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Ernest Cox oral history interview by Nancy Hewitt, July 25, 1985

Ernest Cox (Interviewee)

Nancy A. Hewitt (Interviewer)
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Hewitt: I am speaking today with Dr. Ernie Cox, Professor of Art, as part of the USF Silver Anniversary Oral History Project. Could you tell me first of all, what was your first contact with the University of South Florida and what made you decide to come here to teach?

Cox: Well, I had gotten out of graduate school and looked at a collection of about 6 available jobs in the country in my field of sculpture. And after the summer's applications were all in and the response to those applications, I had come up with nothing. So I started applying to public school districts along the east coast and ended up in Jacksonville. Florida was always sort of a mystical state and I didn't know what I was going to get into. I came down on an interview and I ran into a woman who was supervisor of art in the art program at Jacksonville public schools. She had an amazing attitude about art. She was looking for artists, and she wasn't looking for certification and education courses. She hired me and I got a job at that same time for the Jacksonville Art Museum. So the two jobs together were better than starving back in Michigan where I had gone to graduate school. So I came down here. Once in the state you naturally begin to make contacts. I was still active in exhibiting, and I had connection with the Jacksonville Art Museum so that was a good kind of network that I found myself in. This school was new. I knew nothing about it, but someone said that in Tampa they were starting a new university. It was in its second year so why shouldn't I look at that as a possibility. So I did. And as a matter of fact, I think before they hired me, I was in part of a group exhibition which was shown here on the campus. So the people here, Harrison Covington and Wes Halper, were the only two faculty members who
were here when I was hired. They got a chance to look at the work in the show and they brought me down for an interview. That is basically the way it happened.

Hewitt: When did you actually start teaching here?

Cox: In '62.

Hewitt: When you arrived, you mentioned that there were only two professors in . . . Now was that in the whole Art department?

Cox: The whole Art department was two people. They had had a third, I think, the year before I . . . I think I was replacing someone who had started out with them. We had no facility. We taught in the basement of the Chemistry building or actually in the basement of the University Center and in some of the Chemistry classroom labs.

Hewitt: So the Chemistry lab seems to have been used for everything.

Cox: I guess it was. It was totally unsuitable for studio art. So of all the media that I had available to me, I could only use plaster and wax in those rooms because anything else made too big a mess. We were very limited in what we could do.

Hewitt: Now a lot of the faculty have talked about teaching in joint appointments in both Liberal Arts and Basic Studies. Was Fine Arts separate from Basic Studies or did you also have . . . ?

Cox: No. We had dual appointments. It wasn't the College of Fine Arts. It was a Division of Fine Arts. But we had a dual appointment. We taught in the Basic Studies program as well. We taught majors who were in History and
Natural Sciences. Of all the rest who were asked to choose, I think two labs in the Fine Arts area, was probably their least interest. So they had four choices. They had music, theater, dance, and visual arts and they would choose two of those and take what amounted to, I guess, sort of sophisticated arts appreciation courses in those disciplines.

Hewitt: Now did you ever do any team teaching or interdisciplinary teaching?

Cox: A little bit. I taught a course with a theater professor and someone else, I can't even recall because it was so early on. I didn't teach outside the college, or the division I should say. I have to remember it became a college much later.

Hewitt: It's hard to keep those various states of existence clear in my mind even though I have now talked about it with about 40 different people. I'm still not quite sure when things changed from division to programs to colleges. In those early days, a lot of people have talked about the fact that there was much more familiarity among the faculty members, especially people knowing people outside their program or college or division or whatever. Was that true in the fine arts? Did you know people in biology or history?

Cox: I certainly knew more in ratio terms than you would know now typically. I was on almost every committee you can imagine if you could look at the sheet that I have built up. I had just turned 25 when I took this job. On some of these committees, which were all-university and fairly powerful curriculum and policy-making committees, I felt very much a junior member and I was sort of intimidated by the whole process. But it was also a very interesting learning experience.
Hewitt: As a junior faculty and someone who was relatively young at the time, did you feel like people listened to you even if you were intimidated by them? Was there a sense that administrators and deans and those kinds of people were accessible to the faculty?

