Robert C. O'Hara oral history interview by Nancy Hewitt, July 22, 1985

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Hewitt: I am speaking this afternoon with Bob O'Hara, Professor of Linguistics and President of the University of South Florida Chapter of USF-FTP-NEA, our faculty union, as part of the USF Silver Anniversary Oral History Project. Let me just ask you first of all, what was your first contact with the University of South Florida and what made you choose to come here?

O'Hara: Well, the first contact really was quite by accident Nancy. I was at the University of Minnesota and decided to put myself on the block and get out and discovered that one of the letters in my file was missing. The letter was from Russell Cooper, who had been my department chairman up at Minnesota. So I wrote him asking if he would replace the letter. We had several fairly good offers from universities in the east. I got back an airmail special delivery letter plus a phone call asking if we, my wife and I and kids, had ever considered coming south. I said that we really hadn't. We got a fairly good offer from him. It was below what they offered in the east. We started reading the local papers and found out what the cost of living was down here. With two small children we figured the environment would be alot better down here at that time for a 3½ years old and a 1 year old then say Syracuse or the Long Island Branch of NYU. So we went ahead and took the offer and came on down.

Hewitt: Now what year did you arrive at USF and do you remember what your first impression of this place was?

O'Hara: Yes. 1961 in the latter part of June or July. First reaction, believe it or not, was that we drove past the place completely. Fowler Avenue at that time had two lanes. We drove past it and my wife said, "Oh, there is the
University back there." I said, "No, it's a factory." And we found ourselves out in the boonies and turned around and came back and sure enough we were at USF. They didn't have the fancy entrance way or anything out there the way they do now. That was about 5 years further down the road before they got it in. The first impression that we had as we drove in that long processional that we have there was that we were entering a modified desert. There was practically no grass whatsoever. There were only about 6 or 8 buildings around campus at the time. We had phoned Dean Cooper and he said that he would meet us. It turned out that he had a meeting and asked us to wander around campus. I said that I would like to see the library, which is now the Student Services Building. I went over with my wife and honestly you could look from one end of the stacks to the other and see the wall, there were that few books. My first impression was that maybe we had better go back to the hotel, pack the bags, and get back to a place were the library actually had books. It got even more distressing when I went to look at the shelf of things on English and Linguistics. We had the complete works of Frank Yourby on file, all of the Readers Digest's condensed books, the whole smear of trivia was up there. I mentioned this to Dean Cooper at lunch, once I had fought myself out of a severe depression, and he said to give it a couple of months. They had, I forget how many thousands on order, put out a plea to the community to donate books for the library and evidently everyone in the Tampa Bay area who had a spare copy of something running around that they wanted to unload and didn't want to call the Salvation Army. They just put these things up on the shelf for appearances sake. So I'm afraid that the initial impression was not the most favorable one in the world.
Hewitt: What was your first actual job at USF? What were you hired in as?

O'Hara: I was hired in to teach English Literature and some composition. You have to remember that when I first got here everyone at the University, for about the first four or five years, came in on a joint appointment. That is you were half time in Liberal Arts and half time in Basic College. So I was to teach two literature courses and two courses in the Basic College. The names of the courses in Basic College were a bit of a mystery to me. The content was even more so I think. They were designed to be very broad-brush types of courses which would give students a foundation in interdisciplinary areas or something of that sort. They found out that my minor work was sort of a blend of anthropology, sociology, and some work in psychology. On the masters level I had a minor in history. So they gave me two courses in something called Behavioral Science which was the damnedest mishmash of stuff you have ever encountered in your life. The syllabus, which I still have a copy of, is absolutely unbelievable. It was a program textbook. I was told before I came down that I would be teaching two courses in literature and since my primary interest in literature at that time was American Literature, they gave me two survey courses in British Literature. That was even changed before I met my first class. They found out that I had just recently published a book and things of that sort. So they then had me teaching a course in Writing for the Mass Media. Which was something I was singly ill-equipped for. Of course at that time too, what I found out was, when I walked into the course was not writing for the mass media, it was writing for the school newspaper which at that time consisted not of the Oracle as we know it today. I think every Tuesday the Tampa Times would publish a USF addition and that was distributed around the campus. The Oracle was some six years down the road. So that was my first introduction.
Teaching courses that I had no idea of the content of and there I was on very sound ground because the director of the course had no idea of what I was suppose to do either. We were sort of mutually pooling our ignorance. It was really a fascinating thing to do because you were feeling your way through material. You knew alot of what you were teaching was totally out of any context and out of your field of expertise, so you had to reach for it. You started talking to people who did have more experience than you did in those areas. You bounced ideas off of one another. The course was constantly being revised and so forth and so on as you went through it. So while it was very frustrating, I guess initially, in the long run it was very beneficial because you got to rub off against other people. Ordinarily you wouldn't have that opportunity.

Hewitt: And fortunately you did have the multi-disciplinary background to help you out.

O'Hara: That helped. I had just enough to make me dangerous in certain areas, but not enough to make me knowledgeable. The course, Human Behavior, later evolved into a behavioral science course, but still pretty much it was an interesting blend of sociology, psychology, and anthropology all sort of mixed together.

