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## Alice Murray oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, May 27, 2003

Alice M. Murray (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center  
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## TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

### *Arrival to USF*

Dr. Murray arrived on the USF Tampa Campus in 1997 from the University of Florida. As a native of Tampa, Dr. Murray had watched USF grow “literally from the ground up.” From a very early stage, Dr. Murray knew that she wanted to make a contribution particularly in the area of university and community relations. Having worked in the corporate world previously, in 1992, Dr. Murray decided to enter into academia. Opportunity did not present itself in Tampa, but instead, at the University of Florida in Gainesville. In 1997, she joined the Student Affairs Office and the Office of the Vice President in the Tampa campus. This position helped to foster Dr. Murray’s goal of working with students and the community at-large. After completing her doctorate, Dr. Murray decided to begin looking for another position, which would further develop her interests.

### *Regional campus excitement*

Prior to beginning her doctorate work, Dr. Murray had an opportunity to enroll in courses on the Lakeland campus of USF, and was extremely impressed by not only the class offerings, but also the potential of the new campus.

### *Early memories of USF*

As a young child, Dr. Murray remembers her parents taking her to the Tampa campus. In those early years, the majority of the community looked at the university as being located in the “boondocks, it was literally out in the middle of nowhere. You hear stories of sand dunes and they really, really were there.” Growing up first in Ybor City and then later in West Tampa, Dr. Murray recalls attending open houses for the community, as new buildings on campus were constructed. Attending many of these open houses, Dr. Murray was told by her parents that someday she would attend the university. Although only a small child at the time, Dr. Murray knew that USF was in the middle of nowhere and really did not have an interest in going to a school in such an environment. Seeing the sand dunes and a few buildings, Dr. Murray’s first impressions of the university were focused on the dreary and ugly appearance of the early campus. As an adult, Dr. Murray

can now reflect on her early memories with a critical eye, and recognize what a beautiful place the university has become.

#### *Mid-1960s at USF*

In the mid-1960s, Dr. Murray's future husband enrolled at USF as a freshman. She remembers that her Sunday afternoons were spent on campus in the student union studying in the glass partitioned study area, "You could sit in what was like little living rooms, but each one was partitioned off with these glass walls." After studying for several hours, Dr. Murray and her future husband would go downstairs and play pool. "That was our typical Sunday afternoon into Sunday evening date, almost every weekend."

#### *Coming back to USF*

After leaving Tampa for a number of years, Dr. Murray and her family returned and were amazed at the amount of growth of the campus that had occurred. Throughout the next several years, Dr. Murray had several opportunities to return to the campus, as many of her children's sporting activities took place on university property.

#### *Community perceptions of USF*

Prior to working at USF, Dr. Murray recalls that as a member of the community, "It [the community] did not always see the university as a partner." USF was predominately viewed as, "An ivory tower sitting out on the edge of town that had its own agenda." This sentiment always bothered Dr. Murray and was certainly an impetus for her wanting to work at the university and make changes regarding community relations. Dr. Murray worked in the corporate world and wanted to pursue her MBA. Her employers told her that they would prefer if she received her degree from the University of Tampa (UT). "If you insist on going to USF, we will allow you too, but we really have a preference if you go to the University of Tampa." Not caring about the price of tuition at the University of Tampa, Dr. Murray's employers paid for her MBA without even examining USF's business program. One of the reasons why many downtown businesses had a preference for UT was because it was so engaged in the downtown area. USF on the other hand, was not viewed as a member of the community and had not made great attempts to tap into the community at large, particularly in the downtown area. In recent years, the perception of the university has changed dramatically.

#### *Reasons for poor community relations and perceptions of USF*

According to Dr. Murray, until recently, USF did not make many efforts to engage in the community. In fact, over the last several years, the university's strategic plans have finally begun to consider issues of community engagement as a top priority. While USF has always provided an excellent education, it was missing a firm connection with the community. With the building of the medical school, the university was forced to establish ties with local hospitals and physicians. USF initially viewed itself as an ivory tower and did not have a commitment to be an active part of the local community. Instead, other institutions such as the University of Tampa and later Hillsborough Community College were viewed as being the only educational institutions that made efforts to engage the community at-large.

### *Examples of UT community outreach*

One example of community outreach took place when Dr. Murray studied at UT, and included a major emphasis on keeping downtown businesses informed of the university's business programs. For example, UT recruited many CEO's working in the downtown area, to serve as advisors to its diverse business programs. In other words, UT was asking the community what kinds of qualities and skills they would like to see in UT graduates before they would go out into the public and look for jobs. Unfortunately, USF was not engaging in any kinds of outreach like UT, and instead focused on businesses that immediately surrounded the Tampa campus.

