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James Strange oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, May 6, 2003

James F. Strange (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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

Narrator: Dr. James Strange (S)
Current Position: Professor of Religious
Studies and Director of Graduate Studies
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Interviewer: Yael V. Greenberg (G)
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TRANSCRIPTION

G: Today is Tuesday, May 6, 2003. My name is Yael Greenberg, oral history program assistant for the Florida Studies Center. We continue a series of interviews here in our studio in the Tampa campus library with USF faculty, students, and alumni in order to commemorate fifty years of university history. Today, we will be interviewing Dr. James Strange who came to USF in 1972 as an assistant professor in the department of religious studies. Currently, Dr. Strange is professor of religious studies and director of graduate studies. Good morning, Dr. Strange.

S: Good morning, Yael.

G: Let's begin by you taking us to the year you arrived in Tampa and what circumstances brought you to the University of South Florida.

S: Well, the circumstances were a little bit lengthier. I had been in Israel a previous year on a post-doctoral fellowship. My university wrote me and said a position has just been advertised at the department of religious studies at the University of South Florida, shall we send your materials? I said please do. I never heard anything at all. I finally wrote the University of South Florida, William Tremmel, chairman of the department, and I heard nothing at all. So, when I came back to the United States, I went to the meeting of

the American Academy of Religion that fall, and thought I'd keep my hand in. I got a job teaching at a high school in Morristown, New Jersey. So, at the American Academy of Religion I actually made contact with William Tremmel. He explained that he had closed the search because he was dissatisfied with the candidates and the only one he liked was in Israel. I said oh no kidding. So, I explained who I was and he sat me down right there and interviewed me and offered me the job. So, that was long before all the rules that would keep you from doing that. That was the circumstances. Now, I came down in April of 1972 to visit the campus and see what it was like. I actually took the train. Tremmel had some trouble finding the train station because he had never known, but he came and got me and he brought me to the campus, which of course looks considerably different than it does today. Ultimately, I came in the fall 1972 to start teaching.

G: Can you describe what the campus and the surrounding areas looked like in 1972?

S: Well, yes. In 1972, I was very impressed with all the nature around here. On the west side there was a huge stand of loblolly pine trees, it was just gorgeous, which is where the De Bartolo (Corporation) land was finally swapped with the university. There's a commercial place there and then the mall right next to it. The only thing, that I can remember at least, between I-75, today we call it I-275, and the campus was the University Restaurant, which I was told was a watering spot for many faculty. In fact not long after I came I ran into Don Harkness there, Don was a professor of American studies, with his wife Mary Lou Harkness who was the director of the library. [We] had a wonderful visit.

G: You came in as an assistant professor in the department of religious studies. How was the department of religious studies set up in those days and what college or department

was it part of?

S: The department was five professors and that was the first year of its inception. These professors came from other departments actually, or they had been adjuncts who then were hired and made full time. We had two borrowings as it were from the humanities department and one who came in from outside who had been an adjunct and also taught at the University of Tampa. Ironically enough, he got his PhD the same place I did, Drew University. Then, Tremmel himself, who had a PhD from ILIFF School of Theology in Colorado. So, I was the only outside hire that came from some other place. For a while, Tremmel called me the only legitimate hire in the department. We five were not even called a department; we were called a program, program of religious studies. We were attached to the College of Arts and Letters. There was a major transition going on. There was a brand new dean coming in, for example. Irving Deer had been the first dean. I met him, but he was already out as dean; he was back as a professor of English. Then, we stayed, obviously, as part of Arts and Letters for many, many years. [We] were just a very small program. Within about three or four years we did become a department.

G: In terms of the program philosophy in those early days, what kind of courses were you guys teaching and how has that direction moved to what it is today? Did it move very quickly to what it is today?

S: The department started offering very broad-based courses all at the upper level, 3000/4000 level. We made a decision that year, as far as I can remember it was 1972, not to attempt even to offer 1000 and 2000 level courses because we had so many students. Seventy percent of the students came in from the community college network, so they