Hewitt: Now in those early years the administration had formulated a mission called the "Accent on Learning" which apparently went through several revisions even though it is still our motto. I think the actual content of it seemed to have changed over the years. Were you involved at all in formulating that early mission, and do you think the "Accent on Learning" actually was a good reflection of what the mission of USF was originally?
O'Hara: I found myself very much involved in it shortly after I got here. One of the problems that USF had at the outset and to a degree in various ways we still see it reflected in certain aspects of the University. This was a university where you had a group of administrators come in and play university for two years before they had a faculty. These were, in their own way, highly idealistic men and one of the things they really wished to do, I think, was to come up with an administrative structure that would have none of the flaws of the various university administrative structures they came from and which at the same time would give students a good sound general education I guess, in the best sense of that term, which they felt that other universities had not accomplished because the various disciplines had charge of these introductory courses. If you got people from various areas together to talk through these things and what have you, that this would then give you a more viable kind of course than one that would say barely focus from the standpoint of sociology or anthropology or whatever you will. Or history, psychology, or you name it. It soon became evident that what was set up in two years of theory was really not going to work out all that well in practice. What we had were a, if you don't mind the metaphor, a group of ribs, but not a backbone. Incidentally, all the courses were called "functional" with the exception of Human Behavior and American Studies. In fact it was American Idea at the time. The only problem was that nobody bothered to find what the American Idea was. One of the things we evolved as a way of providing some coherence to all of this was what someone unfortunately called a "capstone course" which was a senior seminar. The purpose of this was sort of an exit course that all students had to take to get out which was supposed to synthesize this broad base of knowledge
that you had picked up in Basic College and then in your last two years in your specialty. This then would reveal to you the true nature of things, man, and the universe and your place within it and all the other types of things. This continued for six or seven years, this so called senior seminar. There was only one problem with that, too, in that this was being taught by people who came from disciplines. As a consequence, the emphasis was always seen from the perspective of the particular discipline. This meant that quite frequently students emerged from the senior seminar wondering why it was they hadn't majored in whatever it was that the director of the senior seminar had majored in and that way all of this would have had a good deal more coherence. But it was one of these marvelous things that developed in theory. We also developed the idea of team teaching. These were pretty much selective courses. What you would do is have two people in the classroom from two entirely different disciplines. You got together ahead of time, you laid out your course work, and what have you. This was all in the Basic College curriculum obviously. Then two of you would approach this from your own particular standpoints and it gave you an opportunity in class to rub off against each other. This was successful in some instances and total disaster in others. One thing they had that we modified, well we gradually modified it out of existence, was that in Basic College only 50% of the term grade was in the instructor's hands. Everybody took a common final examination. They had people who wrote multiple choice examinations on the fifth floor of the old library and these were critiqued by the people in the department before they were given. Everybody took this common final examination and they took your grade and their grade on the final, put them together, averaged them out, and that is what the student came out with in the course. Quite a few people did not like having that
much of a final grade out of their control, so over a period of years it was gradually reduced from 50 to 40, to 30 to 20, and finally totally abolished all together. So we had the team teaching concept. Another thing we came up with was that when people signed up for Freshman English, in their second semester of Freshman English, they would write a joint term paper. That is, they would select one of the areas that they were taking a course in outside of English . . . so they really had two directors. They would have their English instructor and they would have the person in a particular discipline. Then they would write the paper. The person in the discipline would read it for content and the person in the English department would read it for format. I think that continued for about three or four years. It was a marvelous idea, but like the Tampa Bay Bucks it looks good on paper, but when you get them out on the field they don't really operate that way. This is in essence what happened with the thing. There were innovations. I mean we were highly innovative at the time. We really didn't have any fear of failing. So it soon reached the point where, well let's say biology which is where this happened more frequently than not, for some reason or another I never understood, there were all sorts of papers on the mating habits of the Stickle Back. You take a man who is fairly busy trying to do research and suddenly unload 80 papers on the sex habits of the Stickle Back and he gets rather surly in a hurry. So the people in the various disciplines were the ones who first became dissatisfied with this particular technique which was jointly written on paper. I didn't mean to dump it on the sciences. They were written in History and things of that sort. But we were a comparatively small school in terms of students and in faculty. We had so many things going. They were putting demands on our time. You know it is understandable when someone would just say that they didn't have enough time
here to fool around with this. Whether it would have worked out in the final analysis, I don't know. I have a hunch that the direction we were heading at, getting larger and larger every year, that it was just a matter of time before the whole thing would have gone down the tubes.

Hewitt: What was the relation like among faculty, staff, and administrators in those early years when USF was so much smaller?

O'Hara: Absolutely delightful. We had only one dining hall over in the University Center. You never knew who was going to show up at the thing. We were small enough at that time. There was constant interaction among the faculty members from the different disciplines and so on. It was absolutely unusual not to be able to sit down over there and have lunch not only with someone from your own particular discipline, but a person from Social and Behavioral Sciences, someone from the Natural Sciences, and someone from Fine Arts. It made for a very stimulating situation because you were getting so many different perspectives on whatever it was that you were talking about. In fact if there was one thing that I really lament it's sort of a loss of that over the years. I still maintain a rather cordial relationship with people in most of the other colleges around the University. We don't quite sit down anymore like we did in the past, hash these things around, and solve the worlds problems and things. Of course we were all a good deal younger than we are now. I do miss that though rather than having to go out and consciously cultivate an atmosphere. This just sort of came naturally. The administration was another thing all together. John Allen ran pretty much an oligarchy over there. The other administrators were sort of feeling their way around and what was for them a totally new situation. That is, we very rarely saw President Allen in anything except formal social functions;
the deans were far more accessible at that time. Of course you have to remember that under the College of Liberal Arts set-up at that time, we only had one dean and that was the dean of Liberal Arts. He did keep a fairly open door policy. We had, instead of deans, division directors as they called them. They were sort of an intermediary between the dean and the department chair. So you had a department chair, your division director, and then you had the dean of Liberal Arts. That was primarily a set up I think that was designed to avoid a couple of problems that would be too lengthy to get into here, which Dean Cooper faced at the University of Minnesota. It was a way of down-grading the influence of deans and what have you. So it was a fairly interesting time because the division directors didn't know what they were suppose to do either. They were a little bit like Mistress Quickly in Henry IV Part I, you know, "in neither fish nor flesh in man quite not knew where they were to wear the habit." They just sort of bumbled from one thing to another and of course it wasn't until President Mackey came in that the Liberal Arts structure was dismantled, and the colleges as we know them today came into existence. So you are really talking about a totally different administrative creature at this very early stage of the University from what we are familiar with today. The lines of communication were not nearly so formalized as they are now. We have this whole business of following channels as you go out. Nobody paid much attention. If you didn't like the department head, he would send you to the division director. If you regarded him as a nonentity you went right to the dean and it went to the mat on these things. This could happen when you have a very small faculty, which we had, 150 at the most to start out with, maybe 350 by the time the Basic College structure started to give way.
Hewitt: In those early years you mentioned that President Allen was someone who you generally saw at social events. Were there social events that were college wide or university wide?

