

4-4-2003

Alvin Wolfe oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, April 4, 2003

Alvin W. Wolfe (Interviewee)

Yael V. Greenberg (Interviewer)

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



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

Scholar Commons Citation

Wolfe, Alvin W. (Interviewee) and Greenberg, Yael V. (Interviewer), "Alvin Wolfe oral history interview by Yael V. Greenberg, April 4, 2003" (2003). *Digital Collection - USF Historical Archives Oral Histories*. Paper 201.
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/usfhistinfo_oh/201

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

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

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

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

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

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

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

Narrator: Dr. Alvin Wolfe
Current Position: Professor of Anthropology
Abstractor: Mary E. Yeary
Date of Interview: April 4, 2003
Final Editor: Jared G. Toney

Interviewer: Yael V. Greenberg
Location of Interview: Tampa
Campus Library
Editor: Danielle E. Riley
Date of Edit: October 31, 2003

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Year of arrival

He came to USF in August of 1974 as a professor of anthropology.

Circumstances that brought him to USF

USF was just starting a master's program in applied anthropology. He already knew a lot of the department members since the 1960s and had worked with them nationally on issues such as the employment of anthropology. He visited USF several times. Before coming to USF, Dr. Wolfe was at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. Dr. Wolfe says it was really cold up there. He says the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee was a wonderful urban school. The USF Anthropology Department members always encouraged him to come down to USF and join them. "I always said I will when you have a graduate program," he says. One day, Dr. Wolfe received a call from a department member who said, "Well, you can come down now, we have a master's program in applied anthropology." Dr. Wolfe adds, "This was perfect from my perspective because I always was an activist anthropologist." Dr. Wolfe worked out the details to come to USF. The dean of anthropology, Travis Northcutt, made final arrangements with Dr. Wolfe. He moved down to Florida in August of 1974 with his wife and three children. Dr. Wolfe and his family lived in a house on a lake that a professor allowed him to use at a low rent while the professor was traveling. While staying at this house, Dr. Wolfe was able to begin house hunting. At this time lake property was not very valuable. With a professor's salary, he was able to buy a house on a lake with two and a half acres. Dr. Wolfe says he does not think that is possible now.

His first encounter with USF

Dr. Wolfe says there was not much on Fowler Avenue. He says he liked the USF campus. He liked the relatively new buildings, such as the Administration building, the library, Cooper Hall, Social Sciences, Human Services, and Classroom Building A, now the Behavioral Sciences building. Dr. Wolfe says the Marshall Center did not exist yet. In place of the Marshall Center was the University Center. Dr. Wolfe says the center was a very modest building. There was no Sun Dome. There was a physical education building located in the same spot as it is today. According to Dr. Wolfe, it was also a modest building. It had a gym, but not much else.

Where the Anthropology Department was located in 1974

Dr. Wolfe says the anthropology department is in the very same place it is now. It is in the Social Sciences Building, suite 115. His office was and is located in suite 115. In 1974 there was an archeology lab.

Dr. Wolfe comments on the design plan for the anthropology part of the SOC building

Dr. Wolfe says the design plan for the anthropology part of the building was a terrible plan. He says the designers did not plan for any kind of movement of things and objects in and out of the building. He says in an archaeology lab there is a lot of moving and carrying in and out of the area. Dr. Wolfe says there is no reasonable loading dock. Commenting on the design plans, he says, "It is a very strange arrangement, which has lasted for twenty-nine years. I have never understood it—wasting so much energy carrying things up and down the stairs."

In 1974, was the anthropology department part of the College of Arts and Sciences?

The anthropology department was in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. The College of Social and Behavioral Sciences also included psychology, geography, political science, international studies, international affairs and sociology.

When he first arrived, details about the faculty in the department (who was there, what were the areas of specialties)

Dr. Wolfe says all four fields of anthropology were recognized. Curtis Weinker was the physical and biological anthropologist. There was a linguistics anthropologist, two archeologists, and the rest were social or cultural anthropologists. Also, there was a chair of the department. The graduate program at the time was only a master's program. Dr. Wolfe was brought in to be the coordinator of internships, which would train graduate students. This was in his contract. Dr. Wolfe says he was glad to be the coordinator because it was an area of his interest, which had developed over the decade leading up to 1974. He became interested in the area while working with the Society of Applied Anthropology and in some cases, with the American Anthropology Association. Both organizations were working on the idea of using internships for training graduate anthropology students. Dr. Wolfe says internships for training graduate anthropology students had never been done before anywhere. This was the beginning of the program. In the anthropology department there were two women and eight men.

Why did the Department of Anthropology want to start a graduate program?

