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Donna T. Christensen : USF 25th (1985) Anniversary Oral History Project: interview by Nancy A. Hewitt

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DONNA CHRISTENSEN

Hewitt: I am speaking today with Donna Christensen, Staff Assistant II at the School of Extended Studies, as part of the USF Silver Anniversary Oral History Project. Donna, can you tell us first of all, what was your original contact with USF and what made you choose to come here to work?

Christensen: Actually I didn't choose to come to work here. I had just graduated from high school, and my dad had told the six of us that when we got out of high school we basically were on our own. And so he literally dragged me out of bed one morning shortly after I graduated from high school and drove me down to the campus and said to get a job. At that time, there was no campus. There was a mobile home up near the entrance of what was then to become the University and it apparently housed the personnel people. There were about one and a half buildings on the campus at that time. So my father literally dragged me down here and forced me to apply for a job at the University which I didn't even know existed at that time.

Hewitt: When did you actually start working here?

Christensen: I began working here in either late August or early September of 1960.

Hewitt: So right when it opened?

Christensen: A little around before it opened.

Hewitt: And what was your first job at USF?

Christensen: I think that I was called a "stenographer" in those days. Basically I was a receptionist in the College of Basic Studies which of course no longer exists. But I was a receptionist and did a little of very light typing for the then, Dean of the College of Basic Studies, Dr. Sidney French.

Hewitt: What was your first impression when you came to the interview?

Christensen: I was absolutely awestricken. I was suddenly in a real, honest to God university and I did not come from a university-oriented family. None of us had ever been to college or to a university, and I was just totally, totally overwhelmed and totally intimidated by being around all these exceedingly bright people. I was scared to death for the first solid year.

Hewitt: A lot of people have mentioned, that I have interviewed so far, that in the early days there seemed to be a closer relationship between faculty, administration and staff. Given your level of fear and intimidation, what was your impression of those relations in the early days?

Christensen: I think that had it not been for that easily established camaraderie between the faculty and staff and indeed that higher level administration, I would have never survived my first year. I was basically an insecure person to begin with and I think the fact that these people drew me into the organization so quickly and readily and made me feel that there were no lines of distinction between the various ranks, it

was just like a family. It was a home away from home and, incidentally, still is.

Hewitt: Now you were involved in establishing the first office of academic advising. Could you tell me a little about that? Was that a change in jobs for you or how did you get the job for this?

Christensen: I really can't say that I remember how I became involved in it. I think that I was a stenographer and I guess maybe I had been serving as a receptionist and stenographer for a year and a half when Dr. Henry Robertson came on board. I suppose that at that time one of his primary responsibilities was to develop an academic advising office and somehow or another, I became his secretary. It was a marvelous happening for me. I can remember at that time, we didn't of course have computers or anything like that, we had to build the student files by hand. We had to have them ready and available for the student's academic advisors before the students ever set foot on the campus for the first time. So we would just work furiously from the time the we knew a student had been admitted to the University. We would physically go over and pick up the transcripts and make a folder, develop a file and we would sort the files according to the proposed major. I would physically carry stacks of these files to the various faculty and the various buildings for advising conferences before registration each term. It was really a madhouse. Everything was done by hand. We often worked well into the night doing this. I can remember sitting there at night making up folders. At that time you didn't even have prestuck labels. You had to get the labels wet with your tongue. My boss, Henry Robertson, and the Dean of the

College of Basic Studies, a fellow named Ed Martin, manually created all of these files for the students so they could be advised. It seemed like there were millions of students there at the time. It was a momentous . . .

Hewitt: Well, doing that by hand is probably equivalent to doing the same thing now for 25 thousand students with a computer. That actually sounds tougher. I don't think they work into the night anymore!

Christensen: No, that's very rare.

Hewitt: Were there faculty involved in planning this office of Student Advising or was it basically an administrative task to get all this work done?

Christensen: I believe that there were a number of core faculty who were very much involved in this. Key people in each of the academic disciplines at that time worked really closely with Dr. Robertson and myself to establish a format for developing files, disseminating files, etc. There was a tremendous amount of cooperation back in those days.

Hewitt: I have no idea what goes on in the Office of Academic Advising now! Once you got the Office of Academic Advising established, how long did you stay in that position? Did it change during the course of those years?