would already have satisfied all that. So, we decided to start at the 3000 level. So, we offered Introduction to Religion, which was both theoretical and comparative religion. We offered what we called Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and New Testament: Life of Jesus. Those were sort of bread and butter classes. We offered Buddhism, pure and simple, and if we offered Buddhism fifty students would sign up immediately. It was in enormous demand in those days. We offered kind of a peculiar course, even from my perspective then, called Dialogues in Religion. We brought in practitioners of various religions and had them talk about where they came from after we had equipped the student theoretically. So, we were very much of a generalist department within the field of religious studies. I was doing all my work in archaeology and publishing all that. One of our members was interested really in art and religion though he never published in that area. Other department members were interested in just the whole theoretical component of religion. Why people, as he would put it, do religion at all. So, we filled a niche that was very necessary, I suppose, to get us going. It was inevitable that people would develop more and more specific interests and we would gradually hire other people and we had some losses. The department from that to really a comparative religion and society emphasis. We've stayed that way and we've gained an emphasis in comparative religious ethics, which means we got to dialog a great deal with people doing ethics in other parts of the university, not just the philosophers but all the people interested in professional ethics, for example. We got very interested in religion in America as part of the religion in society. We actually published some monographs on religion in Tampa Bay. One of our earlier hires was Dr. Mozella Mitchell, who was interested in black religious experience. She in fact worked on black religious experience in Tampa Bay and

unearthed all kinds of things that none of knew anything about.

G: You mentioned the five people who originally started the department. In terms of diversity, were there women teaching in the department as well? Were there African Americans?

S: No, we were all live, white males in those days. We were aware that we were not very diverse ourselves. In those days we defined diversity mostly in terms of something having to do with African American experience. So, that was one of our first goals was to get an African American in there or somebody trained in African American or both. We did succeed. We brought in a guy who did not have his PhD finished. He was working on his dissertation, but he never finished it so he didn't make tenure and left. That was a blow to us all. We tried it again and that's when we got Mozella Mitchell and brought her in. It just gradually changed. I think part of that was that as the university became more and more interested in diversity that supported us in our interest in diversity. I don't know, I suppose it's relevant, religious studies faculties are often regarded as very politically left wing because religious studies faculties got deeply involved in the civil rights movement in this country and that was regarded as a left-wing movement. So, I think people expected us to go around talking about the need for some kind of diversity. It wasn't necessarily supported very strongly in those early days, but gradually that changed.

G: In terms of student interest in those early days, you mentioned Buddhism as being a course of high interest among students. Why was Buddhism such an interesting course to students, and why were students taking courses in religious studies in those days?

S: Well, people were interested in Buddhism as a left over from the 1960s. They heard their

parents and their older brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles talking about it and how wonderful it was. So, just sight unseen they would flock into a Buddhism course. They would not take an advanced Buddhism course. If we had tried to offer a course on reading poly-text or something, even in translation, then we'd have maybe a dozen. But they would really be very interested in what was more or less considered the alternative religious experience available to Americans, which is Buddhism. Some of that is historical in nature. The introduction of Buddhism into the intelligencia of northeastern America with the transcendentalists and all that, which gradually filtered down and stayed with us. They were not all that interested in Hinduism. We could offer Hinduism and get twenty students. The other major component that was afoot in religious students, there was a large number of them, maybe as much as thirty percent in those days, who really wanted to be serious leaders in Christianity and Judaism. They wanted to be ministers, priests, or rabbis. Some of those in the 1970s were women. The women who came from very Pentecostal movements in America succeeded in getting back in as practitioners and leaders. The rabbis and the ministers and sort of the priests didn't make it for a long time. However, I did find that one of our very earliest female rabbis in fact did make it. She still has got a pulpit in Long Island, which is wonderful. In any case, then we had people who were just curious. They had this sort of cultural definition of religion, this cultural feeling that religion was pretty good if you didn't take it too seriously, so maybe if they examined it they'd learn something. Some of those people got turned on to the academic study of religion. If you're being phenomenological and nonjudgmental as it were, or attempting to be...For some people that was a brand new experience; it was simply intellectually stimulating and wonderful. Those people came

back in droves.

G: Was there a lot of faculty interaction with different departments in those early days?

S: There certainly was. First of all, our offices were on the fourth floor of Cooper [Hall] in a long hall in the northwest corner. In that hall there were professors of linguistics, English, the history of ideas, [and] of comparative literature. One guy trained in sociology but there was not department of sociology in those days; he was sort of out of pocket. [There were also] professors of humanities simply standing in the hall, talking to you neighbors, could be a very exciting experience. Those are wonderful memories. I'll just give one anecdote. I heard someone down the hall talking to one of my colleagues, Bob O'Hara in linguistics. I heard Bob talk about a radio program he was doing. I had no idea he was doing a radio program, so I walked down there and stuck my head in and just interrupted and asked about the program. Yes, I do a radio program with a friend [he said]. So, I started listening to it on Sunday evening. Usually, I would be driving somewhere and I would turn on the car radio and listen to it. It was just marvelous. I had no idea. Just to discover the kind of things that your colleagues and many other places were doing. All of us in religious studies were not in a single row or little cul-de-sac or something and we'd just talk to each other, we'd talk to everybody.