Dr. Wolfe believes that most faculty members feel like a department is more complete, satisfying and successful when it not only has an undergraduate program, but also a graduate program. "Most of us feel that it is more interesting to teach graduate students. You get into deeper issues. It opens up the door to more research," states Dr. Wolfe.

Dr. Wolfe describes a college successful in anthropology that does not have a graduate program (Dr. Wolfe taught there and the current chair of USF's Anthropology Department is the daughter of the chair of the Anthropology Department at Beloit College)

He says there are good undergraduate programs and good schools that do not have a graduate program. According to Dr. Wolfe, Beloit College, which does not have a graduate program, has been outstanding in anthropology since the 1930s. He says this is due to the college having a great museum and a good endowment that prevents faculty from doing research. "They do things the way a department that has a graduate program would do things," he says. Dr. Wolfe is familiar with Beloit College because he taught there for one year before getting his degree. While at the college he met the chairman of the anthropology department, Andrew H. "Bud" Whiteford. His daughter, Linda Whiteford, became and still is chair of USF's department of anthropology. She will be stepping down soon. Linda Whiteford is also the president of the Society for Applied Anthropology.

The reason for USF choosing applied anthropology as the graduate program

In his own career Dr. Wolfe thought anthropology should do more than just teach anthropology. He felt like if a person does not put anthropology to use then there is something lacking. In the early 1970s when the anthropology department wanted to begin a graduate program at USF, the Board of Regents wanted to make sure that the graduate program would not duplicate what was already present in the graduate anthropology programs at UF and FSU. "The Board of Regents let it be known that it would not approve the same anthropology program. It would attract students away from UF or FSU," Dr. Wolfe says. Dr. Wolfe and fellow colleagues worked together on a national organization called the Committee on Employment of Anthropologists. Dr. Wolfe says there was a concern that universities were not expanding fast enough to find jobs for graduate anthropologists with Ph.Ds. Also, institutions with masters programs had just a temporary degree program that would lead up to getting a Ph.D. Dr. Wolfe and his colleagues believed there was a place for something more at the master's level. They wanted to be able to train people at the master's level to be good anthropologists and useful in the community. The whole anthropology department was involved in planning this.

The structure of the graduate program both now and then

The program began with a four-track approach. These tracks were urban, linguistics, medical and public archeology. The USF anthropology department believes the key principle of anthropology is a four-field approach. The program began with requiring first year graduate students to take one of four core courses depending on their field of study. These courses were Physical Anthropology, Cultural Anthropology, Linguistics and Archeology. Dr. Wolfe says in the long run they gave up the four core courses plan because the department began to find that those who taught the four core courses tended to make them more specialized than what was in mind. "In order to integrate the whole field, you need to teach those [courses] in a way that shows how they are integrated with each other. Now the anthropology department requires graduate students at the master's level and at the doctorate level to take a pro-seminar in anthropology. Dr. Wolfe says, "It's our way of insisting on a four field approach. We try to cover topics from all four perspectives. We integrate the field as best we can through the semester. I think it works out pretty well. We have specialists from the different fields coming in to talk to the students and guide class discussions." Dr. Wolfe coordinates the pro-seminars.

Why did anthropology students come to USF in 1974?

Dr. Wolfe believes that in the beginning students were mainly local people who wanted to get a master's degree, but it was difficult for them to leave the Tampa Bay area. He says they were good students. Dr. Wolfe says there was a vast population to draw from in the Tampa Bay area. These students were called place-bound students. He says this is changing quite a bit. "We had some who were deliberately anthropologists, but we had some who were good students who didn't know much about anthropology. But they were in a field where they couldn't advance without a higher degree," he says. These students' particular major did not have a graduate program. They would take undergraduate courses to get familiar with anthropology. Dr. Wolfe says many of these students had broader views and interests than just their narrow profession. Some of these students came from the professions or majors of nursing, public administration and urban planning. Dr. Wolfe says the people who are attracted or successful in anthropology are always those who have broader interests and not just narrow technical interests. Dr. Wolfe says the graduate program began to draw students who were had broader interests and who wanted to get a higher degree. Dr. Wolfe says then the graduate program became better known as faculty and students would give presentations at regional and national meetings. Referring to training students with the applied anthropology program Dr. Wolfe says, "People began to see the value of what we were trying to do." Dr. Wolfe says then the anthropology department got students from areas outside Tampa Bay. This has developed gradually over the years.

What is Dr. Wolfe's job as the coordinator of internships?