Christensen: No. I did stay in that position until 1968. By that time, of course, it had expanded considerably. We had moved from a location in the Administration Building to a location in the FAO Building, the Faculty Office Building, where Personnel is now located. Of course the

operation was quite a bit larger, but it was still all manual work. It was a centralized office. We had to manually transfer files from our office to the . . . By then there were many, many buildings on the campus. We had to hand carry them . . .

Hewitt: I hope they were still having you . . .

Christensen: Oh sure, sure, I did. Up until I was about nine months pregnant as a matter of fact, and then they told me I could take a rest.

Hewitt: So you were there until 1968? Is that when you moved to the St. Pete campus?

Christensen: Yes. I had a good friend, Dr. Lester Tuttle, from the College of Education. He was a real charmer! He was an extremely popular young man on campus and still is 25 years later. I learned through the grape vine that Les Tuttle had been made Acting Dean of the St. Petersburg Campus, which at that time didn't even really exist. There had been some experimental academic programs on that campus. It wasn't really known as a "branch campus" at the time. So I learned that Les had been appointed Acting Dean and I remember calling him on the phone and telling him that I understood he was the Dean and I asked him if he would need a secretary. He said he thought he probably would and I threw my hat in the ring. I was anxious at that time to leave the Tampa campus because I had just had a child and my husband had separated from me. He was still on the campus. It was a difficult time for me, and so I thought that this was the time to leave. And, very happily, Les Tuttle decided to take me with him. So that was when I transferred over to St. Pete.

- Hewitt: Now besides you and Les Tuttle, how many other USF people were in St. Pete at that point?
- Christensen: At that point there were probably about six of us all together. I remember that even before we got there a fellow named Herman Brames was on that campus. He now works very closely with the dean of the St. Petersburg Campus. At that time I think he may have been a student counselor or a student advisor for the experimental programs that had been going on prior to that time. So Herm was there. I remember him from having been on the Tampa campus. Actually, when Les and I went over there, I think our first year we had maybe six faculty. I don't recall more than six that came with us that first year.
- Hewitt: Did all the faculty come from Tampa at that time?
- Christensen: I believe they all had come from the Tampa campus. I can remember one or two of them. I remember Harriet Deer very well, Bill Garret and a fellow named Gene McClon. The rest of them have escaped my memory right now. But yes, they were all from the Tampa campus.
- Hewitt: Where was the St. Pete campus actually housed at that point? They had just built several new buildings since I've been here.
- Christensen: It was housed in what was then one of two buildings on that campus. We had an "A" building and a "B" building on that campus. As you probably know it was an old maritime base. It looked exactly like an old maritime base with the ten foot ceilings and the exposed pipes running up and down the halls. In fact, our office was unique in that

my boss and I shared a fully tiled bathroom, with a john, sink, mirrors and a bathtub. It used to be an officer's quarters. Dr. Tuttle made us fill in the bathtub with bookshelves for supplies which I didn't think was a very kind thing to do. In any case, it looked like an old maritime base. You could here your voice echo up and down the hall. It smelled musty like an old mushroom. But it had its own charm. The beauty of it was you could look right out your window and watch the porpoise go by and the pelicans sitting on the sea wall. That frequently was where I would find my boss if a call came in. If you didn't know where Les Tuttle was, we'd say "look out on the sea wall" and he would be out there with his fishing rod.

Hewitt: It must have been quite a change from the sand dunes from the early Tampa campus?

Christensen: Completely different. I felt as though I was working right near the Atlantic ocean. It was beautiful.

Hewitt: What was the atmosphere like at St. Pete relative to Tampa in terms of working at such a small campus?

Christensen: Working on the St. Petersburg campus in the entire twelve years that I was there was very much like it was in the early years on the Tampa campus. It was very, very close. The camaraderie was just remarkable. Again there was no distinction between faculty, staff and administrators. That, of course, is very much the way it was in the early days on the Tampa campus. We had a common goal, and we were all in it together. We all perceived ourselves as being part of a team. You don't see that much of it anymore.

Hewitt: In the early years of the St. Pete campus I understand that one of the reasons for wanting to open a campus there was because St. Pete originally wanted the entire University and didn't get it. Secondly, that there really was a desire to have a campus that would be open to that particular community which was an older community. More people might be taking night courses. Did you have much of a sense that the student body there was different or that community involvement was different in St. Pete than in Tampa?

