

7-9-2003

Willette Roach oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, July 9, 2003

Willette Roach (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/usfhistinfo_oh



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [Other Education Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Roach, Willette (Interviewee) and Greenberg, Yael V. (Interviewer), "Willette Roach oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, July 9, 2003" (2003). *Digital Collection - USF Historical Archives Oral Histories*. Paper 167.

http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/usfhistinfo_oh/167

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Digital Collection - Historical University Archives at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digital Collection - USF Historical Archives Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

This Oral History is copyrighted by the University of South Florida Libraries Oral History Program on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the University of South Florida.

**Copyright, 2008, University of South Florida.
All rights, reserved.**

This oral history may be used for research, instruction, and private study under the provisions of the Fair Use. Fair Use is a provision of the United States Copyright Law (United States Code, Title 17, section 107), which allows limited use of copyrighted materials under certain conditions. Fair Use limits the amount of material that may be used.

For all other permissions and requests, contact the UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA LIBRARIES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM at the University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, LIB 122, Tampa, FL 33620.

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

Narrator: Willette Roach
Current Position: Director of Student Services
for the USF Lakeland campus
Date of Interview: July 9, 2003
Editor: Danielle E. Riley
Date of Edit: October 27, 2003

Interviewer: Yael V. Greenberg
Location of Interview: Tampa
Campus Library
Abstractor: Mary E. Yeary
Final Editor: Jared G. Toney

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Year of arrival

Willette came to USF Lakeland in 1989 as a technical assistant.

Circumstances that brought Willette to USF Lakeland

Her family relocated to Lakeland, Florida to be closer to family members. She desperately needed a job. She went to a temporary service agency called Rita Staffing. USF Lakeland needed temporary help. She was sent there on a six-week contract. The Lakeland campus decided to keep her on a little longer and kept extending the length of her contract. Finally, her position became a permanent temporary one. Willette remained as OPS for two years. After that she became the secretary for the College of Arts and Sciences. She then became the registrar and later the director of student services.

When did the Lakeland Campus open?

USF Lakeland opened its doors in 1986.

How many students the first year

When the Lakeland campus opened in 1986, forty-six students were enrolled.

What did she hear about the new Lakeland campus?

Since she was new to the area she had not heard anything about the Lakeland campus. Once she became an employee at the campus she heard wonderful things about the campus and its potential.

How many employees and where they were located on the campus

Willette says the Lakeland employees were all housed in one building. There were about five faculty members who shared the responsibility of faculty teaching and administrative duties. There were about seven staff members. The offices of financial aid, registration, and advising were located in the same building. "The funny part was that we all got along," she says.

Was it crowded?

The PCC campus was located where the USF Lakeland campus was. It was a joint use facility, but USF Lakeland only had access to the one building. There were two bathrooms, but they used another bathroom because they were using those bathrooms for storage space. They had already outgrown their facilities, but they did not have the funds to move elsewhere.

First employees and faculty members of the Lakeland campus that Willette encountered
Patty Clark was one of the original staff members of the Lakeland campus. “She is a very unique and interesting person,” says Willette. Patty Clark was then the director of student services. “She whipped us into shape and would get everything going all at once. She controlled the schedule. She got involved in a little bit of everything,” states Willette. Patty Clark had oversight of a lot of the functions at that time. Pat Gill was the development person who also taught courses in the College of Education. Willette says that Dr. Carmen Myers was a wonderful instructor in elementary education. Dr. Frank Young is still at the Lakeland campus and is now the administrator for the College of Engineering. Also, Dr. Young still teaches. Dr. Martha Johnson was also one of the first faculty members. She is now the administrator for the College of Arts and Sciences and still teaches as well. Willette states that these faculty members mentioned were the only ones when USF Lakeland first opened.

Why was there a need for a campus in Lakeland?

“It is my belief that the people of the community needed a campus,” states Willette. She says that the former dean of the Lakeland campus, Dr. Ralston, worked with the community to establish a lot of their needs in order to provide for them. Willette says that when Dr. Ralston left, she left a wonderful legacy that has been built upon by the current dean, Dr. Preston Mercer. “Dr. Mercer is able to build on what she started, and I think it is just a wonderful transition. And I see the campus doing great things and continuing to serve the community in the way that Dr. Ralston intended to have it,” she states.

What kinds of initiatives did Dr. Ralston begin?

