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## Charles (Eugene) Scruggs oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, March 20, 2003

Charles Eugene Scruggs (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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USF Florid Studies Center  
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

*Year of arrival*

In May of 1972, Dr. Scruggs came to USF as an associate professor in the Division of Modern Languages. In 1972, he began teaching in the summer program at USF.

*Circumstances that brought him to USF*

He came to USF in 1971 to visit a friend who was the chair of the Department of Modern Languages. Dr. Scruggs had known the chair, Dr. Cleon Capsus, for many years when both were colleagues teaching at Appalachian State University in North Carolina. Dr. Capsus had just come as a chair to the still new university. In 1971, he asked Dr. Scruggs to come down during spring break to visit him and look around. Dr. Scruggs came down and looked around and then left. Dr. Scruggs then got tenure at Eastern Kentucky University. Referring to Dr. Capsus, Dr. Scruggs, says, "Then he called me one winter evening when it was snowing in Richmond, Kentucky. And he said it is eighty-five degrees here wouldn't you like to come down and interview. We have a position open." Dr. Scruggs decided to interview at USF. He was selected as one of the French professors and started teaching in the summer of 1972.

*First encounter with USF's surrounding area*

Dr. Scruggs says, "Fowler Avenue was a two lane road. There was one restaurant along the way, called the University Restaurant. There was another place I recall called Lum's, which was big into kraut and hotdogs and that sort of thing."

*First encounter with the USF campus (buildings and landscape)*

Dr. Scruggs says the campus itself was not very impressive. He thought that the architecture looked and still looks neo-Stalinist. He also says the buildings looked like bunkers and had very few windows. There were few trees and lots of sandspurs. Sandspurs were the first things he noticed in Florida. USF had little grass, and a lot of sand and palmettos. "It was not a beautiful campus at all in comparison to today. They had just moved into a new building, Cooper. I had a nice office with a nice view. I think the building was built by someone who wanted to keep the professors in captivity. The

hallways seemed like cellblocks. But, the people were nice. It had along way to go to become a more attractive campus,” states Dr. Scruggs.

*Division of Modern Languages (name changes and restructuring of it)*

When Classics and Linguistics were incorporated, the name changed to Foreign Languages. In 1980, the name was changed to the Division of Modern Languages because a restructuring occurred in order to give a semi-autonomy name to three major sections. These sections were French/Italian, German/Russian, and Classic/Linguistics. The new structure lasted until 2000 or 2001. Then, the current provost, who was dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the time, David Stamps, wanted to look at the structuring of the department one more time. Stamps wanted to take a broader view on how to organize the languages in order to meet the contemporary needs of students and degree programs. Stamps also wanted to collaborate with the College of Education. Dr. Scruggs became the chair of the committee that Stamps had organized to plan a restructuring of the department. The committee established the World Language Education Department. “This allowed us to cooperate more fully with the degree programs and with the College of Education. Being able to cooperate with the College of Education was one of the reasons the word education was added to the new name of the department. Using the word foreign seemed obsolete, and they were no longer modern languages so we went with world. That’s the current name as of 2 or 3 years ago,” he says. According to Dr. Scruggs, there are four basic structures now: Hispanic studies, classics, literature, second language acquisition and lower level teaching. The department has four coordinators and a chair.

*How many languages were taught in 1972?*

The languages that were taught in 1972 were Spanish, French, German, Russian, Italian, and occasionally Portuguese. Dr. Scruggs states that for some time there was not a need to teach things such as Chinese or Japanese. Courses in these languages were offered on demand and as the demand increased, the languages became a standard offering. Hebrew and Arabic began to be offered in the mid 1970s. However, Hebrew, Arabic, Japanese and Chinese are not majors. According to Dr. Scruggs, the reasons they are not majors is a question of demand. The majors now are the same ones as the majors in 1972.