Christensen: I don't think that there was any question that the student body was different from the student body on the Tampa campus. Students on that campus seemed a little older, a little more mature, and a little more sure of why they were there. We did not have freshman and sophomores on that campus. So they came in as juniors, seniors and some graduate students and they already had a sense of direction and a sense of purpose for being there. They weren't simply going to school because their fathers and mothers were making them go to school. Because, again, they were part of the entire campus community. We all had the same sense of goal and direction and, we all worked together to achieve our purposes there. Community involvement - I really can't speak about community involvement. I am sure that community involvement . . . Certainly community involvement relevant to today is very, very important, but I cannot see that there was a lot of that back in those days. There was very little in the way of fund raising that was going on and that kind of thing. So it wasn't nearly as important as it is now.

Hewitt: In some ways that's almost the opposite of what seems to have happened on the Tampa campus where community involvement was very important early on and it seems to have declined over the years. St. Pete seems to have picked up over the years. What was the quality of life like at St. Pete as far as the working day? I know at the Tampa campus, people keep mentioning that the University Restaurant was the only place to eat within any reasonable distance from campus. So you saw people at lunch all the time. I taught out at the St. Pete campus and within walking distance there isn't a tremendous amount of lunch places.

Christensen: That is true, and it was true back then. Actually, the folks that I knew real well met at the watering hole which was a little place called the Stick and Rudder. It was a little bar that apparently was there primarily to cater to the Coast Guard which was based all around us. It was a kind of meeting place roughly analogous to the function that the University Restaurant served in the early years here on the Tampa campus. There really wasn't much else. It was quite an occasion to even leave the campus to go out to have lunch. People would just sit around wherever they happened to congregate and chew the fat.

Hewitt: Well it's nicer to do that sitting by the water than sitting out in an empty fields here. I understand that Les Tuttle eventually left St. Pete to go and work at other regional campuses. Did you stay out at St. Pete at that point?

Christensen: Yes I did. I stayed on for about another three or four years I think. There was an interim Dean, David Kennerson, who now I believe is an Associate Professor of Management on that campus. He served in an interim basis till a permanent Dean was hired to replace Les Tuttle.

Hewitt: And you remained the Staff Assistant to the Dean?

Christensen: That's right.

Hewitt: So they kept changing, but you stayed?

Christensen: Yes, that's right!

Hewitt: So I assume that means that in terms of contact with faculty and other staff that you must have been fairly central since you were the one who stayed from the very beginning?

Christensen: Yes. Indeed. I saw myself that way and I think many of them did too. It was a kind of hub. Obviously a Dean's office was the office where many of the major decisions are made. I would learn so much of that and become involved in so much of that because there was no dean readily available to handle those things. I became involved in a lot of things that otherwise I might have not have learned about.

Hewitt: Obviously the St. Pete campus started hiring faculty of its own eventually. With the increase in the number of faculty, was there any real change in the atmosphere on campus or your job in terms of just expanding the responsibilities in the Dean's office?

Christensen: The extension of responsibilities, of course, did increase with the increased number of faculty, students, and support staff. It was always essentially the same kind of work except more of it. I cannot say that my job radically changed in the twelve years that I was there. It just became increasingly pleasant up to a point. It was very, very lively. There was a lot of interaction with the faculty. Everyone was on a first name basis and it was just very, very pleasant.

Hewitt: It actually sounds very nice.

Christensen: Oh, I loved it!

Hewitt: Now when did you leave the St. Pete campus?

Christensen: I left the St. Petersburg campus on July 1st of 1980.

Hewitt: And moved back to the Tampa campus?

Christensen: Right.

Hewitt: Why did you end up leaving St. Pete? You obviously had a very positive image of the campus and the people there.

Christensen: At the risk of being edited out, I mentioned the fact that there was an interim dean on that campus and then a permanent dean was hired. When the permanent dean came on board in January of 1979, I began immediately having fairly serious problems with him. Specifically, I felt that I was the victim of sexual harassment. When I finally got up the nerve to bring this up to the attention of the authorities, here at the University of South Florida, they in their collective

wisdom decided it was nothing more than a personality problem and that the only way to resolve it would be to transfer me off the campus. So they, in effect, created a position for me to get me off that campus.