Willette states that the Lakeland campus started reaching out to the community, particularly to senior citizens. She says this legacy of Dr. Ralston still continues today. Now, the Lakeland campus has hired a full-time person to coordinate the senior programs that are offered.

Courses offered at the Lakeland campus and the community focus of those courses

Willette says that the Lakeland campus did not always have as many complete degree programs as it does now. In the early years the campus had just a few complete degree programs. “We served the community in the areas that they needed us to serve them, particularly in law enforcement,” she states. The Department of Corrections is located in Lakeland. Willette says USF Lakeland established a relationship with law enforcement by offering courses to them. Also, Health and Rehabilitative Services is located in Lakeland. The USF Lakeland campus wanted to reach out to the employees there. The campus began to offer students courses to further their careers in social work. “We

basically catered to the community on an as-needed basis as well because we had that contact with the community. We had a community advisory board that would inform us about the needs of the community. And we tried to meet their needs,” she says.

Has the community based mission of the early Lakeland campus changed over the years?

Willette says the early mission is very much a continuing focus. It is a continuing focus of the current vice president and executive officer. Willette says the early Lakeland mission states that the campus would cater to the community in offering more complete degrees locally. Also, part of the mission is to work closely with the Polk County School Board in the way of course offerings. The Lakeland campus works with the school board to figure out what proper courses to offer teachers or potential teachers so that the teachers can better serve their students.

Why was the idea of community an important part of USF Lakeland’s mission?

In her mind she sees the community as a partner. “If the community does not have a need than we don’t have customers. I think it is a hand-to-hand operation,” she says.

Willette’s responsibilities as a technical assistant

As a technical assistant, Willette primarily did clerical duties. Her duties involved making traveling arrangements for faculty members; getting proctors to process exams; and a number of other minute functions. At that time they did have someone to perform paperwork. She was a technical assistant from 1989 to 1991.

Willette becomes a senior secretary after being a technical assistant for two years

In 1991, after being a technical assistant for two years, she was hired as a full-time USPS employee as a senior secretary.

Responsibilities as a senior secretary

She carried on some of the same duties that she had as a technical assistant, but with a few additional ones.

Willette becomes registrar

In 1996 Willette became the registrar of the USF Lakeland campus.

Registrar’s responsibilities

The registrar is responsible for overseeing the admission and registration processes. The Tampa campus is always responsible for decisions made as far as admissions. She had the responsibility of reviewing the applications and making sure the transcripts were adequate and then letting a student know if he or she was in good standing. When she took the position in 1996, her office was in the new building. She was also responsible for the oversight of financial aid. Students come to the registrar if they are having problems. She would take the initiative to investigate and research the problem and help the student as much as she could. If she could not do anything further to help the student, she would have the student go to the appropriate person. She was responsible for the course management system. She would input all of the course information, such as the instructors, and time and location of classes. Willette would keep an accurate account of

all the course information so that students were getting the most up to date information about the classes.

Willette becomes director of student services

At one point, the Lakeland campus operated without a student services director for about a year. When Dr. Ralston retired someone came in to act as interim dean. The campus had to carry on and perform as normal. Willette worked closer with the interim dean to keep the campus going. Her biggest concern was to keep the student services afloat. The campus had to do all of the things they would do if they had a permanent dean and a director of student services. In 1999, Dr. Mercer arrived as the new dean. Dr. Mercer saw fit to make Willette the permanent director of student services. She has truly enjoyed the position and opportunity. "Because of the new administration, staff, and faculty it has become a very pleasurable place to work" she says. Willette sees the new faculty and staff caring for the students just as much as she does. Her focus has always been students first. She sees that the new people believe in the students' first attitude as well.

Major initiatives that Willette is working on as director

Recently the campus added a career services area. Willette says the career services area works together to make the students knowledgeable of the employment opportunities once they are educated. Career services gives students a focus and teaches them how to write resumes. Students receive the adequate resources that they need to go out and find a job. She sees that as a major project right now because the job situation is not as good at this time. Willette believes that giving students all the tools they need to get a job is a great advantage. Another initiative involves financial aid. Willette says that in the early days, the Lakeland campus did not have autonomy in financial aid. They could not make any decisions at the Lakeland campus. Now the campus has more access to the student financial aid database. She sees financial aid as an important tool for students' education. Students become educated in the ways that they can fund their education. The financial aid coordinator goes to more seminars and conferences to learn more about the ways students can pay for their education.