O'Hara: There were at least two a year. Sort of command performances. There was one in the fall, a formal dance, and there was one in the spring. Well, you really have had to attended one to appreciate it for what it was like. They would let the men wear suits, but they would prefer that they came in tuxes. The ladies all wore formal gowns. No cocktail things allowed. That presented problems for people like myself who had no tux whatsoever. I did have a suit at that time. It was a reasonably formal type of atmosphere. Deadly dull to indulge in. They would always have a band all decked out in white tuxes in the University Ballroom. Punch was served and finger sandwiches, that usual type of thing. There would be one or two formal dinners during the course of the year and these were always very carefully monitored in terms of who was permitted to come and what have you. I could detect no pattern to them as they seemed to invite people from various areas rather than having one for people in the Sciences and one for people in the Humanities, things of that sort. It was very interesting when I first assembled with the new faculty... our first... We would have three day orientations for new faculty. It was an endurance contest. We were told by the vice president for academic affairs, Sydney French, that our aim was to make this a coat and tie university. They couldn't order you to. You have to remember we were almost an exclusively male faculty at that time.

Hewitt: I assume that they didn't want coats and ties for the women faculty too?

O'Hara: No! But they would prefer hose, girdles, and stockings. The usual trimmings of that sort. We were not told in so many words that this was suppose
to be our attire, but it was strongly recommended that when we taught, we taught in ties and jackets. In fact on Sundays when they would have very fine buffets out here at the University, students were not permitted in unless the boys had ties and jackets and the young ladies were appropriately dressed with stockings and shoes. It seems pretty hard to imagine now, but that was really the case. In fact we were a very proper place for three or four years. The fourth floor of the University Center was a dormitory because they didn't have... They converted it into a dormitory or modified it into one. It was a girls dormitory. We had only Andros? No, Argos was the first dorm. Of course you had strict segregation of the sexes at that particular time. The young ladies that were housed on the fourth floor of the University Center, when they took gym classes, they could put their gym cloths up in the room, but they had to wear a raincoat when they came through the University Center lobby. There was a degree of formality here. It is rather difficult to imagine now it ever existed at this point.

Hewitt: It sounds like the form of dress has changed enormously from the early '60s. You mentioned that the Basic College was dismantled and the teaching programs were either done away with or modified in some rather dramatic ways. What do you think were the forces that changed USF so dramatically by the late '60s and early '70s?

O'Hara: Well internally, I think, sheer size. We were getting big and bigger. I also think that people like to identify with their discipline. By '64 or '65 it soon became obvious the newer faculty and many of the older faculty as well were not content to have joint appointments. They felt they were losing status with their colleagues around the country. It's awfully difficult, as I did on several occasions, to go to a national convention and
try to explain what Functional English is. They would always say "as opposed to Non-functional English?" Or Functional Mathematics and things of that sort. People wanted a sense of identity within an administrative, recognized, traditional, administrative, academic unit. As the faculty grew there were pressures for the abolition of this whim. I remember when the decision was made. I forget whether it was '66 or '67, someone with a better memory of dates would have to check this, but when the decision was made a person would have to opt for either a discipline or for a basic college faculty. Ed Martin, who was the Dean of the Basic College at the time, I remember him saying very distinctly that he would have to go out and recruit a faculty for this place because 95% of the faculty opted for a particular discipline. As a consequence once the discipline identification became a danger type of thing, Basic College was really doomed as an entity because you were not successful in recruiting enough faculty for Basic College and as a consequence you were always borrowing people from the disciplines. It just created all sorts of problems which is still in some ways with us today in the University. It convinced me of one thing and that is the lack of wisdom of having a separate faculty status for a group of people within the University because they pretty much regarded themselves as second class citizens. All you have to do today is go back and look at some of the salaries of folks who opted for Basic College to recognize that they were indeed second class citizens when it came to handing out the money. Some of them have had financial difficulties that they have never been able to pull out from under because of it. Their salaries were just obscenely low.

Hewitt: With this shift to a more traditional structure in terms of disciplines, the departments, and the colleges, was there a shift away from the original
"Accent on Learning" or was there just a modification of what learning meant at this point at USF?

O'Hara: I have always regarded mottos as whatever you make of them. "Accent of Learning" is one of these things that came out of the two year boiler room atmosphere of nothing but administrators. I think their hearts were really in the right place. I think "Accent on Learning" is pretty much reflected in the de-emphasis of athletics at this University. We have never had a football team, and it wasn't until recent historical times that we had a basketball team. We have had the traditional intramural types of things and I think the intent was, of the original group here, through "Accent on Learning," we will emphasize teaching and not athletics or frills of that sort. It wasn't until August, no more than a decade ago, that fraternities and sororities were allowed on campus. The feeling was that there was something antithetical in these groups to the process of learning. So whether that was behind it or not I really don't know. But what I was doing was just pointing out what I considered to be reflections of this.