*Size of the department*

The tenure-earning faculty was larger in those days. The department was large in the number of faculty members. Today it is twice the size, but that includes adjuncts and teaching assistants. In 1972, there were no teaching assistants. The faculty did everything, including teaching the beginning language courses. Now, adjuncts and teaching assistants teach these courses. In 1972, the department had thirty faculty members who had tenure. Now, the department has nineteen or twenty, and this includes the faculty members that were brought in from classics and linguistics. Dr. Scruggs says the original modern language group is probably one third the size it was. Dr. Scruggs also states that the department offers a lot more courses than it did in 1972. Along with teaching assistants and adjuncts, the department has brought in graduate students and part-time professors.

*How long did Dr. Scruggs expect to stay at USF?*

He stayed three years at Appalachian State and five years at Eastern Kentucky. He figured he would stay maybe five years at USF and then move on to bigger and better things. He has been at USF now for thirty-one years. His reasons for staying on at USF were that he had reached professorship and salary increases were good. Also, if a professor was a chair they could easily move on to another institution. However, Dr. Scruggs served as chair twice and did not think it was all that exciting. He has enjoyed the avenues he went into during his latter years at USF. He went into international education and modern language teaching and initiated the first study abroad program. Dr. Scruggs ultimately became the director of USF's Study Abroad and Exchange Program. "So it became a very exciting kind of lifestyle, which continued until two years ago," he says. Then he resigned all administrative posts and returned to teaching.

*Qualities of USF that helped Dr. Scruggs stay for thirty-one years*

"Well, the sandspurs are gone. There are trees, and beautiful buildings. There is research activity and a lot of excitement. The university has grown up and matured. When I came in 1972, it had just the twelfth class of incoming freshmen. So it was basically twelve years old. It was still in tremendous growing pains. USF was fairly naïve," he says. Dr. Scruggs adds that USF did not know where it was going or what it wanted to be— should the university focus on research or liberal arts, should it be a residential or a commuter university. Through the years, logical general education requirements were initiated. Also, USF created degree programs that brought research dollars. "It began to be a place where you could say, 'gee, the University of South Florida is really going places, and I would like to be apart of it,'" Dr. Scruggs says.

*Diversity among the language department's faculty (sex, race)*

"The language department did not reflect what was going on as a general rule throughout the university. We were a model U.N. We had a number of non-natives who were French, German, Russian, or Italian," he says. According to Dr. Scruggs, the first chair of the department was Italian and he would go to a local bar and hang out. If he heard someone speaking a foreign language he would walk over to them and try to recruit them. According to Dr. Scruggs, a few professors who did not have degrees were recruited that way. In the earlier years, the department had three or four women. Now there is a higher number of women. He states that there are few black professors and few black students. He says there were some Hispanics in the department. "We have a much more diverse group today, more women and more minorities, but still no blacks," he says.

*President of USF in 1972*

Cecil Mackey had just been hired as the President in 1972. He was president of USF for four or five years. According to Dr. Scruggs, he was an activist type of president. Dr. Scruggs says that he was brought in to see if he could help the campus to mature by "slicing some heads off so to speak." "He was a hatchet man. He did not stay very long. He did his job and went out to bigger and better things," says Dr. Scruggs.

*Division of Modern Language's faculty interaction with different departments*

The Division of Modern Languages Department was a close ally of the English Department. The two departments would create comparative literature courses. Also, the Division of Modern Languages Department interacted a lot with the Linguistics Department. Dr. Scruggs says in 1972 there was not as much contact with the History Department as there is now. The interaction among faculty from different departments was not a real part of USF in 1972. Dr. Scruggs says that there was no place where faculty members could gather and have coffee to talk and get to know one another. The only gathering place for faculty was within the individual buildings. In Cooper Hall there was a snack bar with coffee and doughnuts. Here, other departments in Cooper would interact with each other. “No one wanted to get out in the hot weather to go to other buildings. There was no central place where we could say that this is the faculty hangout. We just didn’t go in search of each other. There had to be a project in mind. There’s much more of that going on today,” he says.