Hewitt: Was the actual problem of sexual harassment ever dealt with?

Christensen: No, it was not. They attempted, I think, to ignore it for several years until finally through a series of machinations I was able to bring it to the attention of the media. I attempted to file charges with the assistance of a lawyer but that didn't work out. I finally went to the Equal Opportunity Commission and the Florida Ethics Commission and that, of course, came to the attention of the media. It wasn't too terribly long after that that the Dean in question resigned to return to his first love - teaching. I would like to think that I had something to do with that.

Hewitt: I know that there is an attempt, coming up in the fall, to do a survey on sexual harassment at USF to try and both publicize the guidelines and perhaps revise the guidelines. Do you have any suggestions from your experience as to what ways this issue could be handled more easily, either from your own personal sense of how difficult it is to report it and act on it or in terms of how the institution itself could more easily handle the situation?

Christensen: I'm afraid that I had such a bitter experience that it's very difficult for me to come up with any suggestions. The advice that I give to women, and in some cases men who perceive that they have been victimized by sexual harassment, is to say nothing and to do nothing,

to take very, very careful notes and to do their very best to find others who have been treated in the same way. Then when they have overwhelming evidence to bring it to the attention of the authorities. Prior to that time I think anyone who brings charges of sexual harassment is in effect signing his or her own termination papers. I don't think, based on what I have seen of the University's action in the past, that anything is going to be done about these things unless the evidence is overwhelming. That was the case with the "De Rusha" situation. I think it will always be his word against hers. It's far more expensive to replace a dean than to replace a secretary.

Hewitt: When you came back to the Tampa campus, you then came back to the School of Extended Studies where you work now. Was this a new school . . . ?

Christensen: It was an entirely new ballgame for me because prior to the time that the School of Continuing Education was created, we had had for many years, I think for sixteen years or so, a Center for Continuing Education which dealt with non-credit kinds of programs for personal development and personal interest kinds of things, basket weaving if you will, and photography, etc. So it was mostly all a non-credit kind of thrust. It occupied very, very low status in the University. I suppose that five years ago the administration decided that it was going to do something about increasing the importance and the visibility of the continuing education mission and a School of Continuing Education was created ostensibly with the intention of bringing it to the forefront. It is my opinion, five years later, that that has not happened. The University has invested a certain amount of money in

line-item positions to support the School of Extended Studies, but beyond that it has been my observation that very little is being done beyond service. I think we are still an extremely low man on the totem pole with virtually no legitimacy; certainly no academic legitimacy associated with the School of Extended Studies for the programs there.

Hewitt: You had been away from the Tampa campus for a number of years. When you came back to this campus, what was your sense of the changes that had occurred in the atmosphere on campus, relations with administrators or faculty?

Christensen: Again, that was a totally different ball game. When I left the University, when I left the Tampa campus in '68, there still was a large amount of the closeness and the camaraderie that we experienced in the early years. But when I came back in 1980, after twelve fairly short years, the entire atmosphere had changed. It had become almost an adversarial atmosphere. It was the career service and the faculty against them. In the interim period, of course, a great deal of attention was being given to civil rights, to women's rights, equal opportunity, affirmative action, and a lot of problems were beginning to surface. A lot of people who perceived that they were victims of discrimination of one kind or another were beginning to speak up. They were beginning to be aware that they indeed were victims of these various kinds of actions and they were beginning to speak out. The administration was not always dealing with these problems the way we would like to have seen them dealt with. So it became almost, like I said, adversarial. We had lost, a lot of us had lost, any kind of

respect, I'm afraid, for the upper level administration who was making the decisions that affected all of our lives and careers.

Hewitt: Now in that period, as you mentioned that there was a lot of concern about civil rights and women's issues. It's also in that period, I believe, that the Status of Women Committee and the Equal Opportunity Office came into being. Did you become involved in those kinds of committees and associations when you moved back to the campus?