Hewitt: Was there a shift of faculty away from teaching and towards a more traditional measure of scholarly productivity in terms of research and publication?

O'Hara: Oh very definitely yes. For a number of years around here it was not a case of publish or perish. Well, within the past six or seven years at least the emphasis has become more and more one of publication of research. I'm not really certain whether the two cannot coexist one with the other. We have always regarded... This has pretty much been mandated by the legislature and the Board of Regents that the function of teaching and the function of research are coequal with one another. This is something that is lauded
more in the breach than in the observance when it comes to the evaluation of
the administrators. There had been, for some people, the view of some
people, a very lamentable decrease in the emphasis on teaching and an
unwarranted emphasis in some areas on research to the exclusion and the
detriment of the teaching function. As a consequence, well, I think in some
areas around here, and don't ask me to document them, I think in some areas
the students with the exception of those on the graduate level are getting a
very short shift as far as teaching is concerned. You have people who get
into class, they put in their 48 or 50 minutes, and then get to their
particular research because this is the way you get promoted and this is the
way you get tenure today, by demonstrating that you are proficient in those
areas. Where as the person may be the best teacher in the world, but he or
she stands a very real chance at the end of 6 or 7 years of being told,
sorry, you're not tenurable or promotable at this University because you
have nothing in the research area. Many of my colleagues firmly believe,
and I can't argue with them, that one of the functions on the college level
is research. That the ideal college professor does both with equal grace.
But you and I both know that this is fiction to begin with. But certainly
some of us manage to handle it and others do not. I know many of my col-
leagues who were really extremely, confident teachers, who have been put at
a disadvantage simply because of this emphasis on them doing so much re-
search and publishing. You know the journals are filled with the most
appalling crap in the world. This cranked out, not just here but in other
places as well, simply in the name of getting something into print. So the
emphasis has changed and I look forward to it to continue to change. So
then more and more emphasis will be placed here on it, and I don't know if
we'll ever get back to the teaching function or not in quite the same way
that it was at the outset. It is highly problematical and I think unlikely.

Hewitt: Now, a lot of people have mentioned the difference in tone and the difference in vision of John Allen as president and Cecil Mackey as president and see the turning point in terms of changes at USF in that transitional period between Allen and Mackey. Other people have suggested that the changes in the curriculum and in the institutional structure actually began earlier during John Allen's tenure and that Mackey was simply a sort of reflection of changes that were already in place. Could you comment on how you saw that transition?

O'Hara: Well, if they were pre-Mackian in their origins, it's to me a well kept secret. One of the interesting things is that for many of us around here without the pressure for publication, we publish more than when the pressure is on. I think perhaps, and this is pure speculation on my part, supported by some things that I have heard from other channels, that one of the reasons that Mackey was sent in and selected as the president was to take the University by the nape of the neck and shake it up because considering our size at the time Mackey came in, proportionately, our publication record was pretty pitiful. So was our research and our grant records and things of that sort. For myself, I would put this change of emphasis as one that was generated within the Mackey administration at the University. It also signaled a change in the relationship of the administration to the faculty, too. It became far more channel-oriented under Mackey. He became increasingly more isolated from the faculty the longer he was here. It is difficult enough now to get in to see President Brown, and even as president of the union I have to make an appointment three or four weeks in advance.
But that is something in the nature of being president of a very large university. You have a large number of community commitments and things of that sort that you have to fulfill. You have a number of other functions that you have to perform. So I would say that the insularity that we find, let's say, in the president's office is not quite the same type of insularity that one found with Mackey. His was a deliberately generated insularity that came in. I think to a degree he brought in people in positions of authority who were markedly inferior to himself. As a consequence this gave him a greater control over practically every phase over the University life. He made certain moves that indicated that he wanted to control everything. He tried to throw the Oracle off campus for example. That was defeated. He tried to do a number of things that would have given him almost total control over every aspect of the University. It was very interesting that after he had taken over, had disestablished Liberal Arts, and the colleges—they were set up that almost without exception the various division directors were not deans when they set up. If they became deans they were shortly moved out of those positions. So that he pretty much had the University in the image that he felt that it should have. There must be a moral working in there somewhere, but I don't know what in the world it is.

Hewitt: Was there any sort of controversy that developed among faculty members themselves? It sounds as though there were certainly changes in the faculty's relationship to the administration. Were there difficulties within departments or within divisions in terms of what direction this college should go under the impetus of Mackey's changes?
O'Hara: Yes. It is difficult to speak for the other colleges since I have always been in what was first called Language-Literature and is now Arts and Letters. The problems there were very acute. One of the problems of course in establishing colleges where there was only one college before, is the decision of which goes where in the whole works. With the hard sciences this is really quite easy. With the Fine Arts, most of that was fairly uncomplicated. As far as the decision is concerned, I do know that there is a great deal of deception within the college itself as to what direction it should go in (in what was then called Language-Literature and is now Arts and Letters). Whatever didn't fit into the other colleges pretty much ended up in Language-Literature. We were a very heterogeneous group. We had programs that had been finally part of the established departments that were now split off as individual departments such as Mass Communications which was once under the aegis of English. It was a free standing department put then in there. Linguistics has also been a part of English. We were not a free standing entity, and they put us in there. Foreign Languages ended up in there. Philosophy, the Humanities, which had formerly been in Basic College was moved in there. The American Idea, which had evolved as American Studies, came in. As a consequence, you get weird mixes . . . have great difficulty . . . with your discipline. History, conceiving of it in Social and Behavior Sciences, I believe it is one of the more humanistic disciplines. I have great difficulty conceiving of Linguistics as a part of Arts and Letters. I feel it should be perhaps apart of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Sometimes shifts were made purely for expedience. That is we had a department, well it was really a program, in what is called speech therapy and it was nominally under the aegis of what was then called Speech Communication. There was a great deal of internal strife there between
these two elements within Speech Communication. So Speech Therapy split itself off, called itself Communicology and went with Social and Behavioral Sciences. About the only ones that really moved through without too much difficulty were the Natural Sciences, Business Administration, and Education.