Cox: Well, there was certainly accessibility in the department because here in the department we were creating curriculum from scratch, in a sense. And we were involved in planning buildings and that sort of thing. Really building from ground zero. At the university level, there were people who were much more experienced, who came from, often, administrative positions in other schools. I got a rough, what I consider in retrospect, a kind of rough and tumble introduction to internal politics and a scramble for power at the university level which was pretty interesting.

Hewitt: I would guess that most people who come out of graduate school in something like Studio Art imagine that they will go someplace and teach Studio Art where a studio is already set up and courses are set up. Since you had a chance to be involved in developing the curriculum, the buildings, and the studios, were there things that you were able to create that you particularly would like to see, that were distinctive from what most art schools would have?

Cox: Well, one of the first things that we did was build a foundry and at that time there was . . . This is a curious situation. We didn't have a hand in planning the lay out of the buildings, these three buildings, which are part of the Fine Arts complex. They were already in the works when I came. I don't know that Covington or any of the previous faculty had really ever had a hand in that. Apparently the architects had talked to artist-teachers
somewhere and there was some idea that studios ought to have high ceilings and some natural lighting arrangement. But the rooms really weren't designed for the purposes they were put to, particularly some of the specialized areas. They made provisions for a kiln room—which was an internal room between the sculpture and ceramics rooms—which had an eighteen-inch exhaust duct which was supposed to take care of our kiln system. Well, it was totally inadequate, even for one kiln. We ended up never putting any of the kilns in that room. I think we tried one small one at one time, but we immediately made it known that it was impossible to operate a foundry or a ceramics kiln operation with the existing facility. And we pushed hard for funds for a new building. We built a small separate building. In those days you could actually get money for equipment and even for small buildings. We had a specialized building built to our design to take care of the foundry work and the ceramic. But to get back to the first part of the question, we built a pretty nice foundry at a time when very few schools, even big state schools, had foundries. Some did, but I mean certainly the majority of them did not. We equipped the shops with ... I don't know, looking back at it now it doesn't look like high tech, but at that time it was very adequate. It was a well-equipped metal shop and well-equipped wood shop that we put together. So we had a good physical facility early on. This building, I think, went up in '64, so we were involved in planning for equipping it for almost two years, from the time I got here. It took a lot of time and a lot of planning.

Hewitt: Let me just backtrack a minute. Do you remember when you first drove down to the University, whether it was for an interview or the visit, what your impressions of this place were?
Cox: There were only five buildings here at that time. And a lot of sand. I guess a lot of people that you have been talking to have talked about the desert, the little patches of grass, and the bits of sidewalk here and there. Basically it was pretty forlorn looking in a way. It was very small. The core of dorms were built and five academic buildings. One of them was the Administration building. My first office was in the Administration building. Later on in the old library which is the SVC building. They moved us around a lot. As they grew, they simply moved you to whatever was appropriate to accommodate the people they were bringing in and the programs they were bringing in. There was, of course, a lot of building. Always building going on. I don't remember the order of the buildings, but actually the Fine Arts complex was one of the very first additional complexes after I got here to go up. And that was basically, I think, a fortuitous kind of thing that developed from the friendship of the Dean of Liberal Arts division and the president of the University. John Allen was the president and Dr. Beacher was the dean or the head of the division of Fine Arts, and they were long time old friends from the University of Florida days. I think that connection really got us in as early as it did. It produced a priority that got us our building as early as we got it. It is very hard to imagine a large state university that would build a Fine Arts complex before Engineering or before Mathematics or even before Business buildings went up.

Hewitt: Now in the curriculum for the Fine Arts program, did the Basic Studies program really demand courses that would be sort of available to people with little interest or knowledge of art? How easy was it to develop studio courses?
Cox: Well, I don't know whether these labs that we taught for non-majors under the dual program, the Basic Studies program, I don't know whether those things were actually effective in recruiting or not. But right from the beginning we had a pretty good steady flow of people interested in the arts. There was a small faculty, but that small faculty had plenty to do. And we hired people continuously. We doubled the size of the faculty in 1963. We went from 3 to 6, which sounds like a small step, but we continued to add people every year for several years.

Hewitt: Now when the school opened I've been told that most of the students were first generation college students. And again that seems like a population that might not be particularly oriented towards taking Fine Arts or Studio Art courses, and it's not like there was some family tradition of fine arts background. Do you have any particular memories of what those early students were like in your courses?