G: How has that changed?

S: Well, we talk to one another mostly. Now, we're nine people and now it's a clearly defined area and we're surrounded simply by English professors. So, it's very easy to talk to English professors, but if we want to talk to a sociologist we have to go upstairs. If we want to talk to a philosopher we have to go clear over to the faculty office building, etc. The kind of exchange that we had there simply is not available to us. Just to walk

out to the lobby and wait until finally an anthropologist comes through and just talk to him is just not going to happen.

G: In terms of those five people that began the program, in addition to you being one of the five, what were the predominant specialties of the program in those early days?

S: It was almost entirely various forms of Western religion, and for that matter, it was almost entirely Christianity and Judaism. Now, all of knew a little bit about something else, but that was really the fundamental specialization if that's the word for it. Dan Bassuk was the guy that was charged with teaching Eastern religions. He actually had a PhD in philosophical theology and Christian philosophical theology from Drew University. It was a strong religion and culture component. So, Dan had just self-educated himself in Buddhism and Hinduism and so on over the years and at the various places he had taught here in Tampa, he just decided to do that. So, he was not formally trained at all. He didn't have the languages in those religions, but he could do what we needed and he was a popular professor. He ultimately published a book on avatars in Hindu religion, so he did some good scholarship, some interesting scholarship. Recent avatars is how I should put it, the last twelve.

G: Who was the president of USF when you started in 1972?

S: Cecil Mackey was the president. In fact I would see Cecil because he liked to jog and he would jog with one of his compatriots in his office and we'd see them out there in their jogging duds. I was kind of a workaholic and I would be up here on Friday afternoon, pounding away on my typewriter trying to get something published, [and] at least once somebody knocked on my door and I opened it and it was Cecil Mackey. He said congratulations on being in your office at five o'clock in the afternoon on Friday.

[laughing] I knew that John Allen had been president because people kept talking about him, obviously. In fact I'd finally met him at a reception, he and his wife. It was one of those lovely evenings. He asked me some rather poignant questions about what we were doing in religious studies and why. But it was kind of fun to get that kind of questioning from a former president.

G: Was the community and the university supportive of the religious studies department?

S: Well, it was very checkered. People in the university were really made up of those who really were glad that we were here, and then there were a small number who were quite opposed to our being here, who took the position that separation of church and state meant that we couldn't even mention religion in the classroom. Then, I would say that there was the great middle ground of people who didn't care one way or the other, if we're there fine. Now the community, the phone calls that we got were not supportive. The phone calls were from people who were upset or suspicious. It was almost always an irate father dealing either with a son or a daughter who had heard something that disturbed him, so their calling us up trying to get it straightened up or whatever, mostly just to complain. The faculty, by and large, we were shielded from those calls. It was Bill Tremmel's job, we felt, to protect us from the townspeople who were upset with us all the time. I made it one of my missions to get out and speak to as many congregations, both Jewish and Christian, as I could. For example, I would lecture to Jewish congregations about Christianity and vice versa, because they were equally ignorant about one another. That was very interesting, a lot of fun. I could represent the university in some sense, then. I didn't have to enter disclaimer in those days that I did not speak for the university. I just, in effect, became the guy that they came to trust. I

would get calls from these people saying they had heard something or other, could I check it out? But by and large, most people just simply were unaware that we were here.

I will put it that way. They just didn't know. I would introduce myself at a party or something and people would say you can't be at the University of South Florida, they don't have religion. I would say yes we do, and I'm here to tell you we do. We were a very well-kept secret somehow.

G: In terms of degree programs, when did the department start offering an undergraduate degree in religious studies, and then how did they move from an undergraduate to a graduate degree program?

