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Harrell Edwin (Ed) Steiner oral history interview by Andrew Huse, September 9, 2003

Harrell Edwin Steiner (Interviewee)

Andrew T. Huse (Interviewer)

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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Arrival at USF

Dr. Steiner had just completed the doctoral program at University of Texas in Austin. He and his wife were considering their options and because USF was relatively new, there were opportunities to “build programs and see growth, it was really an exciting thing for us to move here.”

At the time there was an understanding amongst faculty that you start out as an assistant professor and stay for about five years and move on to another place. Because he and his wife enjoyed the school and area so much, she told him that they could move on to another place if he wanted, but her one rule was that they could not move anywhere north of Lutz. They were both very happy with the school and the area and almost thirty-five years later they are still here.

Dr. Steiner was Associate Dean of College of Education for fifteen years, returned to department chair for about four years. In 1999 he tried to retire, but two years ago Provost Stamps asked him to fill in as interim dean. He has stayed with the dean’s office to help out as new deans have come on board. “It’s been a long and very interesting and productive thirty-five years.”

The USF campus in 1969

The campus in 1969 was much different than the campus we see today. Upon arrival in Tampa, another faculty member picked Dr. Steiner up at the airport. They came down Fowler Avenue, which at the time was a two-lane road. The only thing on Fowler was the University Restaurant. There was also a motel on the corner of 30th Street and Fowler Avenue and the school. In 1969, the USF campus was surrounded by little other than fields and pastures. At the time the campus had fewer buildings than today, plus more grass and open space. There were also only about 10,000 students compared to about 40,000 in the present day. The numbers and quality of students, programs, and faculty have grown considerably.

Classes he taught

Dr. Steiner's field is science education. He taught the methods of teaching science to elementary and secondary education majors. His primary area is biology, so he worked closely with people who wanted to teach biology. His work in administration has adversely affected his ability to teach these things because it has kept him so busy. There is a shortage of teachers now, and Dr. Steiner is interested in addressing this important issue. He has noticed that there has been a cycle over the years with regards to teaching availability. There is usually either too many or not enough teaching jobs available. Right now the shortage is in science and math, so Dr. Steiner wants to do what he can to help rectify the situation.

Departmental Organization

The College of Education did not have departments, instead it had programs. Departments were eventually formed, Dr. Steiner believes that they had large departments condensed into four programs. Those were large and diverse, so after a few years they decided to identify departments a little more precisely. They went from zero departments, to four departments, to fourteen departments. Faculty members looked at ways to work together better, interests merged and the fourteen departments merged into eight and now they have seven departments and one school for a total of eight. This seems ideal for the size of the college and is working well. The changes in general educational discipline led to change in the departmental structure. The system that is in place now "seems to be meeting all the needs of the students and the faculty."

Where did the early faculty receive their degrees?

Dr. Steiner got his degree from the University of Texas, some faculty members got their degrees from University of Florida, Florida State, or Syracuse. There were many educational areas encompassed by faculty. From about 1969-1971 there were approximately seventy new faculty members hired in the college of education. This is indicative of a wider trend of growth throughout the university. This meant that many people were being reviewed for promotion and tenure. Now we don't have all these people at the same time, the promotional considerations are spread over time. In the early to mid seventies, after faculty had been on campus for four or five years, they were considered for tenure. The size of the new hiring pool meant that after five years or so they were considering twenty or thirty people at a time for tenure. All these people were close in age and many of them are retiring now. There were thirteen or fourteen retirements last year, so there is another big turnover in the university. Dr. Steiner thinks we have a healthy mix of faculty with experience and new faculty with new ideas. These transitions are healthy for the department.

Careers at USF

In the College of Education there were very few faculty members that left USF for other schools, this shows how much people liked USF. Most people come with the idea that they will be here for a while and then move on to something else, but many stayed. After Dr. Steiner had been dean for about fifteen years, he was trying to think of anyone who left USF for another job and he couldn't think of more than four or five people. He had

considered other jobs, and other people had considered other jobs, but it just was too nice here at USF. Many have been here for their entire career.

Great scholars at USF when Dr. Steiner arrived

There were two great scholars there around the time that Dr. Steiner arrived. He didn't know too many people when he arrived, but one person that was well regarded was Dr. B. Othanel "Buddy" Smith. Dr. Smith was a leader in the United States in the area of curriculum and instruction. Charles Weingartner had written some well regarded textbooks. Dr. Steiner found the times he got to work with them as "very rewarding." Many faculty members now receive great national recognition.

