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Andrew Bancroft oral history interview by Andrew Huse, May 26, 2004

Andrew Bancroft (Interviewee)

Andrew T. Huse (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Mr. Bancroft came to USF as a student in 2002.

Background

Mr. Bancroft's family moved to Florida in 2001 when he was a senior in high school; he graduated from Gaither High in Tampa. "I was new to Florida ... USF came to our [high school] ... and I was accepted right there on the spot, and [offered a] scholarship right there on the spot ... so that's really why I decided to come to USF."

Scholarships

He received a Bright Futures scholarship as well as a Presidential Scholarship, which combined paid his entire tuition costs.

Local ministry

When he moved to Tampa, he first got involved with the local office of a childcare ministry that works with orphaned children in Uganda, East Africa.

Bancroft's father

Bancroft's father was himself involved with Baptist Student Ministries back when he was in college in Oklahoma, and it only seemed natural that Andrew would do the same in Tampa. "I'm just kind of following in dad's footsteps here."

Baptist Collegiate Ministry

The BCM, Bancroft explains, is actually a nationwide organization funded largely by the Southern Baptist Convention. They also receive a great deal of support and assistance from churches in the surrounding area. He estimates that the BCM has been active at USF for nearly forty years, making it the oldest student organization on campus. "We have weekly meetings [of] over a hundred students ... just an active organization that really is involved."

Unity and diversity

“I think ... as time goes on ... you see a lot more diversity ... instead of unity in the university. What we’re really trying to do is incorporate both of those back in ... We can respect you – very much – for your beliefs, but here’s what we’ve got – here’s what we have for you. And students really respond well to that.” Although it is a Christian organization, Bancroft recalls that they have had Muslim and Hindu students involved with the BCM as well. “Sometimes they come back, sometimes they don’t. But it’s been awesome to see how many diverse types of people can come to our meetings and still enjoy it and come away with something new.”

Typical BCM meetings

A typical meeting, according to Bancroft, begins at 8:00 pm on Thursdays. They begin by gathering at their building on campus, enjoying some time of music followed by a short lesson for the students. After that, they typically have some type of food, and then the students take time to relax and socialize with one another. “It’s an active building, it’s always open, people are always there, but the meetings are one of our biggest events.”

Dr. Elton Smith

Bancroft first met Dr. Elton Smith when he came to the BCM nearly two years ago. “He comes to about every meeting ... He’s a great man ... I love Dr. Smith, he is so awesome ... He’s been there for us ever since we started ... he’s so wise.”

Activities

Besides their weekly meetings, BCM hosts tailgate parties at university sporting events in addition to participating in the homecoming parades. They also attend student conferences outside of the University, and hold regular events to attract students to the organization. Though they are not currently involved with any charities, he believes that in the past, BCM worked with Habitat for Humanity. “As president this year, I may look into going out into the community and working with them.”

Academics

Mr. Bancroft is majoring in Management Information Systems in the College of Business. He believes that some of the mission work he has been involved in, particularly a recent trip to South Africa, has really helped him to keep his perspective and decide what he wants to accomplish in life.

Hopes for the future

What he hopes to do is complete his degree and then possibly go on to a theological seminary to become a pastor or possibly even a teacher like Dr. Smith. “A lot of countries won’t let you come in as a missionary – they’ll just reject you right out. But, as a teacher, they might let me come in ... and I could teach them computers and at the same time accomplish a new mission for the Lord. And that’s really my heart. It all depends on where God leads me, because it’s all up to Him in the first place, for me. It’s an exciting journey. I’m ready for it.”

Personal motivations

After becoming a Christian about three years ago, Bancroft now confidently asserts that, “The primary thing that motivates me is God.” Though he had grown up in and around the church, “I had never gone that extra step and made that commitment to follow Him for the rest of my life. That commitment is what changes your life. That’s really my personal testimony ... I can’t separate myself from it anymore. I’ve become a child of God, and I know that He’s the one directing my paths from this point forward ... Everything I do, the Bible says, I should [look] at it as working for the Lord, and not for man ... because He deserves all the honor and glory.”

BCM President

The decision to run for president of the BCM, Bancroft recalls, was “kind of brought to me.” This past semester, he was approached by the organization’s director and asked to serve as the president. “It was kind of an appointed thing. I didn’t really run for an election – it wasn’t like that, [but] the BCM did approve.” When he was nominated, Bancroft recalls, “I was really humbled and privileged at the same time ... Our former president just did an awesome job ... And I saw all the work that she did, and I knew it was a lot of work ... she kind of lit a torch, and now I’ve got to run with it ... and that’s what I’m looking forward to doing.”

