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Joseph Quarcoo oral history interview by Andrew Huse, January 7, 2004

Joseph Quarcoo (Interviewee)

Andrew T. Huse (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Personal background; academics

Mr. Quarcoo received a bachelor's degree in mathematics in his native country of Ghana, after which he was awarded a scholarship to pursue his master's degree in Italy. Though his intention had been to return to Ghana, he found that the mathematics program at USF was particularly suited to his interests, and thus made the decision to apply to the university as a Ph.D. student. He first arrived at USF on September 7, 2001.

Experiences in the U.S.

He is very happy to be a student in the United States, and notes that experiences here have been very good ones. "The college systems here take care of everybody." In Ghana, for instance, it is very difficult to get into the universities, and requires a "very high grade score ... it is very selective ... they only take the most qualified people." He particularly appreciates being able to take advantage of all the technological resources at the disposal of university students in the United States. "Here, the professors too are very nice, they are friendly."

African Students Association

As a student at USF, Mr. Quarcoo learned of the African Students Association, an organization that had been formed in 1997 with the intention of "bringing together all Africans in the United States." The Association provides members with a valuable forum not only to express a collective identity, but also to appreciate the diversity of their own individual backgrounds and experiences. Additionally, "It promotes the knowledge of our Africa and what's happening on the continent." While the organization first began as a primarily social activity, it has since become more and more discussion oriented. US-African relations are among the subjects given most frequent attention.

Emigration of students from Africa

Mr. Quarcoo also discusses the tendency for many hard-working African students to move abroad to pursue their higher educations. After spending a number of years in another country such as the United States, one has settled and finds it increasingly difficult to return to life in their native country, particularly after adjusting to all the

conveniences of western society. The majority of people who come to pursue their education, according to Quarcoo, do not return. "The life here is very easy ... so they don't go back." Because of such patterns, Mr. Quarcoo stresses the importance of giving back to one's native country.

ASA Campus activities

The African Students Association gets involved in various activities both on and off campus, including tutoring mathematics and sciences to local high school students. They also participate in Black History Month, work alongside the NAACP, and organize events with other student organizations such as Club Creole, an ethnic organization often referred to as "the first daughter of Africa." The Association is also very involved with the Institute for US-African Relations at USF.

Africa Week

In the spring semester every year, an Africa Week is held to celebrate African culture on the USF campus. Included in the week's events are poetry readings and cinema viewings in order to expose people to African traditions and methods of expression. The week culminates in an "African Night" of drama and dancing. "[Students] get more enlightenment about what Africa is and who African people are ... and change their perceptions."

Future of the ASA

The future of the African Students Association, Mr. Quarcoo asserts, is entirely dependent upon the evolving composition of the organization as priorities change and the participation rises and falls. Additionally, while he was fortunate to be granted admission just before September 11, 2001, many other international students have experienced difficulties as a result of increasingly stringent migration and exchange policies. "I was very very lucky," reflects Quarcoo.

September 11; National security

Mr. Quarcoo recalls that he was on campus as the tragic events of September 11, 2001 transpired in New York City and Washington D.C. "It's a shock ... what people can do to this great country ... People come from all countries and they make it here ... when you come here you can do a lot of things ... I think the country has become more secure."

End of Interview