### *Changes in USF attitudes toward community relations*

In the six years that Dr. Murray has been involved with USF, she believes that the university has made a commitment to seek additional community engagement. This new commitment has certainly changed the image of the university in terms of the way the community now views USF. The opening of the downtown center of USF is one primary example toward bridging the gap with businesses located in the area. Prior to the Center's opening, UT had a monopoly on relations with most of the downtown business community. Additionally, with the recent designation of USF as a Research I institution, there are more opportunities for community engagement. Interestingly enough, UT does not have a research designation as one of its primary missions. "USF does not necessarily have to be a competitor, but rather a natural partner. The University of Tampa, for example, has its place and the University of South Florida has its place, all of whom work jointly in moving the community forward."

### *Preference to come to USF/Barriers*

Throughout her academic career, Dr. Murray was always seeking ways to attend USF. However, the opportunity did not at first present itself. Instead, she studied at UF and received her doctorate degree from the University of Central Florida. Dr. Murray was aware that as the local community university, USF had a good reputation, yet she had experienced some barriers after attending a few classes on the Tampa Campus. Some of these barriers included the "Ivory Tower mentality" and lack of sensitivity of student needs. As an urban institution, USF did not grasp the idea that many of its students worked full-time and had families. Beyond providing educational opportunities, USF also did not offer its students occasions to socialize outside of the classroom. Moreover, there were no student services available for students who were beyond the traditional age or who were taking evening courses.

### *Returning to USF after ten years/Non-traditional students*

After being away from Tampa for ten years, Alice and her family returned to the area. Wanting to take classes at USF, Dr. Murray found that there was a lack of services available to non-traditional students. For example, she often had to take off work in order to register or seek academic advising. Even then, she felt that the university was not sensitive toward the needs of working students. Wanting to change these attitudes toward non-traditional students, Dr. Murray wanted to become an employee of USF and assist in changing the institutions priorities. Taking a half-day off to register for classes,

Dr. Murray recalls one day coming to campus only to find out that the Office of Registration was already closed despite signs saying that they were open. Frustrated, Dr. Murray asked why the office was closed and found out from a member of the administration that new signs had been posted on campus, which stated the revised hours of the Office of Registration. Not living on campus, Dr. Murray immediately said that the signs were not helpful to people who lived in the community and wanted to conduct university business during non-traditional hours. These are examples of some of the barriers that Dr. Murray encountered upon returning to USF as a non-traditional student.

*Non-traditional students at the University of Tampa and the University of Central Florida*

By comparison, at UT and UCF (where Dr. Murray received her Ph.D.), the majority of tasks could be accomplished by mail. Also, advisors were available when she needed them. “They bent over backwards to work with me. They made every effort to work with me in every way possible to make it as convenient as possible.” Throughout her MA and doctorate work, Dr. Murray kept thinking, “This is what USF is missing. This is what USF needs to be doing more of.” When Dr. Murray eventually became an employee of USF, she promised to inform the administration of its inability to serve non-traditional students and aid in efforts to make positive changes toward development of new programs. With fantastic programs, state-of-the-art equipment, and a world-class education, USF was still not meeting the basic needs of its students and community.

*USF today, meeting the needs of non-traditional students*

Dr. Murray believes that USF is making better efforts to meet the needs of non-traditional students. Incidentally, sixty percent of USF students are transfer students, in fact, many students who come to the university for the first time, are considered non-traditional students. According to Dr. Murray, USF’s average age of students is somewhere in the high twenties. While USF is making more programs available to non-traditional students, a lot more work needs to be done, such as offering more services in the evening. Rather than opening more university offices in the evening, many are now open on Saturday’s. There are also limitations on eating establishments on campus. After working all day and rushing to the university for an evening class, Dr. Murray feels that some of the eating establishments on campus need to be open later in order to accommodate non-traditional students. One of the biggest limitations that Dr. Murray sees for non-traditional students is the lack of opportunities to become involved in extra-curricular activities. On-line registration and distance learning are two major initiatives that the university has been successful with in terms of recruiting non-traditional students. Activities for families of non-traditional students are also examples of the types of programs that the university is looking to provide. By encouraging families to come on campus, the hope is that children of non-traditional students will develop a sense of the importance of education as well as a long-term commitment to USF.

*1997, Executive Assistant to the VP of Student Affairs, Tampa Campus*

In 1997, Dr. Murray became the executive assistant to the vice president of Student Affairs. In terms of responsibilities, this position included: writing speeches for the vice president, analyzing various reports, liaison between the vice president and the twenty

other departments in Student Affairs, assisting with human resources, representing the vice president at public speaking engagements, participating in university and community communities, running the daily operations of the Student Affairs Office, and participation with the negotiations of building new residence halls on campus.