S: We were degree offering from the very beginning. I do not know the mechanics of it, but we had majors, we all had to advise our majors, we had to decide what courses majors would take and all that kind of business, we had a thirty-six hour major. We even instituted a senior paper requirement, which only lasted a few years. We got enormous reaction from the students, who didn't believe they could write thirty continuous pages, and [they] just pointed out to us that no one else in the university with the greatest sense of intellectual rigor had that requirement. Secondly, [we heard] from our colleagues who were saying why are you putting them through this terrible experience? We said about thirty percent of them say that they want to get master's degrees somewhere and they better be able to show us they can write. Well, we finally dropped that requirement. Our native students, those who lived in the Tampa Bay area and commuted, kept asking us about MA programs. The major thing about them was that they were place bound; they were not going to get up and go someplace. After all, they were approaching thirty years of age, about half of them were married and had children, they worked thirty or forty

hours a week; they weren't going to get up and just go someplace. So, we decided in the late 1970s that we had to have a master's degree of some sort. It was kind of a long time of boring. What was fascinating to me was we could show perhaps thirty people who said if you get a master's I'm going to be one of your first students, only three of them applied. When the chips were down that came to about ten percent of those who were insisting. At first it was a very small program that didn't amount to very much, but it's grown to now fifty graduate students of all types studying all kinds of things, interested in all sorts of matters, from that kind of inauspicious beginning. In fact our very first graduate students, I'm confident, now, would not survive because we kind of coddled them along in those days. We thought some of them might try to go for PhD programs. So, we explained it to them carefully just like they were our own kids or something. None of those first MAs tried for PhDs. It took a good five years before any of them would actually apply and get into PhD programs.

G: Is the department considering having a PhD in religious studies?

S: Yes, we've considered it several times. We've been approached at least once by a dean who said you're our star department, I want you to put in for a PhD, but then that dean left before we could get the thing through. Not unrelated is our own president, our current president, saying are you guys interested in PhD, and we said yes, so why don't you try for it. But we looked very carefully and thought that the down side of it right now is far stronger than the up side just programmatically. We have interest, the same kind of place bound people want to get PhDs. What we cannot do is guarantee placement, and it seems pointless to train people that we cannot place. We tried to design a program that would make them highly marketable in a situation with a small college

with one person. It's very typical to have one person teaching all the religion. So, we try to put together a program like that, and then this person, nevertheless, would be trained in depth in one area so they could publish in one area and stay alive in that situation. I don't now see that changing unless the designation of the university as a research university ends up, in some inverted sense, putting pressure on us to put in a PhD. The political pressures now are much more pronounced than they were in those early days.

G: Why do you think those political pressures have changed so much since 1972?

S: Well, in 1972 we were a very small place. We weren't so small when I came here and people said it was 17,000 students, I almost fainted because I was used to universities with 3,000 or 4,000 in them, except for Yale [Divinity?] University. Then, we didn't have a large basin of legislature. The legislature didn't know about us, didn't seem to care about us particularly and didn't ask about us. When we read their quotations in the newspapers they [the legislature] were always pejorative, they did not seem to have a strong sense of us at all. So, that could only change when, gradually, USF alumni became members of the legislature or at least legislative aids and things like that. Then also, the place of our university in Florida life, our university had to move into the consciousness of people, right into the forefront of their consciousness. I would discover when I went downtown in Tampa, for example, if I spoke before the Rotary Club there would always be remarks about how far away the university was, as though it were a hundred miles away. Well, the most it could be is thirteen miles, but the distance of course is in people's minds. Once we moved into their consciousness one way or another, well that automatically increased political pressures on us then. We were constantly being compared to FSU and the University of Florida. Of course, many times

we couldn't compete. For example, even in the 1980s when we noticed the differences, in the 1980s people would say your religion department is so small, why? [We] only [had] six people in those days. FSU has thirty people. We said well, they've been there a century for one thing. They've had time to build that. Give us some time; we'll do the same thing. Well, you're bound to give us some resources.

G: I want to talk about Biblical archaeology for a little bit. How did you get so passionate about Biblical archaeology and when did you first start taking USF students to Israel, and why?

S: Well, I got passionate about Biblical archaeology actually as a student at Yale Divinity School. It was really not because my professors assigned me anything in this area, because they did not, it's just as I was doing my reading. Sometimes I was reading nineteenth century materials and sometimes twentieth century. There would be constant references to archaeology in one way or another, so I started reading those references. I felt honor bound that if I was going to do scholarly work, to check the references like we say. So, I started reading those references. So, when I finally started applying for PhD programs I actually asked to work in the area of New Testament studies and archaeology. Only two places in the North American continent would let me do that. That was McGill University in Canada and Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. I ended up going to Drew; they offered me money. That stayed with me. All my professors in the area of Biblical studies at Drew had excavated on the West Bank at the site of Schechem. They all knew something about field archaeology. Some of them thought it was the meow of the cat, and others thought it was just a waste of time. They were all different opinions. I just continued resolutely in my interest. Finally, when I came up to dissertation writing