Cox: Well, it is interesting. There seems, over the last 23 years that I look back on it, there seems to be a kind of cyclical wave-like pattern that happens. We get waves of very good students. In the beginning of the course, we had relatively few students and they were coming from the outland hinterlands of Florida. And alot of them I'm sure were first generation college students. In the arts, or in my area at least, it's still surprising in a way that some of the talent came out of the bushes, so to speak, and these people were people who made their mark professionally all over the country. Some of them are showing at major New York galleries, some of them are teaching at well know universities. A lot of them have had significant kinds of recognition. In the early days some of the first group of students
that we had here were just amazingly good and have proved so in retrospect. My attitude at the time was that these were talented kids, not everyone of course. You are always talking about a percentage of the people who went through our program. It seemed to me at the time, and still does, to be a high percent and a fairly unusual kind of quality and we have had that kind of quality again from time to time. But as I say, it seems to come in cycles. You have a period of high activity and a lot of talent. I think possibly, well not possibly, I'm sure there is a kind of competitive phenomenon that helps to up quality. In areas of high energy a lot of peripheral people are pulled into it and probably perform better than they might have in another context.

Hewitt: Do you think that the relationships between students and faculty in those early years at USF were different than they are now? That either faculty were more accessible or maybe because you were busier with all the committee work and buildings . . . ?

Cox: I can only speak decisively, I guess, from my area. Since we were very small we tended to have relatively small student instructor ratios and there was . . . I think it varied from instructor to instructor, but I always felt a lot of informality and I never felt that . . . For one thing I was not so far removed from some of these students in age. Particularly when I started at 25. So, I felt there was a lot of respect. One thing, you tended to know most of the students, either by name or at least recognize who they were. And maybe know something of their work from seeing it in exhibitions. In the early days we had a policy of faculty critiques of the work of every class. So we would go in at the end of the term and either participate or watch the critiques in progress and would be involved in talking to students
who we had not had in class. And it was small enough to be able to do that. It would be awfully unwieldy today. We would have to do it in shifts. But in those days you recognized most of the students who were taking art courses. And if you didn't know them by name, you knew them by face.

Hewitt: When you arrived here, I guess just after the Johns Committee had spent a semester at the University, when you arrived, did that seem like it had affected the faculty at all or were there any repercussions from that in spite of . . . ?

Cox: I knew a number of radical faculty who were very upset about that whole phenomenon. And of course this too was in days prior to the sort of social revolution of the late '60s. The sort of general feeling of the '50s still prevailed. It was a conservative time, a time of not making waves particularly and going about your business. So there were a few faculty around whose methods or ideas were controversial to say the least. Some of them paid a price for it, I suppose. I don't know all the individual situations, but I remember observing it and being conscious of the fact that some of my friends were really concerned with the "big brother is watching you" kind of attitude.

Hewitt: Now I have heard that USF, although outside the mainstream of sorts of the northern and western campus activism of the late '60s, did have student activism. Maybe more in the early '70s. Do you recall either students or faculty being involved in that or there being any atmosphere on campus that a social revolution had finally . . . ?

Cox: Yes. I think so. I think TV spread its influence. I mean you knew what was happening on other campuses. It was in the media all the time. People
out in the hinterlands were still very conscious of it. And of course in the Vietnam era the draft was a very real threat to people trying to stay in school or trying to stay out of war entirely. I think that it did reach here, of course. But it did have fairly early repercussions I think, that whole phenomenon did reach here. The University Administrative offices were never taken over. It never got to that kind of point here. But there were little pockets of pretty strong activity from time to time.

Hewitt: Do you think that it affected the students that you had in class? Did the students question authority more than they had in the early years or was there any sort of repercussion in terms of relationships with students?

Cox: As I looked back on it it seemed to be so gradual. It didn't happen over night. The sort of voluntary dress code changed, but I think it changed all over the country. When we started out we wore coats and ties, as faculty members, to almost any committee meeting or any occasion on campus and often in the classroom. Some of the students wore ties, usually not jackets, but shirts and ties often. That gradually changed in the course of the late '60s and early '70s. By the time it was 1972 or 1973 and I looked back on it, our kids looked like sort of minor league versions of what was going on in the rest of the community, I suppose. And not so minor league sometimes.

Hewitt: I looked at the pictures of the student body presidents that are hanging over at the UC and you can see the sort of . . . it was very, very abrupt.