Duties of the president

The duties of the president, Bancroft explains, are linked largely to the leadership council, serving as a liaison to student government and as a role model for the students. “I kind of have to live a life that’s pure ... really so that people see an example and just kind of instill that in them – that’s really my goal.” Though occupying seats of leadership, he prefers to call his council “servants” because they are largely called upon to go out and do the work.

Reaching out to new students

The university experience, Bancroft asserts, is an entirely new world for incoming students. One of the primary problems he finds among young students on the campus is loneliness. “They really shouldn’t have to reach out that much. We should be able to go to them and say, ‘Hey, come with us, and we’ll stay alongside with you.’ So we’ve really been able to alleviate some of those fears that come with coming to a brand new place.”

The BCM also has a program to get new students involved with upperclassmen at the University. “There’s strength in numbers, and we thrive off of that.”

Intellectual support

Bancroft is aware that students are being bombarded with many new ideas and notions about life in general, which is another part of the university experience. He asserts that the BCM is a valuable resource for all students. “We notice a lot for our Christian students that professors often times don’t side with them in their beliefs, and they’ll criticize, and it really helps to have some encouragement alongside other believers – and we provide that. And for non-Christians as well ... when you don’t have a friend, you can

always come to someone at the BCM ... and it really helps ... to have someone there with you.”

Inter-faith activities

The BCM has been “talking about” participating in inter-faith activities with other religious organizations on campus. “We haven’t done it yet, but I think it could be something we do in the future ... We definitely support what they’re doing ... we’re all going for the same goal ... to show people the same love, and that same care.”

BCM Conferences

The high points of the year for Bancroft personally are the spring and fall conferences where the local chapter goes out to meet with Baptist Collegiate Ministries from all over the state. “It’s just a huge event ... it’s a magnified version of our Thursday night meetings. Those are always the best times of the year for me ... those are what I look forward to.” Before he became president of the BCM, Bancroft actually served as a state representative for the organization, where he was very involved with the planning of the conferences.

Friends of Internationals

On campus, the BCM works closely with a group called “Friends of Internationals,” to minister to international students. “International students are some of the brightest minds on this campus, and they really have a contribution to make to us.” They have done a variety of events in conjunction with the Friends of Internationals organization, including a trip to the Kennedy Space Center, as well as a number of retreats.

Personal impressions

“Personally, for me, [the BCM] is a fun place to go to ... it’s an active, student-led organization ... and you can’t beat free food ... [It is] really fun to see students’ lives change.”

“Prayer-walks”

The BCM is also very active on the University campus itself, and is involved with the orientation events for incoming students. On Fridays, members of the BCM will walk around campus and offer to pray for students. “We really find a lot of times that students are just so appreciative of that, that somebody would care about them on that level ... we’ll post that on the message board on our website, and people actively pray for those things ... We find that students really connect with that ... level of caring ... We find that when we say, ‘Can we pray for you,’ we build a relationship from the very start that says we care.” “We’re out there trying to find the lives [God] is working on – and respond to those people.”

Campus evangelists

In regards to the occasional itinerant evangelist found standing out on campus grounds shouting and condemning students, Bancroft comments that, “He’s hurting out faith. He’s hurting our relationship with students ... There’s no time in the Bible that Jesus was ever like that ... In a walk with God, you want to always become more like what Christ is.”

That is when the BCM decided to start going out and doing the “prayer-walks” on campus. “ I just really want to reach out and say, ‘You know what, we’re not all like that.’ ... Coming to a relationship with God through Jesus Christ is a personal thing, and it’s led on through time – it’s not something I can force [on] anyone.”

Personal approach to ministry

“My perception of any person on this campus is not to judge them but to love them. And that’s what Christ did ... I just want people to know that God does love them, that He’s there for them, that they’re made in His image ... it’s a powerful thing ... Compassion ... drives the ministry.”

“Our sign says BCM, but we’re open to other students as well ... It’s not just an exclusive thing ... The idea is to ... welcome in new students ... all to develop relationships – that’s what we’re really seeking ... reaching out to the campus.”

Advice for incoming students

To a Christian student, Bancroft would urge them to “definitely come to the BCM and get involved.” To any other, he says, he would give the same advice, “because these people really do care.” He believes his own experiences to be an effective testament to the effectiveness and value of the program at USF. “Be prepared for a challenge, is what I’d tell them, but be prepared for an exciting journey because USF is an awesome campus, and I love it.”

End of Interview