The increase in external funding is a "measure of the quality and reputation of your faculty." When he began as associate dean the external funding for education was less than \$500,000 a year and came in sporadically. By 1990 it was up to eleven million dollars a year. The number has continued to rise, it has increased to twenty million in the present. The college has grown and "been recognized as a quality program." They also receive federal funding. Many of their early grants were state grants, so now they receive federal and state grants. Transition from state funding being greater than federal funding to vice-versa has taken place in the last two or three years. They have grown considerably in the college of education.

Any other professors that later became renowned?

Dr. Steiner can't think of any scholars off hand that received significant recognition after leaving the College of Education.

Diversity in College of Education

In 1969, faculty in mathematics and science education was mostly white males. There were two white females. At the present date there is a greater male/female mix. Science education is male to female 50/50. Mathematics is about 50/50 male/female and African American; Hispanic minority groups are represented.

Schools should be open to diversity because it gives you a "richer combination of perspectives, cultures that students can understand and study, and it gives a variety of viewpoints. It is always important to have more ways of thinking about issues than might be represented in one culture." There is a high priority in the College of Education to increase diversity among the faculty.

Upon arrival there was no real diversity. There was a high concentration of white males, especially in sciences and math. There were high numbers of female faculty in other teaching disciplines. The faculty has grown more diverse over time. The student population has gotten much more diverse. There were few minority students early on, but that has changed considerably.

First Science Education Building

Science education was in the chemistry building in 1969. Dr. Steiner's office was a cleaned out storage room that had contained chemicals and had a chemical smell. There

were no windows and the office was small, but it was all he needed at the time. There was one secretary supporting four faculty members. When the new education building was built Dr. Steiner served as co-chair of the building committee and he worked with architects and builders. Dr. Steiner maintains that the old building is nothing compared to their current residence. They have windows and space, they wanted to have an open air, inviting feeling in the building. The new building was built and the old education building was renovated so now the two buildings are connected. Some families that made significant contributions to the program have their names on sections. The Anchin Center and the Stavros Education Center are both two-story buildings attached to the education building and they add to the inviting nature of the college. It is pretty much a four building complex and all the buildings are new or newly renovated. It is very different today than it used to be and a good feeling to work there because the “physical facility is no comparison” to what they used to have. All of this took a lot of time and donations, but perseverance pays off and he has windows in his office now. The addition of the courtyard in the middle of the building allowed them to add window space to just about every room. The courtyard itself is nice because students frequently have their lunch out there.

Inter-department faculty interaction

The College of Education places a high priority on interaction with other colleges. The work in science education is closely tied to faculty communication with the various sciences. Faculty members in the College of Education work very closely with people in their related field, whether it is math or performing arts. Communication is important for content and coordination of what everyone is working on and learning.

Reflections on Dr. John Allen

He interviewed with Vice-President Harris Dean for his position, but came during John Allen’s presidency. Dr. Steiner had no real close contact with Dr. Allen, (Dr. Steiner began at USF in 1969 and Dr. Allen retired in 1970) but heard stories of faculty being reprimanded for walking on the grass because it was difficult to get the grass to grow. Dr. Steiner found it funny that the president admonished a faculty member for walking on the grass.

Jean Battle, Dean of College of Education

He was the original dean and continued until approximately 1971. When John Allen retired, Cecil Mackey became president, and then Dean Battle retired they got a new dean. Dean Battle continued to teach part-time for many years after giving up the position of dean. He continued to help out after retirement.

Major accomplishments of presidents and deans

They had very few deans in College of Education: Jean Battle, Roger Wilk and Bill Katzenmyer in 1978. He stayed dean for sixteen years, which might be the longest anyone has been a dean at the University of South Florida. Dr. Steiner was there with him for fifteen years. During this time the college’s reputation grew on the state level and they got their first accreditation by the national council in the mid-1980s. This was a significant milestone. They have maintained strong ratings from accreditation. They also

experienced great growth in external funding which allowed them to expand and do projects including training and research. The early years were like an adolescence. The College of Education might not be out of this period yet, but they are still continuing to grow.

New Education Building

The new building opened in the spring of either 1997 or 1998. He was there for about two years before his first retirement. The rise in funding from external sources has been continuous and very handy in projects, and in considering faculty hires that are interested in research. They are hiring great faculty members with good reputations and the funding should continue to grow.

Social gatherings for faculty and staff

There have been activities from ice-cream socials at the MLK Mall to picnics at the USF Park on the Hillsborough River. Students, faculty and community members are invited to events.