Hewitt: Within the College of Arts and Letters, you were most fully involved in the Linguistics program. Could you tell me a little bit about how that developed?

O'Hara: It started out as a sort of a sub-classification within a sub-classification. When I got here, I came in with two other linguists. Hugh Roberts, who is now the Executive Director of the Institute for Applied Linguistics in Arlington, Virginia, and Everett Johnson, who is doing God knows what at the present time. All of the linguistics, which was not much, there was one course being offered in linguistics by Dr. Gessman who was sort of floating around somewhere in this administrative structure. Well, Hugh Roberts introduced a number of courses which were, strictly speaking, linguistic courses—in Structured American English, History of the English Language, which I guess is not really strictly speaking a Linguistics course, although linguists usually teach it. There was also a bit of a philosophical difference between the attitude that Dr. Gessman had about how linguistics should be taught and the attitude that the three of us had about it. Dr. Gessman is out of the Prague School of Linguistics and his is the finest mind we have on campus. If there is a language he doesn't know I haven't really discovered it yet.

Hewitt: I asked him about Magyar the other day and he started reeling off . . .
O'Hara: Oh yes, he will go through the whole thing with you, the whole nine yards. But the problem was that the approaches used by Prague school were at that time very much in question and the driving force in linguistics in this country was largely out of Chicago, Michigan, Georgetown, those areas. So that as a consequence there was almost immediate antagonism especially between H. Roberts and Dr. Gessman, in the philosophical approaches to this. There was another disturbing factor too, and that was the fact that when they were first started, with Dr. Gessman teaching all the courses, if you added up strictly linguistics and such, had enrollment of 75-80 students in them, but very shortly dropped to about 8 or 9 students signing up for the courses. As a consequence it was decided that there should be some consolidation. Instead of having a course here and a course there nominally labeled linguistics and what have you because by that time several other courses had also started to come in. Essentially what we should do would be to incorporate these under some sort of a single head and house them under the English department. So Dr. Gessman taught mostly some aspect of Ancient History, which he is an expert, and so on. These were just pulled into the English Department. Well in the interim, Cliff Roberts had left and Everett Johnson had left, which left me as the only Linguist on the staff other than Dr. Gessman. It was about that time that one of these weird things happens which is the Legislature reared back and in somewhat dubious wisdom enacted a ruling that before anyone could be certified to teach English, or any English-combination education thing in the state of Florida, they had to have a course in advanced grammar. Well, I was the only one who was teaching Structure of American English at that time and as a consequence I found myself an empire that I didn't desire and didn't know quite what to do with.
I was teaching 3 or 4 classes of this a semester. It was a 500 level course with anywhere from 40-60 students in there. And finally I just screamed bloody murder. I said that I didn't envision going through life doing this type of thing, and we were going to have to do something about it. Well, no real thought had ever been given to expanding linguistics into a more formal format, but just these few courses in English. So Irv Deer, who was then the Division Director, said that we should get another linguist in and let's expand our base just a little bit. So we got a young, very hyper-thyroid man in to work with me, but it was still under the aegis of the English Department. We got up a couple of more courses, but I forget which ones. We got one in phonetics, we got one in morphenics, which are fairly traditional courses that you have to have in the linguistics sequence. Well, this young man lasted two years, and then they brought in Roger Cole to take his place. Roger is really a very active person. So we sat down and we conspired together. Oddly enough he had a line. He had been hired as a linguist. No one knew quite where to put him in the College, but he was our linguist. I still had my line in the English department. So he and I sat down and we devised a whole curriculum. We wrote in about 12 different courses. We got them passed. We put them in the catalogue. We decided early on that we would not have a bachelor's degree, it had to be a master's degree, although we would offer a minor in Linguistics. We went to the Board of Regents. We made a pitch for this, and they agreed to let us hire two more people and we were off and running. We had Linguistics and now have perhaps the largest masters program in the College of Arts and Letters. In fact it is the largest masters program in the College of Arts and Letters with a faculty of 4½ people. Pretty much like topsy, we just grew and yet one of the anomalies in the whole thing is that Dr. Gessman is still one of
our swing men. He teaches the Comparative Grammar course and several other courses. Even though he is now nominally housed in of all places Religious Studies. This gets back to something we talked about earlier, this screwy mixed-up type of administrative infra-structure that you find in the colleges especially Arts and Letters now. So we just started evolving from one course, and like topsy we just grew so that now we have a full blown Linguistics program on the masters level and I think a very solid minor for students who wish to take that. I'm not certain whether that is an interesting story or not.

Hewitt: It was to me. Were you involved in the development of any other programs or organizations or associations on campus besides the department that you're housed in?