time I had just got going on, I got a chance to go to Israel and actually dig, so I took off. Hebrew University, the campus in New York City, was actually sponsoring the dig and the campus in Jerusalem at Gazera, so I excavated there and kept excavating. I never quit, except recently because of the security problems in Israel. In 1972 would be my fourth year of digging. I was digging with Eric Meyers of Duke University and Tom Crobble of University of Minneapolis. This was Eric Meyers initiative of Duke to do a synagogue project, an attempt to get some hard evidence for the evolution of synagogues and their uses and so on and so forth. So, we ended up excavating four synagogue sites. That very first site was called *Khirbet Shema'*, which means the ruin of a candle, but apparently an Arabic corruption of some earlier Hebrew name. We all knew that we had to bring students. In those earliest days maybe two students would come from USF, because our students tended not to have any money. They really reserved the summers to work and the idea of being gone for four to six to twelve weeks depending on how long we were digging and investing all that money was very foreign to them. Gradually, it got better until eventually I had a whole coterie of students. The reason I was doing this was twofold. A, it's a major way to get an understanding of religion is to look at the material culture associated with the religion. Secondly, I just needed to train up a generation of future archaeologists. What I discovered was about every fiftieth student would develop a really serious interest. Plenty of students would be turned on and have a wonderful time, but about two percent of them would actually then go somewhere and get a PhD and then get into the field. However, almost none of those ever went back to the Middle East, they mostly dug in this country or occasionally in a place like England or Europe. The opportunities for digging in the Middle East were much more restricted. If they went

to a department of anthropology, for example, to get a PhD, the anthropological department there would have no notion of digging in the Middle East unless they were interested in pre-history. So, they typically did not continue what I do, but that's okay. At least they're doing something in archaeology. Some of them are doing some very interesting work.

G: I'm curious. You're in the department of religious studies and there's an anthropology program at USF too. Was there any cross over between the two departments?

S: Not particularly. It took a long time to get archaeology here from other disciplines together. Our interest was so disparate. We had an archaeologist in history, had me in religious studies, we had one on the St. Petersburg campus, and there was one in Sarasota. So they had these academic archaeologists. Then, there were classical archaeologists in the state of Florida even, who dug in Rome mostly and some of them in Greece or outside Rome. It's sort of like being in an English department. Just because you're in an English department doesn't mean you have a lot of interest in what these people are doing. The eighteenth century specialist doesn't really care anything about existentialist poetry. So, that was part of it. Then, anthropology itself is not geared up to do anything like Biblical archaeology. In fact they'd be very suspicious of it. It sounds like trying to prove the Bible or something, which had nothing to do with what we were doing. It just didn't sound, from an anthropological perspective, it didn't sound respectable. That's what I received; it may not have been what was transmitted.

G: Since you came here in 1972 have you been taking students to Israel?

S: Yes, sure have.

G: With the recent Middle East crisis, how has that changed your focus and your work in

Israel and bringing students from USF?

S: Well, I can't take any students from USF. The liabilities are overwhelming. The university council I think is just on pins and needles. They may not even be thinking of it. Secondly, Israel itself says just hang on a minute, we'll get this solved, but don't complicate matters for us right now [by] bringing over fifty or one hundred students. We say okay. Right now I'm an officer with the American Schools of Oriental Research, which is the body with which archaeologists affiliate. In the eighteen dig schedules for Israel in the last two years, none of them have gone into the field. Now, the Israelis dig but that's pretty easy for them. First of all, their college students have been in the army two or three years, they're all weapons trained. They know all about security and defense and so on. Our students are not like that. In fact the Israelis said to me once, why don't you just get a license and wear a pistol? I said because I'm an archaeologist, and people who have pistols attract other people who have pistols. I don't want to do that. From their point of view it seemed odd, but we dig in a national park, so it's not really much of a security problem at all. Everybody who works in the park has a weapon. It just became out of the question to take students. I just participated in a long discussion in Boston this past weekend between the Archaeological Institute of America and the American Schools of Oriental Research. Each [organization] are meeting independently, talking about the future of Middle Eastern Archaeology because it's not clear at all when or if we will get to dig. The digs in Jordan [are] cancelled. There are no digs in Syria. Only the French are digging in Lebanon. It's cut way back in Egypt. Even Boston University is not digging in Egypt. Of these traditional places, what's left are really Turkey and Greece and Cyprus; but those are actually different venues. If you're trying to do something,