Cox: That's right. You can really see it.
Hewitt: It goes from short hair to long hair and beards. Now it is sort of back to not quite short hair but . . .

Cox: But as it was happening it seemed sort of gradual. It didn't happen in a couple of months. It happened over a year or so. It was an interesting time. It was a time of more energy, activity, and vibrancy in the arts then any other time before or since.

Hewitt: Were there people in theater, studio art, and music who either arrived during that period and brought some of that vibrancy with them, or was it the people who were already here that became more interested in new sorts of art?

Cox: That is hard to answer. I never know where the students are coming from. When they are in my classes I don't know whether they have come down from Connecticut or whether they have come from Colorado. Often I find out somewhere along the line. There was always a sprinkling of students from out of state, particularly the northeast part. We had people from New York, New Jersey, and that sort of thing. More than the Midwest and certainly more than the west, but we have always had a sprinkling of kids from alot of different places. The local variety of kids were almost indistinguishable. I didn't feel that this was a deep south university with long traditions of a certain kind. These kids were probably mostly coming from, well alot of them came from the Tampa area, and I don't know whether you call this a metropolitan area or not, but it is certainly not out in the middle of the brush. They had, I guess again, TV and media had something to do with certain kinds of sophistication. They were getting outside information.
Hewitt: Talking about whether or not Tampa is a metropolitan area, you mentioned that you were a director of an art museum in Jacksonville.

Cox: I wasn't a director, I worked for them. I taught classes for them.

Hewitt: When you came down here, did you have much involvement in art museums or art councils in Tampa itself that weren't necessarily connected to the University?

Cox: No. There was very little going. Almost nothing in the Tampa area except at the University. The University was really the hub of that kind of cultural activity, the activity expressed through the arts.

Hewitt: Do you think since the University had been here that it has had an impact on changing that in Tampa? Is there more interest in the arts or more avenues for exhibitions in the arts in Tampa now than there were when you arrived?

Cox: Well, certainly more than when we arrived in the same sense that Tampa's skyline is changing and getting bigger and there are alot more people coming in. I think as you bring in more and more people from the north and the east who are in industry and business . . . We have already had certain kinds of cultural advantages and opportunities and when you bring them down here . . . You have got to offer them something of the same kind. If they are coming down from New York or Philadelphia you can't make the same offerings precisely, but you certainly have to create some kinds of substitutions, reasonable facsimiles in terms of music and dance. Of course, Tampa has not been able to support a good commercial gallery, I mean a top quality gallery with works by regional and nationally know artists. There have been a couple of valiant attempts made and some of them fairly
recently, but it has been tough to do. I think there are a lot of wealthy people in Tampa and people with a certain kind of sophistication, but often those people feel that when the money gets to be a big issue, they often go to New York to buy the works. And of course, I think, looking around at the theater that is going on here in Tampa now, there are two or three different companies that are surviving. I think that is terrific.

Hewitt: It definitely seems more visible than other changes in the arts.

Cox: I don't know. The University I think is still, particularly in the visual arts, is still the hub of activity in this community.

Hewitt: I remember when I first came down here for an interview, someone took me down to the city and took me to the Tampa Art Museum and told me that the best way to explain the arts in Tampa was that the Tampa Art Museum had no permanent collection.

Cox: And is out of sight and therefore to some extent out of mind. It is difficult to find it. It is certainly not a visible landmark in the downtown area. It has had a small budget. It has had all sorts of limitations. This town has just not made the commitment yet to the arts. And, of course, I guess the new Fine Arts complex downtown is a step in the right direction. I think as the city keeps growing that sort of thing is going to keep growing. The people who start these things tend to take it on the chin, though, they tend to deal with either conservative boards of trustees or lack of commitment to funding or city concerns about land or building commitment, all these things. And a lot of these people leave disillusioned and someone else ultimately comes along and inherits it and it begins to
improve. Sometimes you go through two or three generations of those people before you really begin to put a program on the map.

Hewitt: It is a good thing that you came here young. You may see it yet.

Cox: I may see it yet, that's right.

Hewitt: When the College of Basic Studies started to be dismantled in the late '60s, I guess it didn't get fully dismantled until the early '70s, was the Fine Arts program one of the ones that pulled out early and sort of developed its own majors and its own college? Or were there Fine Arts people involved in Basic Studies right up to the very end?