O'Hara: Yes. We had a wing-ding interdisciplinary program going here some years ago in Communications. It was housed under what is now, I guess, newly-called Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, the ISS format. And this gets back to something we talked about earlier too. It was Dr. Peter Wright who was over in the Social Sciences area; David Bantenfeld, who was in American Studies and English, and myself, plus Henry Winthrop; we got together and we put together a sequence of courses in communication. We had about four or five courses. It was not a full-fledged major. It was adjunctive to about five or six other disciplines who were very much interested. We had an introductory communication course. We had public opinion and pressure mechanisms propaganda. This type of thing worked into it. Somehow or other it disappeared; I've never really known what happened to it. It got incorporated somehow when they finalized the ISS structure. It got incorporated in there. Those of us who were not in Social and Behavioral Sciences somehow
found ourselves on the outside looking in at the thing. People who were not involved or in at the creation (this says nothing about their competence) were assigned to teach the course. This is another problem we have here at the University too. That is having a person teach cross-disiplinarily. Just to give you an example, I have created a course for American Studies in American English. It's not a technical course at all. It's rather a broad brush type of course. I have taught it maybe six or eight times over the years. But one of the problems is that in order for me to teach that course in American Studies I have to be released from a course in Linguistics. Now even within the College itself, this would seem to be no great problem, but as you well know we are hooked in with the FTE formula and who gets the FTEs for the course that O'Hara teaches in the American Studies of English. As a consequence, for two consecutive years now, Dr. Moore, who heads up American Studies, has wanted me to teach that course; but I have not been able to get released from my other commitments in order to teach it. This is something I think we really need to concentrate on here at USF. It wouldn't apply to all people. There are just a few of us weirdos around who like to do things like this. But even when it is within the same College to come up with some sort of rational way of permitting an individual to teach a course that is not history, is not linguistics or whatever it is, but falls in another department and then just go ahead and split them up. But here we are. We are bound by these FTE formulz and somehow or another people have the impression that we are engraved in stone. That is a rather ridiculous way to run a university if you ask me, you know, not to allow people to do things in other areas where they do have expertise.

Hewitt: Especially at a University whose early mission was really built on interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary perspectives and that kind of
vision. It is a shame now because of the institutional structure and the legislative mandate we can no longer do those things. The other organization that is obvious that you are very involved in now is the faculty union at University of South Florida. Could you tell me a little bit about your knowledge about how the union got started and your own involvement in union activities at USF?

O'Hara: Yes. Actually as of this year, 1985, UFF has been around for eight years. It did not come into existence until Governor Askew signed a collective bargaining law for state employees. Before that we were not permitted to bargain collectively. Originally the organization was formed under the aegis of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, Al Shanker, and we affiliated with them. The union sat in sort of a limbo for about a year in the sense that there were some initial joiners. I was not one of them incidentally. Then the legislature did a very foolish thing. It voted a "no raise year" and this got UFF off and running. It was the year that I joined and a thousand or more of my colleagues jumped in at that time too. Basically the aim was to, as it always is, to negotiate an agreement with the Board of Regents or contract which ever you want to call it, which defines what the rights of the faculty are. Simply I think because as administration has more and more adopted the managerial model, we have moved away from the traditional background that I come from and I would like to think that maybe I could still live in. But no, it's not true. Once you have developed the managerial model then you have employers and employees. My feeling was that as long as I am being defined as an employee, I have no other recourse but to react as an employee and that's to join an organization that looks out after my interests. This is not necessarily to presume the view that the administration is duplicitous, which it is, or anything of
that general nature. It is just that you have a group of people who are operating from a set of premises which say that everything is under their control and what have you. That is phrasing it very poorly. I became actively involved about four years ago. That is I have paid my dues. If they needed someone to work on something or edit a document, well I would be more than happy to do that. What really got me actively involved was the plight of a colleague of mine who has been consistently underpaid at the University and who came carelessly close to getting fired some years ago for a reason I can't really understand, although the nominal charge was that he wasn't producing enough scholarship, which of course was sheer nonsense because he was producing it. It was just that the people over there who read it didn't know what it was they were reading. It's really frustrating stuff. But I was really more concerned about getting this man a living wage, which he is barely getting now. I went to the administration to plead his case, and of course you know salary is not grievable under the contract. If they were, we would all be involved in one thing or another. I laid out what I thought was the logical case for equity for this person and so on. I got a memorandum back, not from someone in the present administration, but from someone who was in then in a position to render a judgement that ... Well this was very unfortunate, but you know that in any administrative structure there is always someone who falls through the cracks. I love that metaphor. While we sympathize with this person's position, they were very sorry, there was nothing they could do for him. I felt a great sense of frustration at the whole thing. So I said, "Get a little bit more involved in this, O'Hara, than you have been before." I started out by sitting in on a few committees, examining such things as the annual assignment duties form. I sat down and rewrote that with Jim Anker and several
others. The next thing I knew I was secretary of the union, and the next thing I knew I was president of the thing. I don't necessarily view the role of the chapter president as being of necessity adversarial. I've since been very much convinced that the union plays a very definite function as far as the bargaining unit members are concerned. It protects them in a number of ways that they are not even aware of in many cases. In fact I am appalled at how little some of my colleagues know about what their rights are under the contract. Given the managerial model you have to have a counterbalance . . .

Hewitt: One of the areas in which I assume that the union was active, but obviously there were activities going on long before a union was established, is in the area of affirmative action. I wonder if you have any recollection of issues involving either minorities or women at USF, the establishment of the Equal Opportunity Office, or maybe more informal ways of dealing with the affirmative action issues?