which gets at the history of a people and so on of the tenth or nine century B.C., well you can't elect another country. It will be a different people. We really don't know right now what the future of archaeology is. One of our archaeologists pointed out at that meeting that she is in mid-career suddenly faced with not being able to train students. What to do? The answer to that right now is we just don't know. We've opened up a dialogue with the Saudis two or three years ago, but there's an obvious problem there and that's about bringing women. If half my staff is women and they don't want me to bring women, well that would be quite difficult. We also have a Baghdad committee because we once had a Baghdad center, and now the State Department is asking us to reestablish that center. Does that mean we can do archaeology there? Would we want to under the current circumstances? I don't think so. So, our hopes are in tatters at the moment for the Middle East. We'll just see how it develops.

G: How has your work, particularly your work with Biblical archaeology, helped to put USF on the map so to speak, and intrigue people to come to USF?

S: It has put us on the intellectual map simply because all my publications say University of South Florida on them. They identify me. In fact, what I discovered was some of my colleagues assume that we have this huge program here in Biblical archaeology, which we do not. It's just me. Everyone knows about USF and the USF excavations at Sepphoris in Israel, but that doesn't mean much more than the reputation in the scholarly circles is secure. If the day ever comes that I retire I don't know if USF would even hire someone to do Biblical archaeology as my replacement. That would be up to the department, for example. Students come here, yes, to take Biblical archaeology. They discover it can only be a very small part of what they want to do. They usually suffer

some disappointment, but they go ahead and they take that small part. If they really want to do it more seriously they get up and they go to places like University of Pennsylvania, or perhaps some seminary somewhere has a large Biblical archaeology program, or Wheaton University, or one of those places.

G: You came here as an assistant professor, you eventually became an associate professor, then a professor, and in the early 1980s you became dean of the College of Arts and Letters.

S: That's right.

G: What were some of your responsibilities as dean, and what were some of your major initiatives as a dean?

S: As a dean what they tell you is that you're responsible for personnel, for example, and for budget. For the security of the buildings, they make you building supervisor of any buildings that you have. You're responsible for personnel issues, hiring and firing and evaluations. The real crux of the matter is budget because you can always assign someone who knows the personnel issues for you and they can come back to you and say we've got some things we've got to adjudicate, or you can assign people for other areas like curriculum. Well, as a matter of fact you expect the chairs to develop curriculum and to do it well. They know their discipline. It really comes down to budget. What I discovered was, as dean of Arts and Letters, almost the smallest college in the university in those days, nine departments and mostly humanities, that the degrees of freedom I had in budgetary matters was just really tiny. For example, I discovered to my chagrin that the major part of the budget went to offering two hundred section of freshman English a year. That was just the truth of the matter. I tried to innovate some things like lecture

series to stimulate the intellectual life, but that had a built in component, though, of fighting with the chairs. I would say to the chair, okay I'm going to give you \$2,000 for a lecture series. They would say that's terrific, can I spend it to offer a class? They were under such tremendous from pressure from students clamoring for classes and with very low budgets to do this. I would say it's really for the lecture series, and so sometimes that flew and sometimes it didn't. The other thing I discovered I could do, because it meant new money, was technology. I could bring us into the technological age with computers, and with people in the humanities that was a very hard sell at first. Fundamentally, they then saw computers as replacements for typewriters. Typewriters they knew and understood, they hardly ever failed. The computers crashed two or three times a day. For some people it was not interesting at all to switch over to a computer. It only became interesting to those who were at the limit of production on a typewriter and discovered that they could do wholesale editing on screen, right there. That became very attractive to them. I also tried to point out that they could do their own budgets on the computer, and they could even balance their checkbook if they wanted to as far as I was concerned. There were lots of other services available by way of the computer. They could maintain student lists and do automatic calculation of grades and all this business. I would say that's the major innovation that I introduced. I've discovered that the first upper administration would say nobody in the humanities needs a computer. So, I finally joined a group called Computing in the Humanities, had the college join it. [We] offered to send people to the national meetings, got some takers. [I also introduced computers by] subscribing to computer magazines, which in those days were far too technical. I put them prominently on a table in the dean's office so that if professors came down to see