Cox: Well, it's interesting. I made a reference earlier to observing the maneuvering for power among people who were making decisions at the university level. Right from the beginning there were two points of view in opposition to each other. There was the "all university approach" which was sort of exemplified by people like Russell Cooper, who I think was a significant humanist and sort of ahead of his time in that sense. He really wanted to see an integrated university where students took courses across all kinds of boarders, but sort of traditional lines of demarcation. He wanted a strong liberal education and there were a number of people who did. But, on the other hand, there were those opposed to that point of view. There were a lot of people who wanted to build their own empires and wanted to give more and more strength in their own areas of discipline. They wanted to give more and more courses. And whatever fell by the wayside, whatever their students missed in that push was just too bad. It would be nice if they could get it, but it certainly was not high on the priority list. There were people who were really pushing to make their own programs stronger, more
professionally oriented, more all inclusive, and the Liberal Arts courses were often considered peripheral and extraneous and were easy for those people to let go. So you had both attitudes and I think there was no single point of view about that.

Hewitt: When did the Masters of Fine Arts become part of the program?

Cox: It must be in effect for 10 years or so, maybe it was 12 or 9, I'm not sure.

Hewitt: Has that changed the experience that faculty had with students? Did it change the undergraduate program at all to have masters' students in here?

Cox: Yes I think so. It gave the undergraduate students a chance to see the work of students who really were committed to these disciplines. Art has never been a very popular or easy way to make a living. It takes either foolishness or guts to jump off of the economic security of business, law, and medicine and so on into the abyss of art. So in a way I think it was very good for the undergraduates to see people who had made that leap, who were confident, who were talented, and who were doing very strong work. I think it is always good to have that kind of example.

Hewitt: Alot of people from the Social Sciences and Arts and Letters have talked about the fact that there was a real switch in the late '60s and early '70s from the sort of "Accent on Learning" emphasis on teaching as the primary focus of faculty work to emphasis on research and publication. In the fine arts, does that kind of transition make much difference? I mean is there a sense that teaching, research, and publication are sort of separate things that you emphasize separately and if they are, was there any shift in terms
of what you felt you were supposed to be doing according to the administration or other people in the department?

Cox: Well, the fine arts faculty is charged with carrying on a professional activity along with being involved in making works of art continually. Whether they show them commercially or not is not a particularly crucial point, although a showing of some kind is the publishing that artists do in a sense. There has been an emphasis on that right from the beginning in this department which I think is very healthy. Whether it is sometimes to the detriment of teaching, which I think it probably is in certain areas, where the research is so consuming ... It takes you out of the classroom and into laboratory. Whether that is the case in Fine Arts or not, I don't know. I don't equate it with that kind of thing so much. I think that most of our activity is easily translatable in the classroom. I think most of the faculty feel not only a willingness but an obligation to do it, to transfer it into the classroom. I don't feel that there had been ... Publish or perish is a kind of university phenomenon, of course, and I don't think that the Art department has suffered from that phenomenon even though it does exist, even in the arts. But I think that we have had a pretty good faculty, maybe an exceptional faculty, and the faculty has been very interested in teaching from the beginning and continues to.

Hewitt: Alot of people have also mentioned that their own experience, again especially in Social Sciences and Arts and Letters I think, really shifted when President Allen retired and Cecil Mackey became president. Do you know if those shifts of higher administration had a strong impact on the Fine Arts since Allen did seem to be very supportive of Fine Arts programs?
Cox: No. I don't think it affected us adversely at all. Cecil Mackey was also interested in the arts. Funding began to be a problem generally when Mackey took over. The state legislatures began to cut back all across the country. The days of wealth and opportunity in terms of new buildings, new resources, and so on really took place early on. Obviously it is tied to the economy. I think in the late '60s and early '70s there was much more uncertainty about the economy. The war was eating up part of the economy. So I think, no matter who was at the helm, we would have suffered during that period. Suffered from the inability to fund some of the things that we would have liked to have funded or build some of the buildings and facilities that we would like to have built. But we had autonomy in developing curriculum. I don't think the Art department has ever felt that they didn't have that. There weren't any restraints from the administration pushing us in a particular direction that we didn't want to go.

Hewitt: Maybe it is an advantage being in something like the Fine Arts, that people really don't feel their capable in commenting on things like curriculum. Somehow things like history or English, I think everyone feels like they know something about it.