O'Hara: The area that I have been most actively involved in is with women. No pun intended. But it became evident that the salaries that women were being paid on this campus were an absolute scandal. What really infuriated me was a lady who has since retired who had not only her Ph.D, but she had a law degree and so on. She had had three years more teaching experience than I had, who was earning six thousand dollars less a year than I was at the same rank. This then drew me into some . . . I've always felt that there should always be equal pay for equal work. We were at the time when we were both associate professors, and she did have more experience than I did and certainly more degrees than I had and yet here she was just really scandalously underpaid for the work she was doing, and she was one of the mainstays
of her department too. So I ended up on a couple of committees. I was perhaps not as vocal as I should have been on the committees. I am a great memorandum writer, and I’ll be happy to haul some of those out and show them to you later on. But I found out later on that she was not the exception. As you went down the line, and we are talking about something seven or eight years in the past, it was a consistent pattern that one found as far as the pay for women was concerned. I was very happy to see myself—(I don't think I played a material role in it, other than to stir up the animals a little bit from time to time—I wrote letters to the legislators and the Board of Regents)—that they did take positive steps to see that these inequities were as much as possible redressed in a hurry. I don't think they succeeded in redressing all of them at the present time. In certain instances having looked at some of the salaries of the women, I think some of them have been over redressed. But the situation is certainly one that cried for immediate remediation. I remember right after the second equity adjustment that went through for women, a colleague of mine came to me and said, about this woman I had mentioned that was scandalously underpaid... (Until I got in this position I never looked at salaries. All that information is available in the library. This person likes to look at that type of information)... he came over and said, "Do you realize that so and so is making two hundred dollars more a year than you are?" I thought what in the hell difference does that make. We are talking about a small sum when you consider for a period of seven years, at least, she was making anywhere from six to three thousand dollars less than I was. There is absolutely no way you are going to compensate that lady for the difference in our salaries over the years. I'm very happy to see that at last being righted as I said. I wish I had done a little more than I did, but it really burned the hell
Hewitt: Let me ask you about a couple of other areas of political activism at USF, both of which I guess takes us back to the earlier periods of your career here. First of all, were you involved at all in the investigation by the Johns Committee?

O'Hara: Oh Lord yes! Good old Charlie Johns. Charlie Johns and the attorney Mark Haas settled in on us quite unexpectedly. Their mandate from the senate legislature was to investigate communism on campus. You have to remember that this was my second year at the University. They settled on USF because we were new. We also had a very vocal lunatic fringe, settled over in mostly then what was the Temple Terrace area, and this University came as quite a shock to the community when it hit. Not only did you have all these foreigners coming in and teaching their kids, but they had all sorts of wild ideas and so on. Well, when the Johns Committee came in, they first settled at the Hawaiian Village, which was then a very posh motel. President Allen invited then out on campus to conduct their hearings. They were really investigating two things. Communism and homosexuality. You have to remember that we were quite small at the time. We didn't have any communists around at that time, and our resident homosexual resigned and went to another university. So this then left them with nothing to investigate but the charges of teaching pornographic literature in English classes. Since I was a member of the English Department and on the book selection committee, I was one that was called in by Senator John for interrogation as to why I was recommending, as he put it, books on "po-nography" to the students. It had a very chilling effect, but that is not a cliche today, on the
University as a whole. It was a totally uncontrolled investigative group that came in. The only control that was on the whole thing was the fact that it was on campus and the entire proceedings were recorded. Those tapes are in the library if you haven't heard them. They should be in the Special Collections. Then they left. I forget how many weeks they were here. It seemed like forever at the time. They left a fairly shaken faculty in terms of "what in the hell have we gotten ourselves into here if a semi-literate red neck from Starke, Florida, can come down and whose mandate is communism and homosexuality and the only thing he can settle for is pornography, which wasn't even in his mandate and the legislature does nothing to control him, what are we in for here?" It caused a great deal of unrest. There was a movement afoot on campus among those who felt that President Allen had not acted strongly enough to support his faculty. There was actually a motion of censure voted by the College of Liberal Arts on President Allen which was tabled and to my knowledge is still on the table. It took us about two years to really recover from it. People were afraid to do certain types of research in the humanities area or to write certain types of things and what have you. Fortunately, the legislature took old Charlie Johns up short, and he was never really a force again. In a way, it sort of solidified the faculty after shaking the hell out of them, and it made us realize that we could be segmented very easily by this. Fortunately the legislature not only reined him in, but reined in all investigations of this sort because the report that he came up with is such a patently foolish thing, condemning us for using books like *Brave New World* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. I think he would have condemned us for using hyku if he knew what it meant. So that is about the only really serious political intrusion. We had another close one about a year after that. We had an English professor, again I don't know
why we are prone to that, by the name of Sheldon Grebstein, who was teaching a course in literary criticism, and Shell used an article by Norman Podhoretz which was a very logical and systematic attack on the "beat generation" of writers, namely Jack Kerouac and so on. He got Podhoretz' permission to reproduce the article. Well, in the article Podhoretz had quotes from Kerouac and some of the others from that particular school. Well, this was mimeographed and the parents of one of the students got hold of this and read it totally out of context. A great hue and cry went up to the legislature about all of this, and as a consequence, Grebstein was suspended with pay while there was an investigation about the propriety of his use of these types of material in the classroom. A faculty committee was appointed. You'll find a report on that in the library too, which found that Dr. Grebstein was in his rights in using this material, and that if you took these quotes out of their context, this was really totally unwarranted thing to do and so on. What had really upset people was that President Allen put a letter of censure in Grebstein's file claiming that he had used poor judgement in this case. The story that I got was that the resolution came after the Florida vs Florida State game in Gainseville. Shell was still under suspension. Allen went up and the Board of Regents, which was then called the Board of Control, had their meeting up there and their annual football game-beer bust-business meeting, and that they informed Allen that he would either censure Grebstien or he, Allen, would be out of a job. That is the story I got. Allen came back and censured Shel. But that is about the last serious invasion, I think, that we have had.