What is the mission of a regional campus?

"I believe we have the same responsibilities as the main campus. We are one university as far as service to the students and producing quality education," states Willette.

Distinctive features of the Lakeland campus

She hears students say all the time that they can walk in the door and get to a live person just like that. The service is much more personable. The campus is smaller and easier to get around. There is more camaraderie among the students. They get to know each other. She sees the regional campus as being a convenience for students. "We operate on a much smaller scale so I think students get more of a one on one atmosphere. That has always been a plus for us," states Willette.

Registration process at the Lakeland campus

The Lakeland campus held registration on campus because online registration was unavailable, and telephone registration was just getting started. Willette and others

devoted a day to registration set up because more students were coming to the campus to register in person. The campus had to be organized for students in order to accommodate them. They set up a separate room for the students. Willette says that registration day was always an exciting time on campus.

Staff members perform a variety of functions

“At the Lakeland campus we are so unique in that we wear different hats as compared to the Tampa campus where you have specific people performing specific duties. At the Lakeland campus we have specific people performing several functions,” she states.

Between 1989 and 1996, how much did the student and faculty population grow?

Willette says that from 1989 to 1996, the Lakeland campus population grew steadily. In 1989 the campus started out with about forty-six students. By 1996 the student population was 760.

In 1997 the Lakeland campus population declines

Willette says that in 1997 enrollment started to decline for several reasons. However, she does not know the exact reasons for the decline.

After 1997 the Lakeland campus continues to grow

When she became the registrar of the campus, the numbers became more important to her, and she had an opportunity to watch the growth. Willette says that now the Lakeland campus has around 1,800 students. “It is a 150 percent increase. I think it is just fabulous. And I got to see it all happen,” says Willette.

Why did the increase happen?

Willette attributes a lot of the increase to the new mission and focus of the campus. Also, Willette says different personnel affected the increase. She says the new mission and focus still kept in mind service to the community, but the Lakeland campus went out to the community more just to see what the community needed, and how needs had changed from the early time period to the current. Willette says that technology changes enabled them to do more for the community as well. “We can offer courses in different methods now. We are able to reach areas that we were not able to reach in the past. I think technology is a big contributor to that,” she says.

Did the growth in faculty and personnel help to expand the Lakeland campus?

Willette says the growth in faculty and personnel helped to expand the Lakeland campus. In 1997 the Lakeland campus had about thirty faculty and personnel. Now the campus has sixty-three or more faculty members and personnel. The growth occurred in the areas of full-time faculty and adjunct faculty. Also, a growth in different positions occurred in order to fulfill the needs of growing programs. She says that because of the growth in personnel and faculty, and in new resources, the Lakeland campus was able to take on a different vision and pursue.

Working together with the Tampa campus

“From a personal standpoint, I can say that the Tampa campus has been very cooperative with us. Where there might have been tensions, I think we worked together to minimize them. We have to have a base for everything and the Tampa campus is that base for us. We consult them when we need to. But, when we have consulted [them] and learned what it is we need to do I think we take it from there and build it into something that we want to have. A lot of that contributed to the autonomy that Lakeland has now. We are still working with several departments to get more autonomy. But certainly if compared to then we have gained a lot more [autonomy] to where we can offer programs that do not necessarily tie us to the Tampa campus,” she says. Such programs are the new IT program that Lakeland started in the fall of 2002, the new ASBS program, and the new program in undergraduate leadership. “We work together to build what a university should have as a whole and that is the same goal of giving the best service we can give to our customers,” says Willette.

Innovative programs that the Lakeland campus has started

The Lakeland campus offers a new program in undergraduate leadership. A student has to take nine hours to qualify for the certificate. The program can also be used as a minor. The Lakeland campus has a new program called Information Technology, or IT. The campus has about fifty students currently in the program. The IT program is something Willette sees as really expanding over the next few years at the Lakeland campus. She says there is a need for it. The original intent of the Lakeland campus’ mission is to satisfy the needs that it recognizes in the community. The Lakeland campus and possibly the Sarasota campus offer courses in the ASBS program. The Lakeland campus has the majority of the offerings right now. The campus offers the ASBS in criminal justice, nursing, and business. The ASBS program is where a student would go from an associate science degree to a bachelor’s degree

Most significant changes that she has seen in her fourteen years at the Lakeland campus

Willette says that besides the student population growth, another significant change has been in the buildings on campus. “When I first came there was just the one building that housed all of the faculty and staff, registration, and financial aid and everything else in the one building. Now we have a second building at the back of the campus,” she says. Student services, faculty offices, classrooms, and student government are housed in the second building. Another significant change that Willette has seen in her fourteen years at the Lakeland campus has been in the programs the campus offers. The campus has added several new programs, especially in the graduate area.