*How USF differed from other institutions where Dr. Scruggs worked*

USF was the first commuter campus where Dr. Scruggs worked. Appalachian State University and Eastern Kentucky University were residential campuses. “You could have meetings, club activities, night activities. You could be fairly close to the students. Some of us [faculty] actually lived on campus. You would see the students. You were with them. There was camaraderie. I missed that here with the students and faculty. In both places there was a central location where almost every morning faculty members would drop by for coffee and doughnuts. So you got to know almost everyone. Eastern had about 8,000 students. When I came here it was maybe double that. I think it was more of a question of it [USF] not being a residential campus,” Dr. Scruggs says.

*What brought Dr. Scruggs’ students in 1972 to study foreign languages?*

“In 1972, we were in the midst of Vietnam. The Cold War was raging. There was a lot of interest in Russian,” he says. Since there was no foreign language requirement in 1972, most of the students were in classes because they really wanted to learn the language. According to Dr. Scruggs, today most people are in foreign language classes because they want to combine it with other degrees such as Business or Public Health. In 1972, language was still seen as a route to foreign service, teaching, translation, interpretation or other isolated careers in language. Dr. Scruggs says you do not see that as much anymore. Dr. Scruggs says today most students say they are taking a foreign language because it will help them with their jobs. Dr. Scruggs says this change has been radical. In the past, students wanted to learn the language and they were excited about the literature. Now most students are not excited to learn the literature. They are much more interested in culture. The classes in culture have increased dramatically over the classes in literature.

*What were his students like in 1972?*

Dr. Scruggs say some of his students were tenacious about learning the language. “I feel like over the forty-three years that I’ve taught, the further back I go, the more enthusiasm I see,” he says. Students used to sit in class and take down as many words as they could. I don’t see students taking many notes now. And then they scramble to try and study for the exam,” Dr. Scruggs says. He says in these days, students almost expect a study

guide. In the past, he says no student of his would have ever asked for a study guide. He says that this could have to do with the professors and not just the students. Dr. Scruggs says there has been a change in the style of teaching. Dr. Scruggs says that he is much less formal—in dress, in the way he addresses students and in the way he teaches. “I used to lecture, now I have a chat with them. So the style has changed and the students have changed,” he says.

*How the language structure has changed since Dr. Scruggs first started teaching?*

In the late 1950s, an emphasis started being placed on the oral approach to teaching languages. At the great language universities the courses, and especially the literature courses were taught in English. Also, there were no language laboratory activities. There was little emphasis on studying abroad. The new approach to teaching languages was just beginning in his first year of teaching in 1962. In his classes, there were tape recorders where students could listen to tapes and repeat the words. Dr. Scruggs says this was the first primitive movement toward reinforcement of patterned drills. “Today, I don’t think anyone would remotely suggest that a language class should be taught in English. So that’s a dramatic change,” he says. Dr. Scruggs says that as technology has changed the language laboratories have significantly changed as well.

*When and why did foreign language become a requirement?*

He believes that in the early 1980s, two semesters of a foreign language became required for students getting a B.A. Certain disciplines were requiring foreign language courses all along. These disciplines include History, International Studies, Philosophy, and maybe English. Dr. Scruggs says in the 1990s, the College of Business began to “wake up” and realize that business was more international. The College of Business suddenly realized that students had to have language skills and instituted a foreign language requirement. According to Dr. Scruggs, there are less French majors than there are international studies and international business majors. He believes this is because of globalization and the availability of international jobs.