Hewitt: Was there much in the way of student or faculty activism at USF in the late '60s, antiwar, civil rights . . . ?
O'Hara: A tremendous amount. We had five or six faculty who were very actively involved in the anti-Vietnam War thing. We had a large number of students involved, if not large, than vocal. Of course the capstone was with the Kent State shootings. We had all sorts of demonstrations on campus. We had about as close to, I guess, as you could call a riot out here on campus as we have ever had. We had the campus literally surrounded by county and state police. They even brought out, for the first time and only time to my knowledge, the riot control tank which is still parked someplace downtown around the Hillsborough County Courthouse I guess. It remained at 30th and Fletcher. It never got any further than that. There was some tear gas thrown on campus, not an awful lot. But we didn't have any trashing of buildings or things of that sort. It was out-in-the-open type of protest. We had our share of sign carrying and what have you. There were marches downtown as well as on campus. They were for the most part, with the exception of the one riot that we had out here, which looking back through the haze of memory now, was largely generated by the presence of police on campus when there was no need for it to be here, it was a singularly quiet type of demonstration that we had. We would find them marching around the Administration Building or something of that sort. Students called a general strike which no one observed or very few people observed in classes. One or two faculty members suffered some set back to their possible careers because of their active involvement in it. It took one of them about ten or twelve years before he finally received his promotion to full professor. I had a hunch these are things that are almost impossible to document simply because of his very active and vocal involvement. It just carried through. I have no doubt that it went on his records. We had incidences of everybody
on campus who were involved, or even close to one of these things, being photographed and the photographs, somewhere around here, everyone that was involved in those things, or happened to be passing by, had their picture taken. These were, I know, poured over very carefully in the Administration Building to see if they could identify them and things of that sort. But we suffered none of the great disruptions as they did at USC and California and the East Coast. Nothing of that sort.

Hewitt: Do you think that the various political events on campus, whether they were intrusions of things like the Johns Committee or indigenous activism by students and faculty, affected the relationships between the University and the community?

O'Hara: I think to a degree they did, but I don't know how to assess it. I mentioned early on that this University came as a distinct shock to the community, and I think during this period practically any university was suspect in the eyes of the community--perhaps more so in the Tampa Bay area then elsewhere--simply because of the extremely conservative attitude that obtained at that particular time here. Most of the people, so called opinion leaders or what have you, the community, in my estimation, was a just a little bit right of "Atilla the Hun" in their attitudes. As a consequence, I think it put a very definite strain on town and gown or however you want to phrase it, in relationships for a number of years. It is only now, by that I mean the past five or six years or so, beginning to ameliorate itself. Of course the power structure in Tampa is changing too. It is not quite what it was during the '60s. Many of the people who currently represent the infrastructure or power structure are products of that particular time. So there is not the suspicion, I guess, would be the best
word. There is not the suspicion now, but there was for maybe a decade following the late '60s as far as our motives out here are concerned and what have you. I think largely now the University is accepted, however reluctantly in the minds of some, as a part of the community. We have a great deal of talent out here that in many cases is not made use of as much as it should be by the community. Although it is not for want of trying on the part of many people out here at the University. We are becoming more and more involved in community activities around here as well as political activity. I think this is represented by the fact that we now have people in the legislature who are graduates of USF. Many of the lawyers and what have you got their undergraduate training and some of their graduate training here at USF. So when you talk in terms of 25 years, historically your not talking about a tremendous amount of time as you well know. It takes awhile to shift your attitudes. This friend of mine termed this the "Bible and Pellagra belt." This was a problem at one time. I think it is not nearly the problem it was before. I think as we get older, as an institution, it's going to be less and less of a problem.

Hewitt: We have a couple minutes of tape left. Let me ask you, although I know this is particularly difficult especially with the many activities and areas that you have been involved in at USF, could you encapsulate the changes over the last 25 years by summarizing what you see as the greatest improvements at USF and those areas that may have had the greatest disappointments?

O'Hara: Well, let me start with the last first because that is always the easiest thing to do. I think the most disappointing thing to me is diminution of interaction among faculty that we had at one time. I don't mean to imply that it doesn't exist, but it has become increasingly difficult. As we have
become larger, we have become more insular within our particular areas of
interest. This should not be taken as a blanket generalization, it's just
something that distresses me. The opportunities for that interaction are
not really present I think as actively as they should be. I think one of
our major accomplishments has been the fact that we have evolved a very
strong faculty at this University. I sometimes get a little peeved with
people who take pot shots at us, and this is not a vested interest. I think
man for man or woman for woman or person for person, however you want to
phrase it, we have as good a faculty as you are going to find at just about
any state university in the country. I am constantly amazed at how good the
faculty is here despite everything that we have been through. What it will
be like in the future I don't know. I am a little bit concerned, more than
a little bit, about the fact that tenure decisions are being made on a basis
that seems to me to be not too rationale. We will lose good people because
of that, people that we should keep. I am concerned about the fact that we
are hiring more people as adjuncts rather than as full-line faculty members.
This I think is a cause and it should be a cause for concern. I don't think
you can build any solid university with transients, and I don't think you
can build any solid university where the faculty are constantly worrying
about whether their contracts are going to be renewed next year or not. I
think one of the most fortunate things that has happened in recent years has
been the early retirement plan that they have for the simple reason that
this gives new blood an opportunity to come in. Most universities are
really sort of water-logged with tenured people now, and this is not good.
I think it can serve very much to the benefit of South Florida if we bring
in good people and make a conscious effort to keep them through establishing
rational tenure procedures rather than some quixotic types of the decisions
that are currently being made in the Administration Building about not granting tenure. I don't believe that because a person puts in seven years they should automatically be given a job for life. But we do have some people who are really first-rate people who are seriously in danger of not staying here which, in the present condition of academia around the country, is going to be equivalent to cutting off very promising careers. I do hope that they get enough of us old buffalos out in time to get the newer people in. I think if that happens with the reasonable insurance that they have rational tenure and promotion guidelines, that the University has nothing really to fear in the future. Otherwise we are going to a university composed of administration with nothing but transients acting as faculty. That is overstating the case, I know it. I see good and bad things in here.

Hewitt: Well, fortunately you have not been one of the transient one's here at USF, and I appreciate you taking your time out to participate in this USF Silver Anniversary History Project. Thank you.