Christensen: Yes I did. I immediately leaped into the fray. My own experience had taught me that there were very serious problems that were not being dealt with appropriately by an administration that I think either didn't know how to deal with those problems or chose not to deal with those problems. So I became very much involved in women's rights issues, civil rights issues, equal opportunity and that kind of thing. I was on the Status of Women Committee; I was on the Career Service Senate for several years; I served on an Equal Opportunity Committee for two years; I served on a committee that addressed the problem of sexism; and as a result of those various activities, I became aware of many unresolved problems dealing with discrimination of various kinds. And I also learned, unhappily, that although we did a lot of screaming, hollering, beating our breasts, and demanding resolutions that really very, very little was accomplished as a result of our collective effort. I would have to maintain to this day that the only accomplishment that we ever saw were accomplishments that the administration wanted us to realize in the first place. I don't believe we have ever been able to force the administration into doing anything that it wasn't inclined to do.

Hewitt: In your work in the Career Service Senate, were the people who became involved in that mostly people who have been on campus for awhile and through their own experience decided to become more involved in these kinds of activities, or was there sort of a new breed of career service hired?

Christensen: To begin with, your operating on the assumption that people in the Career Service Senate were involved. That's a false assumption. There were, there still is, a core of career service staff who are very, very much involved and very active in the kinds of issues that effect career service employees as a whole. Generally speaking, in a Career Service Senate of say 50-70 people, you would find only 10 or 11 who really were interested in doing anything. The rest were there because it got them out of their offices for an hour or two. And this is still true. This has always been a problem. Very, very few people were really willing to take a stand and to put their money where their mouth is.

Hewitt: In terms of dealing with the sexism issues and the Status of Women Committee, I assume that those issues were dealt with not only by career service but also by women faculty, women administrators, and women students. Was there a sense--since the lines between faculty, administration, and staff seem to be more rigid by the '70s than they were in the early days--was there a sense within those committees, a greater crossing of the lines between status, or was it still a problem even when you were dealing with all women?

Christensen: The distinction was definitely there. There is a very distinct division between female professional staff and non-professional staff. This was true no matter what kind involvement or issue. I served on many committees with faculty and administrators. Perhaps it was just my perception, but I felt that not as much weight was given to my opinions and to my values because I didn't occupy the kind of reign that some of the other members did.

Hewitt: Were there more women just numerically whether faculty, administrative, or staff on these committees? I assume in the early days there could have not been too many.

Christensen: No, that's true. That's one thing I have noticed. I have noticed that there are many more women coming out who are becoming more outspoken about issues, greatly outnumbering the men. The men are remarkable by their few numbers as a matter of fact.

Hewitt: When you came back to the Tampa campus that you had been away from for a dozen years, when you left you said that it still had the quality of being like one big family. When you came back I assume a lot of people had left or changed jobs, or whatever. Were you able to recreate any of that sense of familial ties?

Christensen: Not really, no. Only with the people that I had known in years before. Those people, of course, and to this day we still consider ourselves a little different from the rest. We were the pioneers. We're the ones who started it, and we lived through the early days of the Johns Committee and all of the various rigors associated with getting something started. There is still a very, very close little

group of people who have been around for 25 years. But, no. There is nothing . . . I think that perhaps one of the reasons that I haven't attempted to establish that kind of atmosphere is just the sheer numbers that are involved now and the fact that the turnover is so great. People aren't staying with it as long anymore. People are in and out in a hurry. It's just too transitory.

Hewitt: So if we do this kind of project 25 years from now we may not find a pool of people who have been here that long?

Christensen: I would be very surprised if you did. People just don't want to stick around. This is just a stepping stone.

Hewitt: You mentioned going through the Johns' Committee. Do you have any recollections of the Johns' Committee investigation on campus?

Christensen: My recollections are from the perspective of a tremendous amount of naivete. I didn't really know what was going on. I was just a teenager. I had been born in Scarborough Junction in Canada and I was raised in Lutz. I didn't know what "purple prose" was. I didn't know what a homosexual was. I had heard of communists, but I thought they were Koreans running around with guns. That was about the extent of it. I really hadn't taken this thing very seriously. And all of a sudden, I simply knew there was an oppressive atmosphere on the campus and that a political committee of some kind was investigating the faculty and their sexual and political proclivities. The reading material was being investigated, and the faculty were losing their jobs because they were homosexuals or they were dissidents or they were this or that. I really didn't know. If I learned anything, I

learned a great appreciation for purple prose because I found out in a hurry that I liked it. But really, I was kind of frightened about the whole thing and I didn't want to admit that I didn't know what was going on, so I just kept my distance. For a good, long time I wondered what really had happened. I'm not sure even now I know what really happened except that a number of really good faculty left and lost their jobs.