What Willette sees happening in the next decade at the Lakeland campus

USF Lakeland has been offered five different sites for building a new campus in Lakeland. Willette believes that in the next decade she will see USF Lakeland at one of the proposed sites. Also, she sees the campus with more complete programs, more technology, and a student population triple in size.

Did the community play a role in the idea of the Lakeland campus moving?

Willette says the moving plans were not just started by the campus itself, but also the community. She believes it is community involvement as well because community members have donated all of the proposed sites. That says to her that the community does have an interest in the Lakeland campus and in having a university that can really serve the community.

Approximate timeline of the move

The master planners are busy with surveying the lands and all the behind the scenes action. She says in five years the Lakeland campus will hopefully have moved to a new location. She says five years has been the approximate amount of time discussed by many people. USF Lakeland already has the funding.

A favorite memory about the Lakeland campus in her fourteen years there involves the campus getting its own graduation ceremonies

She remembers when Dr. Murray came and inquired about the possibility of Lakeland having its own commencement. Willette remembers thinking that no way could Lakeland have its own commencement since it was so small. "But, when we got the approval to do it, it was the most wonderful thing. Students were so excited. They had taken all their courses at the Lakeland campus so they did not want to go to the Tampa campus where they believed they were just another number," she says. The Lakeland staff participates in the ceremonies. "When students that you have worked with for several years see you at the ceremony and give you hugs and thanks, it is the most wonderful thing. It is such gratitude," she says.

How did Lakeland graduates graduate prior to the campus' own commencement ceremonies?

Lakeland graduates went to the Tampa campus for their graduate ceremonies. They would have an unofficial ceremony besides the one at the Tampa campus. Students would not receive their certificates, but they were recognized for their work. "We just felt a need to do that because a student had spent their time there and done all their coursework there, but was forced to go to the Tampa campus to graduate," she says.

What is Willette most proud of in her fourteen years at the campus?

She is most proud of the staff and faculty. She says they have the dedication, individuality, talent, team spirit, and camaraderie.

When Willette first came in 1989 did she think she would be at the campus fourteen years later?

She did not. She had just recently located and she needed a job. Accepting the position at the Lakeland campus was one way of fulfilling that need. However, after working with the Lakeland people and seeing the types of things they were doing, and wanting to finish school herself, she thought it would be great to stay. When Willette accepted the permanent position at USF Lakeland she had two other offers, but she wanted to stay at USF Lakeland.

Changes of going from technical assistant to director of student services

Willette says that becoming director of student services has afforded her the opportunity to see from an administrative standpoint and to not have to be someone who simply follows a job description. “You just don’t get all of the information as a staff member that you would as an administrator,” she says.

Does Willette have greater responsibilities as a director?

“There is a bigger responsibility on you to make sure you produce the best quality of service that you can. If your office fails at something, they are not going to get the staff members, they are going to get the person in charge,” states Willette.

Importance of technology on the Lakeland campus

Willette sees the advantages and growth on the Lakeland campus because of technology. The campus has a lot of computers, which Willette says gives the campus the convenience and freedom to offer courses at different sites. The campus is able to accommodate a class in need of computers on a moments notice. The campus has a mobile lab of thirty-six laptops. She thinks this is great thing to have because it adds to the delivery and quality of education that the campus is affording its students.

Last words that Willette would like to leave behind

“The Lakeland campus is a wonderful place to work. You have the cooperation and the approval of the administrators to bring in to fruition great ideas. You have the freedom to utilize your talents without someone saying, ‘I don’t think that’s going to work.’ He [Dr. Mercer] would say try it,” states Willette. She thinks the Lakeland campus is a wonderful place to be in a growing society. Also, she says it is wonderful to be in a place where “the community is looking for you to have an answer for them when they come to you.”

End of Interview