Cox: That is probably true by the way. I've certainly talked about that phenomenon. The arts are a strange creature. Many of the academicians in the University feel sort of benignly well disposed of the arts, but they often don't understand what is going on, particularly in a place like the Art department. Theater, dance, and music are more understandable. Although some of the things that come out of those departments, too, I am sure have created alot of curiosity and wonder. That has probably been our benefit. There has always been and probably traditionally, in the last fifteen or
twenty years or thirty years in this country at large, that attitude in the universities that art programs tend to be left to their own devices.

Hewitt: When I was at the University of Pennsylvania there was a big move by the administration there to purchase works of art for the campus as part of improving the aesthetics of the campus, and there was a tremendous amount of debate both on whether they should spend University money that way and secondly over what they chose to spend it on. To what extent has there been interest in USF in sort of utilizing works of art as part of the development of the campus and have there been issues over any art work or what kinds of art work should be purchased by the University?

Cox: Well, there have been issues and some controversy in Tampa from early days. Occasionally about what was being shown publicly in juried exhibitions. The State Fair Exhibition in this city used to be the premier exhibition in the state, probably in the southeast. It had major jurors from all over the country. It had significant prizes and it was quite competitive and a very good exhibition. Occasionally the city fathers or whoever, behind the scenes, would put some pressure on the director of that gallery facility not to show a particular thing that had been chosen for the exhibition. We really didn't run into much of that here in the University. Again we have had autonomy and people have been receptive generally to what we have done. We have had from the beginning, or almost from the beginning, a small university collection, mostly of prints. And of course the graphic studio came along and we have had access to major artists work. That kind of thing has generated a lot of interest in the community and the University. But we have a lending resource. We lend works of art to offices around the campus. And there is a good demand and there has been a consistent demand for that
kind of thing. People do like to come over and look through it and make their own choices, and they do find things that they like. They do take the works back to their office. So if you go through the various administrative offices in the University you will see alot of work that comes from our collection.

Hewitt: I didn't realize that.

Cox: It may not be everywhere. And I'm sure that it tends to be a matter of if you get a dean or a director who is offended by something or just not interested, you may find relatively little work in a particular area. But I know that there is alot of work out there.

Hewitt: Now you have served on alot of, I guess ever since you have arrived, on alot of the university committees, college committees, departmental committees, and committee work seems to be one of those things that in general people do, but not with a tremendous amount of enthusiasm. Are there committees that you have served on here that you really feel were productive and committees that really came up with something important or innovative or useful at USF?

Cox: Well, of course. Most of the departmental committees and college committees from time to time deal with major areas of curriculum, entrance requirements, MFA requirements, or degree requirements and when those issues come up, obviously the decision making is important and affects us very directly. What happens to the university committee's impact on the university varies alot I suppose. When I sat on the Liberal Arts Council in the very beginning, in the early days, the debate was often centered on what we were talking about before, the issue of the all university approach. The
integration of basic studies with specialized disciplines. There were some important philosophical statements made which I am sure made some effect. We hung on to that interdisciplinary approach for some time. And I think it probably eroded in the way it has eroded everywhere else eventually. As the departments grow more powerful, as more and more specialized degree programs develop, departments tend to want to grab as much autonomy and as much of the available hours that they can get to give students in their own disciplines. I don't know. There is certainly alot of redundancy and make-work that goes on in university committees. If you look at all of it in retrospect, there are so many ideas that were dealt with and were dumped later, or somehow simply filed and forgotten about. Occasionally some very important things come out. I guess that is the way life works. I don't think that it is strange to this university. It is just that when you have people who have vested interests in one direction dealing with people with other interests, you don't know which way the covers are going to fall. They fall in the direction of the most mass power.

Hewitt: It seems to me that when I talk to people from the first couple of years, there was a feeling, even if eventually the entire programs were dismantled, it seems as though there was a feeling that if you were on a committee, that because the place was brand new there was a good chance that ideas would be tried out or at least debated, and obviously with growth and now that we have a fairly well established structure, it seems harder to impact than . . .

Cox: Yes I think that is true. I think the University tried alot of things early on and alot of those things have disappeared. There was an "All University Book" for instance. Probably someone has mentioned that to you.
Hewitt: A couple of them. People seem to remember different books as the All University . . .