me for something or other and they wanted to read, they could read *Atlantic Monthly* or they could read a computer magazine. Many of them picked up the computer magazine just out of curiosity. They would discover all kinds of bibliographic projects in the humanities, for example, by way of computer. That seemed to finally make its mark. I really had to fight for it, but I got hubs put into the various floors of Cooper Hall so that the local area network could be set up and all of that. Again, people said to me nobody in the humanities is going to need this network. I would say eventually we're going to get into the library this way. They would say, but you're right next-door. I'd say it doesn't matter, you won't have to interrupt. You can just turn and look at your screen and type in something and find the book title and turn back to the student and say here's the title I mean. This has enormous applicability. Gradually, all that developed. I really was very pleased about that. I've had people say, you know when you were dean you made us learn computers. Of course I didn't make anybody learn. I just say yeah.

G: After being a dean you became the chair of the religious studies department, what were some of the initiatives that you helped found during those days, and where do you see the department of religious studies moving into the future?

S: I quit as dean so that a College of Arts and Sciences could be set up. It became very clear to me that there was really no future for a college of arts and letters just in humanities. I broached that three years before to the provost, who said don't do anything now; this is not a good time. I would do it again the next year and he would say not now. The third year he said okay, put it in your resignation letter and then I can use that as ammunition to put these together, so he did. I think it has had enormously healthy effects for the university, because now this huge thing called Arts and Sciences is the core of the

university. It has a kind of leverage that it would never have in terms of grant money and all of that business, particularly when you're trying to be a research one university. So, when I went back to the department they said, well would you be our chair now because you understand how the system works? I said okay, but it's going to cost you. Clearly, from my perch up there looking at the department, and it gives you a new perspective, we weren't working very hard in my estimation about integrating ourselves into the whole university. [We weren't] participating in all the alternative programs that would show up that would actually help our students or ourselves. Part of that was the technological stuff, but some of it was frankly interdisciplinary. I think everyone in religious studies is naturally interdisciplinary because we use all these research methods from everybody in the social sciences as well as the humanities, but nobody thought to formalize that in any real sense. Then, that meant formalizing and extending our connection with places like sociology and criminology, the political scientist, and even people studying policy and policy making for the government. There turns out to be a religion component in all of these. What I was saying was, if we don't initiate the contact our colleagues may go blindly through the rest of their careers kind of not doing anything about the religious component. In those days my illustration was how people bothered with what we used to call Yugoslavia, with these enormous religious differences, which in a way were contained at that moment. We would say we're in a position to be able to say to the policy makers, here's something about Yugoslavia you really need to know about ethnic conflict and religious conflict. What are the things that they've done that tended to work and things that don't work? [Notice] how they remember very well what happened 400 years ago and they keep telling the stories, and that keeps that alive and it makes it

something that you have to take care of in policy making. There was also another thing. It looked to me like we were crossing some sort of threshold in terms of the impact of the department rather broadly in Florida and nationally because our scholarship was advancing so strongly and being noticed so widely. It just seemed to me that we needed to take advantage of that in some way. We tried two efforts to take advantage of that; one was with the school system. We discovered quite to our chagrin that the descriptions of courses that were written up for teachers all over the state of Florida and all counties...For example, when the pilgrims were discussed, say in English, you would never know that the pilgrims were Calvinistic Protestant Christians. You just wouldn't know; there was nothing in there at all about the origins of this movement or anything else [about] where they came from. That was really very strange. That meant that when we would get students from the schools, there was a kind of a hole in their education. So, we did manage to get those rewritten, but that whole effort to do something with education really didn't get very far. I was certainly naive. I didn't realize that the whole educational effort anywhere in the country is almost a closed system. They talk to each other very strongly, but they don't necessarily pay attention to non-educational people. It's almost like trying to talk to engineers. Engineers say, but you don't know anything about engineering. Well, that's correct but I do know something about ethics, and I know how to talk about whether or not the bridge should be built, never mind how to build a bridge. That is, we can make a contribution even if it wasn't [technical]. It didn't change the teacher, but it did change the context. That ended up not going anywhere. That effort we couldn't pursue. The second one was in publication, seeking ways to support people in the department who were working on publication. I tried everything I could

think of up to and including going to the dean and saying look, would you support a professor for a semester off, assigning that professor just to do research if we rolled his salary back \$2,500 and hired an adjunct? Then the department put up \$2,500 and hired an adjunct for another course, and then you gave us \$2,500. If we guarantee you you'll get a refereed article or over what you would normally expect to see, or maybe even a book. That did work since I knew the dean's lingo. See, I knew the dean couldn't just support a person and not have the classes taught. That worked very well, and it raised the productivity of the department rather amazingly. Frankly everybody [in the religious studies department] was a very good professor/teacher. All the student evaluations were very, very strong, but so is everybody else. So that which made the difference was that small amount applied to research and publication. That was another way to get money into the salaries of my colleagues in religious studies, and that worked.

