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Luis Visot oral history interview by Andrew Huse, June 28, 2004

Luis Visot (Interviewee)

Andrew T. Huse (Interviewer)

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

Narrator: Luis Visot	Interviewer: Andrew Huse
Current Position: Executive Director of the Joint Military Science Leadership Center	Location of Interview: Tampa Campus Library
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Mr. Visot came to USF in 1981 as a resident instructor.

Background

After graduating from the University of Georgia with a master's degree in higher education administration, Mr. Visot applied for a resident instructor position at the University of South Florida. Before this, he had never heard of the university. After being offered the job, he packed up his belongings and moved to Tampa in January 1981.

Residence Halls

Mr. Visot explains that he refers to student housing as residence halls rather than dormitories because, "There's more than just sleeping ... Hopefully there is an experience that allows them to grow and become better citizens in the long-run." As the resident instructor for Beta Hall, he had the responsibility of not only managing the residents, but also working as an instructor in the department of sociology. Along with another staff member, he co-taught a leadership development course to undergraduate students.

From his post in the residence halls, Mr. Visot took advantage of an opportunity to work in the vice-president's office with the university disciplinary officers. He remembers his experiences favorably, reflecting that being spread out across the university "enhanced [and] complemented your resume."

Concern for students

"The number one priority for me is the love for students," Mr. Visot says of his work at the University of South Florida. "That's what keeps me young." Working with students over the years, he explains, has been a learning experience for him as well. "Student development is very much one of my passions." Another interest of his is leadership development, something which he "just kind of fell into."

Hallway "slip-n-slide"

On one occasion, he assembled some of the residents from his hall and created a "slip-n-slide" by pouring soap and water in the hallway so that students could slide along the floor from one end to the other. "As a good resident instructor who wanted to be part of

the team – I did it! Although my responsibility was to discipline, I think it allowed me to build a rapport with the students.”

Power outages

Mr. Visot also remembers that on several occasions, squirrels would get into the electrical systems causing the residence halls to lose electricity for periods of time.

Working for Raymond King

“Being a resident instructor here at USF was very rewarding ... It was a very positive experience.” Mr. Visot also favorably recalls his experiences working for Housing and Food Services Director Raymond King. “A great mentor for us – he genuinely cared for the students ... [and] he did everything in his power to ensure that we had the facilities and the environment for our students to be able to have a good quality of life.”

Village construction; Area Coordinator, Department of Housing and Auxiliary Services
Promoted to the position of Area Coordinator in 1982/3, Mr. Visot began working on a plan to develop and construct the village housing facility (which has since been torn down). When completed, the housing complex consisted of thirty buildings, each building with ten rooms and two residents per room. “It really enhanced ... my portfolio in terms of me having an understanding and appreciation of what construction was all about. So that was a highlight ... to be able to see something from nothing.” The first buildings were opened in the fall of 1983, and the remaining units were completed in the spring of 1984.

The construction of the Village in 1983 was prompted by a significant demand for more on-campus housing facilities at USF. “We had overflow on a regular basis. We had more applications than we actually had space.” The Village was reserved for upper-classmen and graduate students and, notably, the first married couple living on campus moved into the new facility upon its completion. When the project was first being considered, university administrators engaged a number of different businesses to find appropriate housing at a suitable cost. “It was a lot of fun – I really enjoyed my time working in the Village.”

Assistant Director of Residence Halls Training

After working as area coordinator for some time, Mr. Visot decided that he wanted to do something different. One of the areas where he felt work could be done was in staff development. Thus, he undertook a twofold effort to further develop the staff and provide some centralized information management for the housing staff. “I think the neatest part is being able to do staff training ... I was kept pretty busy ... I really got to be very creative and innovative – that’s what I liked about it ... That’s really ... what allowed me to get more into leadership development.”

Retreat at Chinsegut Hill

One particularly rewarding part of the job was an annual retreat at Chinsegut Hill for all of the residence halls. “It was just really nice ... I enjoyed that.” As a part of their training, he would stage various scenarios for the RA’s that they would be responsible for

resolving. “That was a fun job – I enjoyed it thoroughly ... and the students were very happy with the program.”

Assistant Director of Residence Halls Operations

Mr. Visot believes that as he matured, Raymond King trusted him with increasing responsibilities. After his work with staff training, he was asked to take the Assistant Director position which entailed assigning students to rooms, overseeing the cash operations and foodservice sales. “That’s really a time when we focused on providing quality service to our students, because that was [their] first impression.” The work itself, Mr. Visot recalls, was more administrative in nature, and often “very tedious ... detailed ... now you’re talking about human life ... collecting payment from students – that was a challenge ... We had fun.” Mr. Visot served in this position for approximately three and a half years, making it one of his longer jobs at USF.

Operation Desert Shield

Just after he left his position in the residence halls, Mr. Visot (a Captain in the Army) was called up to serve in the U.S. war in the Middle East, Desert Shield, in November of 1990. He was there until early July, 1991. “So when I came back, I wanted to do something different. And that’s when I went and talked with Phyllis Marshall. Mrs. Marshall hired him as Assistant Director of Operations at the University Center.

Transition to the Marshall Center

Mr. Visot recalls a healthy “competition” at the time between Phyllis Marshall and Raymond King, both of whom had been at USF for quite some time. “I wanted to go over to the student union to experience something different ... I don’t think Mr. King was very happy when I told him ... [but] he was very supportive ... [and] Phyllis welcomed me with open arms.” It was during this time that he met his future wife, Cindy Visot, who was working as the director of orientation. Mr. Visot laughs, noting that it was Phyllis Marshall’s intent to “play the matchmaker” and set them up.