Cox: But I mean there was a book about once a month.

Hewitt: Maybe that is why I keep getting different versions of it.

Cox: Well, I don't remember all the titles and I don't remember how long it went on, but I think for two or three years this University Book was published and people were not expected to read it necessarily, but were encouraged to read it. That sort of thing is sort of idealism at its most hopeful.

Hewitt: You have been here for 23 years now and you have obviously served on lots of committees. You have had involvement with the community and you have seen changes in programs. If you could summarize major developments at USF in that period, what would you say have been the most significant, changes either positive or negative ones?

Cox: Well, I think we have done what many large universities do in a short amount of time. If you're talking about the University of Michigan or Duke or a school that has been around for a hundred years or so, the evolution has been very slow. Media hype and influence of media I suppose on schools in the past have been relatively modest. People knew what was going on in the world theoretically more than they do today, and not in such detail as they do today. The information also came slower. We were a school with no traditions and we wanted to look like a school and be a significant school as quickly as possible, and I think there was sort of an artificial scrambling around for symbols and instant traditions and that sort of thing. But I think what really happened and when you ask whether it was for better or
for worse, there is no answer for that I think. The things that happened that are good I think happen in a classroom between inspired teachers and students. The things that are bad--maybe top-heavy administrative decisions or trivial decisions occasionally--that can be gotten around in the classroom. I think good teaching still boils down to what happens between the instructor and the student. That kind of interchange. So I think basically what has happened here is that the University has matured in an inevitable way and has slowly moved into the kind of mold of large state universities where we have a fairly high degree of specialization, a lot of autonomy in departments. We bring in more well known or active or very talented faculty from all over the country. We draw more widely now. As the facility gets bigger and salaries become more competitive, as the University becomes less distinguishable as a regional school and more distinguishable just as a large state university, I think we inherit all the good and the bad things that those kinds of schools have. We now have rapes on campus and crime and a lot of the things that we never had before. Obviously that is not something we want. But it exists at every big state school in the country. We have more art films in the community. We have more exhibition programs. We have more people publishing in international chemistry journals. All of that. I think that that kind of activity is ... Some of it is terrific and some of it is irrelevant. And you have to deal with individual cases. But the University has become a big state university with all of the ills and the good that attend these kinds of institutions.

Hewitt: If you could add or change your particular program, are there things that you would like to see happen in the next 10 years in terms of the art program itself?
Well, we have really shaped our program. The faculty has really shaped our program. We have had marvelous autonomy to do it. We have had fairly cohesive thinking among the faculty members about the direction it ought to take. I think that if there were any changes that I would like to see... It doesn't have to do with my freedom to teach what I want to in the classroom and the way that integrates with what other people think is valuable as curriculum as subject matter to be taught. I think the issue is one of the numbers. That is an issue that inevitably comes along. How are we recruiting or should we be or are we trying to meet FTE expectations to keep funding up? Are we trying to keep up class size for purposes of appearance and that sort of thing? Do we feel that there is some kind of stigma attached to small classes and to that kind of emphasis? I would like to see us be more selective. But I don't think that we have the solid option in a sense, as most state universities. When you get selective enough your student population goes somewhere else. If you have an extremely strong program somewhere, or a very strong reputation like Harvard, then you are going to have so many applicants that you can turn away lots of people and have the cream of the crop. But most state universities don't have that advantage. I think that by and large the work that is produced by our students would stand up very well against the work of students I've seen at any university around the country and I have looked at a lot of schools around the country. So I'm certainly not embarrassed by what our students are doing, but generally I think that the schools in this country are recruiting artists who are going to be frustrated enormously in the future when they get out and find that they can't get jobs or that they can't compete effectively against the best of the people in the field. I was
reading an article in the June issue of *Time* on the status of arts in this country reflected partly by the Whitney Annual Show in New York, and they were pointing out that there were something like 45,000 graduates from art programs a year that were coming out of major American schools. Probably more than that from minor schools and minor programs. But the country can't absorb that. This is the limit that affects chemists and zoologists and historians and everybody else I guess. But I think we are worried about our status as indicated by the size of our department too much. And I don't say that about just this department. I think that is just a phenomenon going on all over the country.

Hewitt: Well thank you very much for taking your time out to participate in this oral history program and hopefully in the next 25 years we will come back and ask you some more questions.