#### *Residence halls at USF*

When the vice president first came to USF, one of the main things that the university needed to work on was the construction of new residence halls. Prior to Dr. Murray being hired at USF Tampa, consultants were hired to complete a study of the residence halls. After examining the study, one of Dr. Murray's responsibilities was to work directly with architects, designers, and brokerage firms in the initial stages of negotiations for new residence halls. Requiring so much effort, the project ultimately became the topic for Dr. Murray's dissertation research.

#### *Reassessment of student housing*

During the late 1990s, most of the housing available on campus dated back to the early days of the university. Up until the mid-1980s, not a lot of attention had been paid to the residence halls. For example, most of the student residences suffered from decay. With very few dollars available in the university budget for housing, most of the student residences had not received any attention or renovation. "They [student residences] had been allowed to deteriorate to a great extent." Moreover, no effort was made on the part of the university to ascertain what the students wanted in terms of housing. More and more, students are not interested in the traditional dormitory life, with the "gang shower" at the end of the hall." Today students are interested in apartment-style living with private bedrooms, access to making their own meals, and having friends over in a common area. Finding traditional dormitories rather limiting, students now want more flexibility and options. In addition, the housing study also found occupancy levels on campus between sixty and eighty percent, which was rather low; in other words, student housing was not financially viable for the university. From this vantage point, the university needed to reassess the problem of student housing, figure out how to make changes that would increase the number of students in campus housing, and understand why so many students were choosing to live off-campus in apartments.

#### *Reasons for moving to Lakeland Campus/Emphasis on regional campuses*

From 1997-2000, Dr. Murray remained on the Tampa Campus and then moved to the Lakeland Campus in 2000. Prior to pursuing her doctorate, Dr. Murray had taken some courses in Lakeland and realized that her background in the corporate world could make a contribution to the academic environment. Working at a main campus like Tampa, Dr. Murray noticed that she was very compartmentalized and therefore only able to impact one area. While at the Tampa campus, Dr. Murray's position in the Office of Student Services enabled her to learn about all of the aspects of services available to students. Once completing her doctorate, Dr. Murray felt that she could offer more to the university, for as a whole, the University of South Florida was getting ready to put more emphasis on regional campuses. "There was a new energy that was occurring and refocusing of directives for the regional campuses and encouraging that their missions be set up the way they were intended to be from the very beginning."

### *Joining the Lakeland Campus*

Based on her work in other regional campuses, Dr. Murray could see that individuals on a regional campus could have a much broader impact on what goes on, than at large universities. In terms of regional campuses, Dr. Murray felt that the Lakeland Campus had so much potential and therefore, it was the place that she could make the most impact. Expressing an interest in working at the Lakeland campus, Dr. Murray had an opportunity to talk with Dr. Preston Mercer, the vice president and chief executive officer of the Lakeland Campus, who at the time had just recently joined USF. Several months after Dr. Mercer had created his vision for the Lakeland Campus, he encouraged Dr. Murray to look on the campus web site and apply for a position. Following his advice, Dr. Murray applied for the director of academic affairs position, and was hired in 2000.

### *Tremendous growth of Lakeland Campus*

In terms of percentages, Lakeland is the fastest growing campus of the University of South Florida. In the past three years, the campus has more than doubled in size in enrollment and has built a campus from, “A little shell to a place that is bursting at the seams.” In response to the recent growth, Lakeland is in the process of building a new joint-use facility with the community college, with whom they currently share building space. Beyond this, the Lakeland campus is looking for new land to develop a larger campus, which would strictly be devoted to USF students.

### *Preston Mercer’s vision of USF Lakeland*

The Lakeland Campus is referred to as the “high-tech campus.” The high-tech corridor runs from I-4 between USF and UCF, and the Lakeland Campus sits directly in the middle. In terms of location, it makes sense for USF Lakeland to focus on technology. Community engagement is extremely important to the mission of USF Lakeland and the two bodies work together in order to meet each other’s needs, “The community members literally see USF Lakeland as a partner and engage us in the operations of the community and the direction of the community.” Preston Mercer recognized that Lakeland was looking to expand its economic development specifically in the area of high technology. For many years, Lakeland has recruited high tech companies to come and build or relocate its facilities to their city. As a high technology campus with an ability to conduct research with new companies, USF Lakeland plans to build a new campus, which will have direct access to a research park. In addition, USF Lakeland is looking to build an infrastructure that will attract businesses to the Lakeland area. “They [potential employers] are going to look for a ready-made work force.” In order to meet these needs, USF Lakeland has a technology program, which none of the other campuses have, and is always seeking ways to bring more businesses into the area. With her previous experience in the corporate world, Dr. Murray knows that potential businesses will look at what kind of educational system USF Lakeland provides, types of medical and allied facilities available, whether the city has a respectable police force, and the level of social services in the area, before making a decision to relocate to Lakeland. As the high-tech campus, Mercer’s primary focus is on high-tech related programs, with three key focus areas of information technology, engineering, and business. Education, psychology, social work, and public health programs are also support programs that Lakeland is