Hewitt: Do have any sense that career service people in general felt either tense about the investigation as it was going on, whether you felt like, as a career person, you somehow might be subject to investigation, or was it more that you were on the outside?

Christensen: I think we were pretty much excluded from the whole thing. We really weren't involved in it. I think that was the sign of the times despite the fact I'd like to believe that there was a tremendous amount of camaraderie and oneness. Still career service people were in a class of their own and they were excluded from a lot of those things, and I suppose it's because the faculty and administration felt there was no need for us to be involved in it. I don't think that any of us had any fear that we ourselves were being investigated.

Hewitt: Was it more just the general tension of the faculty and administrators around you that was making you nervous?

Christensen: That's right.

Hewitt: Obviously there have been a lot of changes at USF especially since you've gone from the Tampa campus to St. Pete and back again. When you think back over the 25 years that you've been here, are there

changes that really stand out in your mind in terms of what you see as either being real improvements that have been made or real disadvantages that have increased over the years?

Christensen: I would say that there have been many, many more negative changes than positive changes. One of the positive changes, of course, has been the strides that women and minorities have been able to make in the university system. Back in the early days of the University, I think that we women, more or less, took for granted our place in society. I don't think it occurred to a lot of us that we really did have rights and we had abilities and skills. So we were perfectly happy to accept our lot in life. We were low women on the totem pole, and it was no big problem because nobody said to us that this is the way it has to be. And I think that may have also been true largely for blacks and other minorities. It wasn't really until I got back to this campus that there was the real, real visible women and the visible black, saying "Hey, look, we have rights and we're going to demand them by God!" When we learned that we did have rights and those rights had the strength of the law behind them, it made a lot of us feel more comfortable about being outspoken. I, for one, never said boo about anything in probably the first twenty years that the University was open.

Hewitt: Well, I have only been here the last four.

Christensen: Yes, I have finally learned that I could speak up because I learned as a woman I do have opinions and some of them are valid and I have a right to speak them without being stepped on and without being told that secretaries are to be seen and not heard. So I think that women

certainly, professional as well as non-professional, have made great strides and I think that there has been a vast improvement. The men are very much aware of our existence now and I think they're going to be, as each year goes by, a little more careful about abridging our rights. So that has been an improvement. I think that the University, the atmosphere in general, the environment in general, is not a happy one anymore. If anything it is become more adversarial since I came here in 1980 and I find that almost everything . . . It always seems to be us against the administration and the University lawyers. I think if we got rid of the University lawyers . . . If we just told them to go downtown and establish their own practice many of our problems would be over. So much . . . so many of our problems end up in litigation where I think that just a few reasonable people putting their heads together could resolve many of the real serious problems that we have here with respect to salaries, wage discrepancies, and other perceived problems of discrimination.

Hewitt: In the years since 1960 USF has gone through three presidents and two interim presidents and many people have mentioned, faculty in particular, the shift in presidents as being kind of marking points of shifts in all areas of life on campus. As someone involved in career service, did you feel those shifts as being significant?

Christensen: Very much so. John Allen, our first president, was a very kind, congenial old gentleman. And again, seen from the general perspective of naivete, I really didn't know a whole lot about the political intrigues and the things that were going on. I just thought of him as a rather big, benign dictator, if you will. People pretty much heeled

when he issued his orders. Everything was done very quietly and very gentlemanly and if people were losing their jobs, it was all done very quietly and kindly as he did in those days. And then along came Cecil Mackey. Even before he arrived on board, we were told "Mac the knife" was coming. Mackey came with his entourage and immediately cleaned out shop. A lot of heads started to roll. A lot of higher level heads started to roll. The entire atmosphere of the University changed then. It became very business like, much more rigid, much more constrained, and people were fearful of him. He was definitely seen as very autocratic. There were people who were identified as his "hatchet men" and it was seen more like a big corporation. When Mackey left, there was a huge collective sigh of relief, and then of course, Jack Brown came on board as permanent president. I think now the presidency really is perceived as a figure head. I don't believe people really think of Jack Brown as taking any real role in what happens to the faculty and the staff. I think that he is seen as engaging in public relations and his various henchmen are still ruling the roost. I don't think that Brown is viewed with the same kind of fear as Cecil Mackey was, but rather as someone who perhaps is not as involved as perhaps he ought to be and as a president who defers entirely too much to his subordinates.