*Foreign students taking the courses in 1972*

When Dr. Scruggs first began teaching there were very few students who were foreign. He says there were a number of students who were children of immigrants from Cuba and other Spanish countries who were trying to polish up on their language at home. In his French classes in 1972, Dr. Scruggs says there were no students who were French or who were from French areas like in Africa or Haiti. He says there were Hispanic natives who were majoring in Spanish and wanted to get a minor in French. “Today I have a course called Introduction to French Poetry and Drama. Of the nineteen students, five are native born Americans, three are from Togo, two are from France, five are from Haiti and one is from Albania. Over the last few years, forty percent of the students are not American,” he says. He says that forty-three years ago this was unheard of. All the students were American. “It’s amazing. You get the roll and say gee, how do I pronounce these names? Before it was the Smiths, Jones and Browns,” Dr. Scruggs says.

*Through the years, have students tried to challenge him in his French knowledge as an American teaching French?*

“I have never been challenged about my knowledge by any of my students from France or elsewhere. There seems to be a following of several French students who like to come and take my courses. We get into some good discussions. It keeps me on my toes. You have to be careful not to give all your attention to those students who are natives of France and know the language and the culture best,” says Dr. Scruggs. He says that he has to remember that some students are struggling and need extra help.

*When did he become involved in the study abroad program?*

In 1972, at Eastern Kentucky University, an intercession was created in the month of May. Dr. Scruggs believed the month of May was a wonderful time to take students overseas. He proposed his idea to the dean of the college and he got the go ahead. He recruited ten students to go to France and spend a month traveling around. The students were extremely enthusiastic. When he left to come to USF, he was interested in getting tenure. By 1976, he got tenure. He then began to lobby for creating a study abroad program in France. He went to the person who was the Director of International Studies. The director was very enthusiastic about Dr. Scruggs idea. The Board of Regents has someone who is in charge of international education. Dr. Scruggs says there was a lot of bureaucracy involved in establishing the program. First he had to get local approval, then the USF president’s approval, and finally the proposal had to go to Tallahassee.

*The beginning of the Study Abroad Program*

In the summer of 1977 he took the first group of seventeen students from USF to France for three weeks. Before the group went, Dr. Scruggs taught three weeks of intensive language preparation. The students met for four hours a day. Dr. Scruggs continued to take students to France through 1990. Then he stepped aside for other administrative duties. After some halting years, the study abroad program became very active.

*The change from the first group of students he took overseas to the students who go overseas now*

In the early years, Dr. Scruggs says the students at USF were west coast Floridians who had not been any place. They were excited about going overseas and seeing the world. The students today do not have the same enthusiasm as they did back then. Many students have already been overseas with their high school class or with their family or friends. Dr. Scruggs says in those early years, it was more rewarding to give the students a chance to open their eyes. Dr. Scruggs says in the fifteen years that he was taking students overseas he had noticed a change. Dr. Scruggs gives an example to illustrate his point. In the latter years of him taking students overseas he says that on the bus he would still be excited to look out at the countryside, but the students would have their eyes closed and would be listening to walkmans.

*Professors of different languages want to get involved in the Study Aboard Program*

In 1978, one of the Spanish professors wanted to start a study abroad program. The program began two or three years later. Dr. Scruggs say the Spanish program to Brazil and Costa Rica has been very successful. Also, the professor of photography wanted to

get involved in the program. In 2003, the professor is taking twenty-five students. The German and Russian professors wanted to lead a program as well. The program went for a while, but is not currently running. According to Dr. Scruggs, the Italian professors have had the most successful program. The Italian program began in 1983 under the leadership of Professor Ierardo. Dr. Ierardo has taken about fifty people each summer. Dr. Scruggs believes the Italian program is successful for different reasons. For one the lure of Italy is very profound, and also because the Italian government has subsidized the program making it a lot less expensive to study abroad in Italy. Dr. Scruggs adds that another reason for the program's success is Dr. Ierardo's own charisma.

*Dr. Scruggs becomes the Director of the Studies Abroad and Exchanges Program*

Once the study abroad program began to flourish the Director of International Studies asked Dr. Scruggs to come on board as the Associate Director of the International Affairs Center to coordinate and be the director of Study Abroad and Exchanges. "We had one exchange at the time. It was at the University of Paris campus seven. Now we have eighty-five on the books, and twenty-five or thirty active exchanges. It has really developed," he says.

