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## Melissa Kelly oral history interview by Andrew Huse, July 29, 2004

Melissa Kelly (Interviewee)

Andrew T. Huse (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center  
Oral History Program  
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Panhellenic Council  
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

*Ms. Kelly came to USF as a student in 2001.*

*Background*

Ms. Kelly was born and raised in Tampa, thus has always been aware of the University of South Florida. Though she had planned to attend a different university, she changed her mind at the last minute and decided to stay in Tampa and attend school at South Florida.

*What makes USF distinctive*

Ms. Kelly believes one thing that makes USF so distinctive is that, “We are not predominantly known as a party school ... [like] some of the other colleges ... We are a little bit more progressive ... a little bit younger ... Students here seem to be a little bit more at a higher level of thinking ... We are a very diversified university.”

*Marketing program*

She chose to study marketing after speaking with a USF business graduate who spoke highly of her experiences in the program. Though she had initially planned to major in pharmacy, Ms. Kelly decided that marketing better suited her personality. She hopes to end up working with women’s groups and doing more public speaking, “That’s where my real passion lies.”

*College of Business*

“[The] college of business is wonderful,” Kelly says of her experiences in the program. “And every professor I’ve ever had there has been so helpful and so wonderful and always willing to go the extra mile for me as a student ... [and] it’s very professional.”

*Extracurricular activities*

Ms. Kelly recalls the incoming student orientation was really helpful, and was what first introduced her to Greek life at South Florida. “I think everybody has a need for social belonging ... [but] I didn’t think Greek life was for me.” After some consideration, however, she “went out on a limb” and decided to go through the Greek recruitment process. “It’s amazing – that’s just what opened up the door for me.”

### *Alpha Delta Pi sorority*

As soon as she walked in the door at Alpha Delta Pi sorority, Kelly recalls, “I just fell in love with these girls. They were classy, they had values ... based on the ideas of Christian womanhood ... I thought, I just have to be here, this is the place for me.” After her acceptance to the sorority, Kelly felt an immediate sense of love and acceptance, reflecting that, “It was all falling into place from there ... It has just opened my life up so much ... Who I am today is a direct result of those women being in my life ... They encouraged me, they enriched me, and they fulfill me to this day.” Though many of her sorority sisters have graduated and since moved on, “the love stays forever.”

### *Volunteer work; Involvement*

Once in the sorority, Ms. Kelly began doing work with Volunteer USF, later becoming the philanthropy chair at Alpha Delta Pi. The following year, as a nineteen year-old sophomore, she was asked to serve as president of her sorority chapter. “It’s like being the CEO of your own company almost ... I really didn’t think that I was that qualified.” After her yearlong tenure as chapter president, Kelly joined the Panhellenic Council, where she was elected president. With a continuing desire to serve and impact still more people, Kelly decided to work as state coordinator of S.E.P.C., where she would be able to work with the greatest number of women.

### *Volunteer USF*

She worked as a coordinator for a program called “Alternative Spring Break” at Volunteer USF, where groups of students are taken to do weeklong volunteer work over spring break. “It was really my first real ... leadership experience of any kind. [It was] a very rich group of students ... very diverse ... We had a good time ... It was a rough week, to be honest, it was a lot of hard work.”

### *Leadership*

Ms. Kelly believes that she is a strong leader because, she explains, “I think that I am a little bit more mature for my age ... I don’t think that I’m a typical twenty-one year old woman and I think that I see something greater in people ... That’s a direct result of my Christianity and who I am.”

Ms. Kelly recalls a particularly significant candlelight event with her sorority sisters when, as the philanthropy chair, she spoke from her heart and emerged as a leader for her organization. It was the very next year that she was asked to serve as president of the sorority. “I had known that I wanted to be president of the chapter since the day I walked in,” she recalls.

### *Nomination for president*

While involved in Greek organizations and student life on campus, Ms. Kelly was also working full time. Faced with the possibility of serving as chapter president, she recalls that, “I had pretty much decided ... that I wanted to kind of give up ... the life that I had ... to really be chapter president because it is a labor love doing that. You have to be dedicated to the sisters all the time.” When nominated for the position, she accepted

enthusiastically, noting that she “would be honored to be the president of this chapter ... and [she] won the election.”

Once nominated, Ms. Kelly successfully ran against two sorority sisters for the office of president and won. “I happen to be a more exceptional person for my age, and I know that ... and it’s just a result of how I grew up ... and the sisters chose [me].” She remembers feeling particularly honored when elected president of her sorority, “I felt loved ... and very well respected ... it made me feel so proud.” What she did not know at the time, she reflects, was that, “It would become who I am for the rest of my life ... It really molded the things I want to do for the rest of my life.”

#### *Responsibilities as the chapter president*

Asked what her duties were as sorority chapter president, she replies, “Anything and everything.” On any given day, she estimates that she would receive fifteen to twenty phone calls just from those women in her chapter in addition to working with various offices on and off campus. One of the most significant events during her tenure as president was the installation of Greek housing on campus, something that had been an issue at USF for many years. “That’s the best part about it. The women in the chapter are what make it the greatest position ever ... I love it more than I have loved anything else ever.”

#### *Recreation*

Ms. Kelly explains that she and her sorority sisters participate in many social events with other organizations. They also host chapter events such as movie nights, slumber parties, and ice cream socials. “Spending time with each other really allows us to open ourselves up to who we are.”

#### *Future plans*

Though Ms. Kelly cannot be certain that a career in politics is ahead of her, she explains that, “I doubly want to be in a public position where I can help people in general ... I guess we’ll just wait and see – whatever life has in store for me.”

#### *Panhellenic Council President*

After serving as sorority president, Ms. Kelly moved on to become the president of the Panhellenic Council at USF. Her election served as evidence of her success as chapter president, and gave her the opportunity to work with Greek organizations on a higher level. “With this, I have to be more hands-off almost, and so I’ve learned a lot about leadership even from this ... It’s just been a more unique experience for me I think.”

#### *Southeastern Panhellenic Conference*

There is an annual conference in Atlanta when the women of Panhellenic councils come together to discuss women’s issues and Greek life while refining leadership skills. The conference often invites speakers to address important issues

*Graduation; Reflections on time at USF*

Ms. Kelly plans to complete her coursework at USF and graduate in the spring of 2005. “I could never have asked for a better college experience,” she reflects. “I had no idea that my life would be as enriched as it is. I had no idea that I would become who I am ... and I love USF for it; I will always be appreciative to this university for that.”

*End of Interview*