Interviewer: Andrew Huse
Location of Interview: Tampa
Campus Library
Abstract Completed: August 2, 2004
Final Editor: Jared G. Toney

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Arrival at USF

Ms. Lentz came to USF in 1968 as coordinator in the Cooperative Education Program. Ms. Lentz had worked for George Miller, the director of the CEP, who came here from the University of Florida. He was a journalist, and was hired by USF to teach journalism. He was also the advisor to the Oracle.

President John Allen wanted USF to be a large cooperative education school, where students could spend the semester in school and then a semester in the work force. Ms. Lentz also believes that this is the best way to teach students. They would spend a semester at work and a semester at school back and forth until they had completed three semesters of training. Usually after graduation, the company they worked for in the co-op program hired the students.

Ms. Lentz had worked at the Chamber of Commerce for George Miller. She came to USF to complete her undergraduate work and ran into Miller without realizing that he was working here. He offered her a job, but she had come back to school to get an education degree and decided to stick with that. She taught for five years, but was always interested in the job she had been offered. Ms. Lentz thought it would be an interesting job, but there was travel involved and she had three small children at the time. Miller told her that if she ever changed her mind, to get in touch.

In the summer of 1968, she got in touch with Miller and inquired about the job. She finished teaching that school year and started working in the CEP in July 1968. She was a coordinator and her job was to interview students about their career plans and talk to employers. She would convince employers to get involved and then match students with potential employers. They would visit students on the job and interview them when they returned to campus. The Cooperative Education Program merged with the Placement Office (the office where employers came to interview graduating seniors).

They had to work hard to let people know that USF existed because the school was young. They had “strong” engineering, business, and education programs. The school

grew quickly, President John Allen thought that USF would have 10,000 students in ten years, but they ended up having 14,000 in ten years. They had to find jobs for students, and get the word out about the school. Ms. Lentz really got involved in professional organizations to market the school to potential employers.

The USF Cooperative Education Program was the 55th school in the United States with a program. Under the directorship of George Miller, “who had the total support of Dr. John Allen because he so much believed in cooperative education,” the program grew and was very successful. USF became “world renowned” for the program. A lot of schools came to USF to learn to start a co-op program. Eventually, USF got federal funding to start the Southeast Training Center for Cooperative Education. They would train people to start training programs in schools. In 1979, Ms. Lentz was asked to serve in the Office of Education in Washington D.C. to read proposals and approve grants. She worked there for six months. They looked for people with a “real commitment” to taking over the program after the federal funding ran out. USF really “made a name for itself” through the CEP. This helped recruit employers to hire graduating seniors. Dr. John Allen saw that since we were in an urban area, the students would have a lot of employment opportunities nearby. He really wanted the school and the community to get involved with one another and he felt that having students working in the community was a great way to do this.

Which businesses took USF Co-op students?

Tampa Electric always had a lot of USF students. Florida Power and Light hired some. Most of the accounting firms hired students. They had a great program sending students from liberal arts to the office of education in Washington D.C. Ms. Lentz worked with a woman in D.C., who took a lot of students, and she had “probably twenty” at any given time working for her in the Office of Education. This was another benefit of the program.

Because USF is a commuter school, many students still lived at home, when they went to another city to get a job, they needed to get an apartment, they needed to learn to live on their own. They gave an emergency loan to their co-op students, but many students saved up the money during their “work term” to pay for the following term in school. This was during the Vietnam War and a lot of students joined co-op to extend their college career and avoid the draft. They had many people work for Busch Gardens, many worked in NASA, and many worked in OSHA. A lot of federal agencies took students. People could also work for Congressman Sam Gibbons. Sam Gibbons’ son Clifford was a CEP Student. Congressman Gibbons was very supportive and Ms. Lentz’s son went to work in Washington for a few summers as a result of Ms. Lentz’s association with Congressman Gibbons.