*How does Dr. Scruggs address the current anti-French sentiment in his classes (and are students concerned about it)?*

In one of his classes he had a long discussion about France and the war in Iraq. Two of the natives of France were trying to explain the reasons why France acted the way it did leading up to the war in Iraq. Then two of the African students began to discuss their anger with France, but not for the reasons Americans are angry. These two students began to talk about how France should be trying to help the ex-colonists more with things like humanitarian aid. Dr. Scruggs says that his students were not really concerned about France not joining the coalition. His students were mainly taking an anti-war position.

*Why Dr. Scruggs has returned to the classroom and given up a lot of his administrative duties*

"I was finding myself taking on too much, and getting tired of the bureaucracy. I was Chair of the World Language Education for a couple of years while still the Director of the Study Abroad and Exchange program. I was also the director for the Florida France Linkage Institute, and I held other administrative posts. Well, after forty something years of teaching, I was thinking that I needed to phase out and get out of the rat race and let younger people step up. It was time to slow down and smell the roses and go back to teaching. I retire in May of 2004 so I wanted to faze out and not suddenly collapse," he states.

*How the collaboration between the World Language Education Department and other departments at USF has evolved*

In the past there was not a lot of collaboration between the World Language Education Department and other university departments. "One of our closest relationships is with the College of Business. There has been a gradual cooperation with the College of Social Sciences," he says. Also, there has always been collaboration with the International Studies and History Departments. According to Dr. Scruggs, there has been a lot of

collaboration in recent years with the Department of English. Dr. Scruggs says in the past the Education College has gone its own way in offering degrees in languages. Dr. Scruggs says since the restructuring of the World Language Education Department, professors from both colleges meet with each other to talk about methodology and teaching techniques. Dr. Scruggs says, "This is a very interesting collaboration." He says there is a greater collaboration since a dual college degree program has been instituted. A Ph.D. program is jointly offered by the Education Department and Arts and Sciences. The degree program is called Second Language Acquisitions and Instructional Technology. It is the first joint program in the U.S. Now there are some emulators of the program. According to Dr. Scruggs, job offerings are abundant in the areas of second language acquisition and the understanding of the technology that goes along with it. About twenty candidates have graduated and have quickly gotten jobs. "Now we have faculty that meets together among the two departments. Thirty or forty years ago no self-respecting second language professor would have been caught in the same room with a professor from the College of Education. There was a great snobbery among those from Arts and Sciences. That is gone. The older professors did not take education courses. We learned by trial and error," Dr. Scruggs says.

*The current most popular foreign language courses at USF*

Dr. Scruggs says in regards to beginning and intermediate level courses, Spanish is the most popular. In the upper level courses the most popular classes are Greek Literature and Translation, Roman Literature and Translation, Greek Civilization and Roman Civilization. The classes are offered in large lecture halls with 100 to 150 students. Dr. Scruggs says this does not occur in the other languages. He states that this is a relatively new phenomenon in the last eight to ten years. Also, biology students and other science students are interested in classical word roots. According to Dr. Scruggs, courses in Russian, German and French have declined. Latin has increased both at USF and at other universities throughout the nation.

*Anything Dr. Scruggs wants to leave for the record about his career at USF?*

"It has been a roller coaster in a way. I have seen a lot. I have had some exciting and rewarding memories here at USF. But some times of discouragement as well," he says. Dr. Scruggs says being able to give 300 plus students an opportunity to go to France and learn about the culture has been very rewarding as has creating a number of exchanges where students are able to go abroad for longer periods of time. "It is always fun in the classroom, especially with exciting students from all over the world. Overall, despite some ups and downs, it's been a great career. I was surprised to wake up one day and say I will get my thirty-year clock because I thought I would be here for four or five years and move on," he states. Dr. Scruggs supposes that inertia has kept him here all this time.

*End of Interview*