The first thing Dr. Wolfe did as the coordinator of internships was become familiar with institutions and agencies in the Tampa Bay area where anthropologists could be placed. Dr. Wolfe says there is a close relationship between internships and jobs. "The first thing we did was place them in internships with agencies such as health and rehabilitative services, public health services, planning agencies and other places where they could use the skills that we were training them to have. Those students could make a contribution to the agency or organization," he says. Dr. Wolfe says once they were placed in an agency, if they did a good job, the agency would ask them to stay on. "I did a lot of networking, traveling all over the area. I would visit areas and explain what we were doing and how our anthropologists could help them. Many people don't know what anthropologists do. Most of them would say how could an anthropologist help us. So I would explain to them what an anthropologist does," Dr. Wolfe states.

Anthropologists' careers

Around 1978, shortly after the graduate program began, Dr. Wolfe and others did a study in connection with the Society of Applied Anthropologists. It was a study of the jobs of applied anthropologists. "We were surprised to see the wide range jobs that anthropologists held. I remember finding that they are located in every sector of the American economy," Dr. Wolfe says. Dr. Wolfe also says the study included following anthropologists through their careers. Dr. Wolfe found that anthropologists tend to move up through the agency they are working for into administrative positions. "One of the reasons for this is that they are the kind of people that look broadly at the spectrum of the

environment in which they operate. These are the kinds of people that are wanted at the higher levels. They look at any problem in its widest perspectives,” he says.

When did the department of anthropology begin to offer a Ph.D. program?

Dr. Wolfe says it was ten years after the applied anthropology graduate program began in 1974. He says, “USF was growing, the Tampa Bay area was growing, the population we served was growing like the I-4 corridor.” According to Dr. Wolfe, officials of all kinds—the Board of Regents and local university administrators—were in a growth mode. “Our master’s program was very successful, recognized nationally and doing a good job locally. So I think all these people looked at us as growing. So one way to keep growing is to add to your graduate program. So they suggested they might consider a Ph.D. program in applied anthropology. They said for us to do the same thing at the doctoral level,” Dr. Wolfe states. The Ph.D. is called Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Anthropology. Dr. Wolfe says it is not the same thing as the master’s program. “We were training people at the master’s level to do applied anthropology. At the doctoral level, it was always thought of as a teaching degree. Many of our doctoral students have gone to other educational institutions. Our master’s program was practicing anthropology in non-academic settings,” he says. Dr. Wolfe says the Ph.D. program seems to have been successful in its seventeen or eighteen years of existence. Dr. Wolfe says the doctoral program had to be planned for several years. There was a lot of discussion about it.

In the 1990s, the College of Arts and Sciences is born

In the 1990s the colleges of Arts and Letters, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences combined into the College of Arts and Sciences. Dr. Wolfe says the College of Arts and Sciences is the biggest college at USF. It has over fifty departments.

How is USF different than the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee and Beloit College where Dr. Wolfe worked before coming to USF?

“USF is not that much different from the University of Wisconsin. They are both metropolitan-based and major research institutions. They did not have a program in applied anthropology. But they did have a degree in museumology, which is similar to applied anthropology. They were also closely related to departments that taught urban planning. At the time, I thought the University of Wisconsin was a better school. Their system is very good. The state of Wisconsin put more money into higher education than Florida did then or does now,” he says.

Where does Dr. Wolfe think the Department of Anthropology is heading in the future?

Dr. Wolfe says the changes in the anthropology department that have been made over 30 years have been gradual. He says the department is moving more into internationalization and globalization. Dr. Wolfe states that the department has put more emphasis into medical anthropology than other things. Dr. Wolfe believes this is because there is more money for research and health than in other areas.

Did Dr. Wolfe expect to stay here for twenty-nine years?

He did not expect to stay at USF for twenty-nine years. Dr. Wolfe says when he signed the loan for his house; he chuckled, because it said the house would be paid for in 2005. It was 1975. He did not think he would be in Tampa in 2005. Before USF, Dr. Wolfe had not stayed anywhere for more than six years. He has been at many different colleges and universities, and the most he ever stayed at any of them was seven years. Dr. Wolfe says he does not plan his life out that way.

Any last words of Dr. Wolfe to leave at USF

Dr. Wolfe wanted to mention his and others efforts in trying to get a Phi Beta Kappa chapter at USF. Phi Beta Kappa is an anthropology society for undergraduates. “We have worked so hard to get the society to recognize us,” he says. Dr. Wolfe states that USF has a strong undergraduate anthropology program. He is concerned about the fact that the program is not recognized by the society. “The fact that they don’t recognize our value means that our students cannot get inducted into the society. And that is a shame because we can offer them as good a liberal arts education as anywhere. We have the resources and the teachers,” Dr. Wolfe says. Dr. Wolfe says he and others have worked long and hard to get Phi Beta Kappa to recognize USF’s undergraduate anthropology program. The words he wanted to leave behind are: “We ought to keep pushing it. USF ought to continue pushing the issue. Don’t give up.”

End of Interview