Students in the late 1960s

Most of the students weren’t exactly sure about what they want to do. The CEP tries to help them find out what they want to do. They had some difficult issues because they were sending young people out to work. The students had to be reminded that they had to “put their very best foot forward.” The students had long hair and heavy beards. The

Co-op had to clean them up to make them attractive to the work world. Many of them had to shave, cut their hair, and get rid of their earrings. These were part of the rules they had to agree to. The rules dictated the length of sideburns, hair, beards, etc. The feedback was sometimes negative because they were comparing the students with the more “conservative” students from the University of Florida and Florida State. Often, the USF students were “more liberal” and they confirmed to the hiring force that the students at USF had some negatives (Some people thought, of USF, that “They wear flip-flops out there and their sandals to class and shorts”). The business people around Tampa were coming from FSU, UF, or maybe Georgia Tech. They were coming from a more conservative school.

USF may have been more liberal because students didn’t live on campus. The campus was hot, and people had to dress for this. They hired more liberal professors and had a more relaxed environment. Ms. Lentz went to FSU and it was very conservative there. Some of the things that the students and the professors were doing were “shocking” to her. The professors even wore flip-flops and wrinkled clothes and this became the environment on campus. This changed a little bit before she left.

When co-op representatives interviewed students they would ask certain questions. They wanted to know if a student was willing to leave Tampa, because if they weren’t they would limit their options. They wanted to know if they have family, what salaries were expected, their expectations after graduation. This was the initial counseling. The “real” counseling was after they returned from their first co-op. They were given a grade of satisfactory/unsatisfactory by their employers, so the program had to see how they did. Having the kids go out and seeing their growth was the best part of being the coordinator. Sometimes the kids would change their path or stay on the course that they had set out. Sometimes when they decided on something they didn’t want to do, it made counseling a lot easier, because they often saw what they wanted to do. When they had the meetings, she would ask them questions relating to their goals, or what health care/retirement plans may be available.

Very few students dropped out of the program. Once they started they were very comfortable and saw their competence rise. They knew they could do it, and they were excited by everything, and the feedback was “wonderful.” They had to do three training assignments, because if they decided to drop out of the program, it usually happened after the first assignment. A very high percentage of the students were very happy with the program. The president (or possible CEO) of Tampa Electric was a USF Co-op student.

How did the success affect Ms. Lentz

The success of the students was very rewarding. When Ms. Lentz became director of the center, she no longer worked one on one with the students, and this was a negative aspect. As director she got to help young people go from being scared and lacking confidence, to having more faith in themselves. It was great to watch positive changes in these kids. It was easier for them to find a job after school, and some of them had jobs before they started school.

A lot of students didn't join the program because they didn't want to be at school for more than four years, but this provided an opportunity to not have to look for a job for six months after school. Some parents were opposed to the program too, particularly students going as far as Washington D.C. Despite this, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive and professors in Engineering and Business were very happy about the program.

The move from Coordinator to Director

Ms. Lentz was moved from Coordinator to Assistant Director of Cooperative Education pretty quickly. Then placement and cooperative education were merged. She was then promoted to director and served in that capacity for about twenty years.

She has kept in contact with George Miller over the years, and he is still living. When she worked for him at the Chamber of Commerce, she had just dropped out of FSU after two-and-a-half years. George Miller still sends her a card on secretary's day, even today. He was very influential in her career track. He was "ahead of his time in promoting women and blacks, he hired one of the first black faculty members on campus," a co-op coordinator named Andy Minor. The school had told all managers that they would be given a position to hire someone who was African American. George Miller knew Andy Minor and hired him; he had a great personality and did a great job in his position. His presence was very helpful because they were trying to raise the number of black students on campus at the time. They loved having the opportunity to place people who may not have gotten the opportunity in good companies with good jobs. This also helped the cooperative education program learn about other companies because of the student interaction.

Transition to Director

She changed from working with students directly to motivating others to fulfill this role. She learned that management was her strength and she learned that she was good at hiring and motivating good people.