beginning to initiate. Coupled with the campus's relationship with the community, all of these programs were initiated with the support of the local community and the needs of the university. Recently, Polk County hosted a "Polk County Day" in Tallahassee, in which USF Lakeland was asked to attend and display information about their programs of study. According to Dr. Murray, Dr. Mercer's vision of the Lakeland Campus was very clear from the beginning. "We are the high-tech campus. We are here to partner with the community in economic development of this community and we are here to provide the programs that are needed by that community in stepping ahead."

#### *Growth of Lakeland Campus*

When Dr. Murray arrived to the Lakeland Campus in 2000, it had six full-time faculty, a student enrollment of approximately 750, and a staff of ten people. Most of the local community did not even know though that USF had a Lakeland Campus. "Oh you drove over from Tampa?" No, we are from the Lakeland Campus. "USF has a Lakeland Campus? Since when?" The current enrollment for the Lakeland Campus is in excess of 1,600 students, forty faculty and eighty staff members. Four modular units for faculty offices have recently been installed since there was no remaining room on the campus to accommodate them. Until the campus is able to receive additional land and financial support from the Florida Legislature, the administration will have to purchase additional modular units in order to meet the growing needs of the faculty and students, "Those are the good kinds of issues to deal with in terms of growth."

#### *Expansion of the Lakeland Campus*

In terms of expansion, the Lakeland Campus is currently in the process of making plans to acquire additional land to build an entirely new campus. Dr. Murray is chair of the Land Acquisition Committee, which is responsible for finding a site for the new campus. Prior to receiving offers of land, the campus put out an RFP (Request For Proposals) for donation of land in order to build a new campus. She received five proposals. All of the offers, according to Dr. Murray, are viable and range from the north end to the south end of the county and vary from 300-1,000 acres. After completing site visits of each property, the Committee has recently hired a team of consultants who are in the process of examining potential problems of each location, such as environmental constraints, etc. By the end of this summer (2003), the Committee will make its recommendations in terms of deciding on which site should be chosen to build the new Lakeland Campus.

#### *New autonomy of regional campuses*

The intention of all USF regional campuses is not to break away from USF for, "We would not be doing our community a good service by breaking away from USF and obviously our commitment is to our community." Rather than each regional campus working apart from USF, the legislature has mandated autonomy for the regional campuses; in other words, each campus has an opportunity to focus on the needs of its particular community. Each of the regional campuses has its own needs to address. For example, the St. Petersburg community is very different from that of Sarasota in terms of their specific requirements. "The autonomy allows each regional campus to focus on the needs of their respective communities, and then to build the programs needed for their respective communities." In the case of the state legislature, autonomy refers to

independent budgets. Previously, all of the funding for regional campuses was distributed through the USF Tampa campus and then was dispersed to Lakeland, Sarasota, and St. Petersburg. The legislature decided to fund each of the regional campuses so that they can “move ahead with their respective missions.” Despite having its autonomy, each campus must still continue to report to the president of USF (currently Dr. Judy Genshaft). “She (Dr. Genshaft) is very committed to each regional campus developing in the way that their community needs them to develop and to have the ability to make decisions on a local level, not always having to bring every decision to Tampa.” Each regional campus has a campus board which is a subsidiary of the University Board of Trustees. Thus, the leadership is still able to flow through the president and the university board of trustees, while continuing to emphasize the local community.

#### *Age of Lakeland Campus*

As of 2003, the Lakeland Campus is fourteen years old.

#### *Final thoughts*

To all of the students: “Be a part of it [USF] not just when you are here as a student, but continue to be a part of it. Be an active alum so that you can then impact other students in the future.” In addition, Dr. Murray encourages all former students to become mentors in order to assist new students, “Remember always the kinds of things that meant so much to you when you were a student and try to envision what the current students may be needing from you and be active in that way.” For Dr. Murray personally, being part of the university has allowed her the opportunity to meet so many of her personal goals and in return, she hopes that she is able to share and allow for the growth and development of programs, maintain a commitment to the local community, and continue efforts to grow the student population of the Lakeland Campus (number one goal of Dr. Murray). The student, according to Dr. Murray, needs to always remain the primary focus of a university and anything that can be done to make their lives better both today and in the future, is paramount.

#### *End of Interview*