G: Where do you see the department moving in the next decade?

S: Religious studies itself is changing very, very rapidly. The Biblical component is coming down to a rather small size. It used to be a third of everything we had to teach or we couldn't meet the demand. Now it's down to maybe ten percent of that which we do. The ninety percent is filled up now with all kinds of initiatives that, once, we knew nothing about. For example, we've hired somebody who came up with a BA in classical Chinese texts from China, Dr. Zhang. Then, she goes to the University of Minnesota and gets a PhD and now she's teaching with us. Well, since now China is no longer a million miles away, since now it's one mile away, and since we can get in there by email very easily, our students want to know more. In fact they must. One of the places we get pressure now, we never thought we would see the day, is from people in business who

say our students are going to be visiting China, they've got to know something. It can't just be the nuts and bolts and read some Chinese literature. Can you offer some courses that will do that? We're already doing that, we say and smile happily. I think this globalization, which often is discussed purely in economic terms but I think that's a mistake, is definitely with us. The cultural part of it includes religion, and we simply have to attend to that. So, I think we're becoming a department of global religion, kind of willy-nilly. That doesn't mean some great homogenization down to one way of talking about religion, it simply means you know something about and explain something about all the enormous diversity among human beings in terms of religion. All the predications about the disappearance of religion have turned out to be wrong, all of them. In our department we notice that when people give up on traditional religion that they adopt a way of looking at the world, which sure does look like primitive religion. You even get predictable responses. Why are you doing that? The answer is because this is the way the world is. Well, that's what people of, what we used to call, primitive religions say. We call it cosmological religion now days.

G: Just two more questions. When you came here in 1972 did you think you would be here thirty-one years?

S: No, I did not. First of all, I didn't want to be in Florida particularly. I wasn't attracted to sun or sand or salt water. Thirdly, when I got here I discovered this huge anti-intellectual streak in Florida, which I was unprepared for. There was no easy approbation. People said you're a professor. It made it easier to be accepted if I said I'm a professor of religious studies. There was enough religious residue in Florida so to speak, and religious people that they said oh okay, then you must be okay. But this anti-intellectual

streak was really quite strong, and I was unprepared for that. Secondly, it was clear from the very first time, the day we got here, how the schools were somewhat backward and our children were suffering. We had to do a lot of work. We found schools for the gifted. We found Montessori schools, which had nothing to do with what I was doing here necessarily except that we're trying to help our children survive. That, by and large, was successful. It wasn't monetarily successful, but educationally it was a very good experience. So, I thought I might be here three years. My wife and I talked about and decided we had to get out of here. I thought I might publish my way out of here in three years. It turned out to be kind of the other way. First of all, the people with whom you naturally talk and all that anyway tend to be supportive, so we had very good friends here in a very short time. They were very supportive, very helpful. Even the fact that the legislature ignored us was a tremendous advantage. It gave us a kind of freedom in the classroom that we might not have had. I would read in the papers where a legislator would say university professors, we shouldn't pay them so much money; they only work twelve hours a week. I think great God almighty, how does he conclude that? As long as they didn't notice us so to speak, well that gave us a great deal of freedom, and I very much like that. I like the dimension of teaching here and being given real freedom in the classroom. I must say, and I have to illustrate that by teaching in a small, very nice school in New Jersey. I'll let it be anonymous, but the dean saw me in the classroom one day as I was coming out. He said where's your tie mister? I said I don't normally wear a tie. He said we all wear ties, which meant we were all male and we all looked like we were cut out with a cookie cutter. I found that very oppressive, frankly. Somehow I called attention to myself by not wearing a tie and I was really afraid his next question

would be, may I see the notes of your lecture please? At least he didn't do that.

G: My final question is something that I've asked everyone who has sat in that chair. If there was something that you could leave on record about your thirty-one years here at USF, or something to former colleagues or future colleagues and students, just a statement or a thought, what would that be?

S: Well, one of the things we treasure as professors is the intellectual life. Our values about the intellectual life survive with our students long after we're gone. That part of us will continue with our students.

G: Dr. Strange, thank you very much.

S: You're welcome.

End of Interview