The children's festival was very successful for many years, usually occurring on the first Saturday in November. Every program in the college set up booths and activities that were centered on children's participation. The first year they ran the program Dr. Steiner brought his five-year-old daughter and she enjoyed everything. They made things and acted out skits and kids could spend the whole day doing constructive activities. Dr. Steiner's daughter commented on the way home that "this is the most fun I've ever had." He knew this was a good program. It continued until the late eighties or the mid-nineties. The kids got in free, but adults had to pay because they needed to offset costs. By the end the cheerleading squads from local schools, the military, police and fire departments, and local bands would come there and teach kids. It would be more difficult now because there are buildings in the way of their old location.

Faculty and staff socializing outside work

Mostly socialization occurred between those who worked together, had common interests, or their children were of similar ages. Many staff members became good friends. The president used to have a dance every December during the holidays and faculty and their spouses would go and socialize. The Women's Club would sponsor events in the Marshall Center. There are so many opportunities and the university is so large that friendships can depend on who a person comes in contact with, shared values or common interests, but there are many close friendships among the university faculty. Dr. Steiner and his wife formed many close friendships over the years.

Differences with other universities

Dr. Steiner's experience at the University of Texas was mostly as a student, although he had been appointed a staff member at the university. The biggest difference was that the university was not an established school and it was easier to build programs and make changes. The other schools had large amounts of state and external funding. The University of Texas had established a lot of connections with people who made large

contributions and USF is starting to do this as well. In the early years this was not the case.

How did he get to work?

Dr. Steiner drove a car except in 1974 during the oil embargo when he rode a bicycle. This ended when he got caught in his first real big thunderstorm. At the time everyone wore polyester and polyester soaks up a lot of rain. The pant legs on his slacks were about six inches longer and weighed about twenty pounds more, so Dr. Steiner decided not to ride the bicycle during the rainy season. Every other year he drove, the parking situation has changed a lot, but he believes that the Bull-Runner is a great help to the parking problem and a great service because students can live off campus and they don't have to ride a bicycle. It also helps alleviate the parking problem.

Reasons he stayed on campus so long.

One of the main reasons is that there has always been "at least moral support for new ideas and new activities." The staff has been able to work with students in different areas of research and different ways of presenting class work to make their teaching as effective as possible. Everything from individual instruction to lab work and new technologies had been tried. The support that they have had has been important in exploration. The funding has not always been there, but the moral support has. That freedom among colleagues has been important to positive change in the university.

Changes in student body

There were lots of demonstrations in the early years: they'd protest and demonstrate in front of buildings, at the dean's office, or the president's office. The number of protests has declined. Dr. Steiner believes that the university has tried to make different and effective ways that students can be heard. Faculty are very open to the students and their concerns, which students like. One disappointment that he has noticed is that there is an increase in student tendency to complain, file grievances and lawsuits. He feels that many complaints are warranted, but some are frivolous.

He was speaking to a colleague about a student that was going to file a lawsuit because the student feels that he or she should have gotten an "A" in a class and he or she got an "A-." This is indicative of a culture wide change; the society has become more litigious, and this is a disincentive for faculty. They work hard for the students and are accused of the contrary, this has become a challenge and these things didn't happen years ago. When he started, the students demonstrated openly, this has declined and they sue now.

Dress Code

Male faculty were required to wear a jacket and tie; this has been relaxed over the years. Students were fairly conservative when he started, then students began to dress in clothes that were torn or ragged. He has noticed that students seem to be taking more of an interest in their physical appearance lately. Of course, hairstyles change from long hair to short hair to no hair through various cycles. Overall he is happy to work with students; they present themselves well and they are conscientious. There is a certain requirement

that student teachers dress like professionals because they are presenting themselves as teachers. Typically students “dress very well” and “respect themselves and others.”

Food Service

“There wasn’t much food service originally,” and Dr. Steiner rarely used it. There was a nice cafeteria at the science center and he would eat there from time to time. It was pretty good, but there wasn’t much demand for food because it was then, and remains in many ways, a commuter university. Students came here, took a class, and went home. This is still largely the case, although there are many students that live on campus. As on-campus student numbers grow the personality of USF will also change in the future. This and the increased focus on athletics will help bring the campus community together.

Proudest accomplishments

He has been an administrator most of his years here, between department chair, associate dean, and interim dean. He feels good “about being part of the growth of the College of Education” and “building the quality of the programs.” He has held many roles in administration of the college and believes that he helped “facilitate the progress it has made.”

Final thoughts

“Always be looking for something new and better, a better way to do things, whenever there is a challenge and you might think it is going to be a problem or a setback,” try to figure out how to make everything better as a result of the setback. “Look at it as an opportunity rather than a problem.” If you do that you will probably be “a lot more successful and lead a happier life.” “Look on the bright...it is always easy to get bogged down and complain but...when anything happens there is always something good that can come from it...an individual that would follow that line of thought would come out much better off.”

End of Interview