Assistant Director of Operations at the University Center

It was important to Mr. Visot that the UC be a place where all students could gather in a pleasant and relaxing atmosphere. The Center also offers other opportunities, however, to get involved with student government, multi-cultural affairs, and Greek organizations, among others. As the assistant director, Mr. Visot was responsible for the reservations office, maintenance and housekeeping, information management, and the business office. “I had a great team. We did all sorts of fun stuff during that period of time.” Working at the UC provided him the unique experience of working with a large budget, amounting to approximately \$3.7 million at the time. In addition, he was able to work very closely with student government, something that he particularly enjoyed doing.

Special Events Center

Mr. Visot also had the responsibility of overseeing operations at the newly constructed Special Events Center, providing support and leadership for students as they managed various productions at the facility. This too was a learning experience for Mr. Visot which, he remembers, “worked out really well.” At the same time that the Special Events

Center was being built in the summer of 1990, the University Center was undergoing substantial renovations.

Associate Director of the Marshall Center

When the previous associate director left the university, Mr. Visot was asked to fill in as the interim director under Phyllis Marshall for a finite period of time. After being placed at the post, however, he was offered the position permanently. “I had the responsibility now for ... not only the operations side, but also ... the programming side” including the management of student organizations. As associate director, Mr. Visot felt he was able to effectively reconcile the “underlying conflict” between the operations and programming departments at the UC. “It was a lot of fun – I really enjoyed it.”

One of the challenging aspects of his job as associate director at the University Center was “trying to keep up with [the] times.” One dimension of that mission was introducing more popular restaurants such as Burger King to campus dining. “Everything is timing ... culture ... what they want to do.”

Director of the Marshall Center (August 1994)

When Phyllis Marshall retired, Mr. Visot was promoted to the position of director at the newly renamed Marshall Center (formerly the University Center). Though university buildings are typically named for their donors, the Marshall Center was unique in that it was named after someone who had devoted so many years of service to the university. “Students get all the credit” for the renaming, Visot says. “They’re the ones that pushed it. They’re the ones that went to Tallahassee.” Marshall “really gave her heart, her soul, her whole life to the ... Center.” Mr. Visot served as director for four years, from 1994 to 1998.

Mr. Visot made a personal commitment as Marshall Center director to regularly attend student meetings. “I felt that if I was going to ask students for dollars, I need to be available for them.” He particularly enjoyed the sorority rush period of the year, and often got involved in welcoming new students to Greek life. “During their first session, I used to get on top of tables and just get them all excited about being here at the University of South Florida ... [and] I used to go to all their sessions and visit with them ... I did the same for fraternity rush.”

Marriage

Mr. Visot met his future wife when he first began working at the University Center in 1991. After a year or two of occasional contact, they began seeing each other on a regular basis, and were married in March of 1994 at the Catholic Church on campus.

Continuing military service

In 1995, Mr. Visot was reactivated for military service, and was sent overseas to Bosnia and Hungary for about nine months.

Special Assistant to the Director of Latin American and Caribbean Studies Program (September 1998)

Because he speaks Spanish fluently, Mr. Visot had the opportunity to go to Venezuela for the Latin American and Caribbean Studies program, visiting various universities and recruiting students for USF. He spent a great deal of time coordinating and managing scholarships for Latin American students during this period. “I really built some very good friendships as a result of my time there,” Visot reflects. “[It was] very rewarding.”

University Experience course

At the time, Visot was also teaching a University Experience course, intended to expose incoming freshmen to life at the university. He believes that he was particularly well suited for the position, considering all his experience at the university. “That was very fruitful,” he remembers.

Other responsibilities

During this period, Mr. Visot had also begun doing his own consulting work, primarily motivational speaking. He also got involved with the University Ambassadors for some time. Often times, however, his momentum was disrupted by his recurrent service in the military. He tried to do much of the same coaching and mentoring with soldiers that he did with his students at USF. “I really enjoyed that opportunity ... There’s nothing more gratifying than to be able to serve with American soldiers who want to serve their country and want to make a difference.” He served in this capacity for two years, from 2000-2002 while his wife was back in the States finishing her doctorate; he returned to USF after a two-year tour overseas.

Alumni Affairs

In 2002, after returning from another military tour overseas, Mr. Visot began working with development and alumni affairs at the university. “The focus behind it was [to] try to market the alumni association to our current student population.” He worked there until February of 2003, when he was again activated and deployed overseas. Mr. Visot returned to the United States a year later in February 2004.

Perspective

Mr. Visot feels that his experience in the military gives him a different perspective when dealing with his responsibilities back in the university setting. “It gives me a total different [*sic*] perspective in my day-to-day life,” he explains.

Executive Director of the Joint Military Science Leadership Center

The Joint Military Science Leadership Center is a brand new initiative at the university which functions to house all branches of the ROTC programs under a single roof. At its inception, they were fortunate to receive a \$6 million donation from the federal government. Mr. Visot was asked to serve as director with the responsibility of developing the new program. “That was just a dream job for me ... [and] it’s a fantastic opportunity for the University of South Florida and I think it’s an initiative that’s going to pay big dividends in the future.” His job is to serve as a liaison between the military branches and build a conduit for future joint cooperation. “They’re going to provide a constituency ... the students for me to be able to do what I need to do.” The intent of the program, Visot explains, “Is to engage all the other ROTC programs in the state of

Florida; engage MacDill Air Force Base; engage, if possible, other military academies,” and other entities that stand to gain from such an endeavor. “You’ve got to develop a total [*sic*] new set of relationships.”

End of Interview