Their initial sign up process was interesting. For instance, Proctor and Gamble would come here to recruit engineers. They came two to three times a year. This was before computers and they didn't get computers until they got extra funding from Student Government. The Co-op program was in the old library (now the student services building). If there were good companies coming, the students would sign up for interviews weeks before the company even came. Students would actually sleep in the outside corridor of the office, to be there when the office opened at 7:00 and make sure they were first on the list for the popular companies. They couldn't convince the school to get the computers, so Ms. Lentz had to go to Student Government to automate the sign up process and the company information. They also ran a resume referral program for students and alumni. If companies were looking for someone, they could refer the resume of an interested alumnus or student. They got the computers around 1985 or 1986. They didn't get too many. A student assistant who was in the Engineering Program was nice enough to help them decide what kinds of computers they needed and help them install the computers.

Motivation of Employees

Ms. Lentz had an “open communication with her staff” and made certain they knew that she was always available if they had problems. She tried to motivate through setting an example, and felt this was the best way to do it. She would arrive early and never leave until her staff was able to leave. She tried to set a certain standards. For instance, if she said that they were to be expected to dress well, she would dress well. She had a dress code in the office because they were trying to help young people in their job interviews. Many of the younger men had never worn a suit before they started the program.

Ms. Lentz believes in “motivation by positive reinforcement” and giving credit to her staff when they deserved it. They also had team building activities. This allowed everyone to become involved and feel as if they had a say in the entire office. She tried to get them together for lunches and they always had a Christmas get-together at Ms. Lentz’s house. She feels that example is the best way to motivate people, but they would have activities to build the team. They would go off-campus two days a year for an all-day team building workshop and this “helped build camaraderie among the staff.”

Changes in the co-op program

Employers were looking more and more for people with computer knowledge. The computer technology program was a very popular program with employers because students who did this got an idea of practical application for computers. This was a big change for the program.

At one time the MBA student was a “hot commodity,” but there was an eventual change in this and people began just looking for the better students in the College of Business. Ms. Lentz believes that MBA’s “sort of priced themselves out of the market.”

They also offered career fairs for people looking for jobs. These fairs are still offered today. Employers were coming to interview and recruit, but career fairs allowed students to talk with companies and get a better idea of what the companies were like and who they were looking for. There was a career fair at the beginning of each semester and they eventually got to use the Sun Dome every semester.

Directors of similar programs throughout all of Florida met frequently to discuss issues and the goals that they all had in common. Ms. Lentz recommended that they have a statewide career fair, where each university is represented. They still have it every year in Orlando. The first two were at USF. Employers thought this was great because they got to see students from all universities all over the state.

Things that never change

Students don’t have to worry about wearing suits any more because the work force is more casual than it had ever been. They spend much less time doing this. Ms. Lentz trains substitute teachers now and she is “amazed” by the dress codes that are in the work force. Ms. Lentz feels that the only thing that might still be the same would be if she went and talked to a freshman student at the co-op program, the student would probably

tell her that he or she did not know what he or she wanted to do. Students still need help in focusing and direction.

Leroy Collins

Leroy Collins Drive is named for the former governor of the state, and he is related to Ms. Lentz, her grandmother was a Collins and Leroy was a cousin of her grandmother.

Ms. Lentz believes that the school “got off to a very very good start” under the presidency of John Allen. She believes that he had great motives and direction for the school.

The growth of USF in the past ten or twelve years has been amazing. Ms. Lentz left in 1992, and the school has grown so much that she could get lost on campus. When she arrived on campus there were only five or six buildings.

Advice for students going into the work force

“Get as many experiences and exposure as you can. Don’t think that just because you come to a university” that you know exactly what you want from your career. It is easy to test your career path and see if it is for you, rather than finding out it isn’t for you after you graduate and start your job. So few people come here knowing what they want to do, so getting as many experiences as possible is the best way to see what you want to do.

Ms. Lentz was at USF for twenty-four years, and is amazed by all the growth that she has seen around the campus. She feels that we should thank people like Leroy Collins and Sam Gibbons who worked so hard for the school.

End of Interview