Hewitt: Where do you think the sort of locus of action is at the University? You mentioned that in John Allen's day that it seemed like it really came from the president's office. That's where the initiatives came from. Since then, how do you think that has shifted?

- Christensen: I would have to say that the initiative from my perspective, from what I am able to observe where I sit, there are three major sources of initiative. One, of course, is Greg O'Brien in Academic Affairs, teamed up with Bert Hartley, the executive vice president, teamed up with the legal office. I don't think anything happens in this University without those three offices being much involved in it. Everything else is peripheral.
- Hewitt: When you were talking earlier about the Status of Women Committee, the Career Service Senate, the Committee on Sexism and the Equal Opportunity Committee, that all of those groups have grass roots and initiatives. Do you know ways for those kinds of groups to be more effective now that there is more interest or at least active involvement in litigation and the use of the legal office? Are there ways for career service or faculty . . .
- Christensen: No, I think not. I think that individuals . . . Back in the old days I think if a person had a problem, he/she might have been able to work it out with his/her superior without becoming involved in litigation, without invoking equal opportunity (Title 9 and Title 7) and all that business. Unfortunately, it has been my experience that when the person challenges the University or challenges the decision made by the University, that affects his/her career or his/her livelihood, that he/she is taking on a monumental bureaucracy and he/she is not going to have an advocate in the administration; that the legal office is there to serve the interest of the upper level administration and that it's a real uphill battle. I would not recommend it to anyone unless he/she had a limitless supply of money and I would not

recommend to anyone to file a suit against the University. I think that it has reached that stage now that when you challenge your rights, unless your case is extremely clear cut and extremely well done, I think you might as well accept things the way they are or find another job. I think you're taking on a huge bureaucracy that while it has given lip service to the various rights that we have earned or recognized over the years, it is still part of the good old boy network - very, very firmly entrenched. I think it is a losing battle and in fact I think that women and minorities, although we have made great strides, I think that we are going to see in the next twenty years or so that we are taking a giant step backwards.

Hewitt: One of the ways that women and minorities began to improve their status or got the knowledge and information to improve their status was through higher education and having more women and minorities with degrees and with specialties and people who understood the law and also helped to create it. The University of South Florida does have programs whereby career service people can take college courses. Do you have any sense of whether (1) that program existed when you first arrived at USF, and (2) has there been any change in encouraging career service people to gain the kind of skills and information that might help them improve their status, if not in the University then in the world at large?

Christensen: I was aware of the existence of the tuition waiver program in the early years of the University and in fact, took advantage of it myself on occasion. I took assorted courses just depending upon what was of interest to me. In fact, I still take advantage of those, the tuition

waiver program, on occasion; but generally it has been my experience in talking with my co-workers, that they are discouraged rather than encouraged to take advantage of this. It is very difficult to take a course under the tuition waiver program. You need to take it on a space available basis and you also need to be able to confirm in writing that you are either taking it as part of a degree or that it is something that is specifically work related. Unless you have a supervisor who is advocating your going to school, you are not going to be able to get him/her to agree that it is part of your work. You always have to be degree seeking. If you are a full-time worker it is very difficult to get your courses during the day, so you have to take them at night. So really, I don't think that it is any easier for career service people now, than if they were non-employees of the University taking courses at night. Some people are able to get their degree. Nancy Taylor is a perfect example of that. I do not see that there is any encouragement. I have never in all my years in the University had a supervisor come to me and say, "Donna, why don't you take this or this, you know it would really do you good," or "I really wish you would take advantage of this." I have never been encouraged to do that. And I don't know of anyone else for that matter, although I'm sure that there are. No, there is no "dictum from on high" that says you should strongly encourage your people to take advantage of this opportunity because it's not really that good of an opportunity.

Hewitt: Are there still activities and committees that you are involved in at USF? You mentioned that when you came back in 1980 that you got involved in a variety of activities. Since then, it sounds like you

have come to realize the difficulties of any of those committees taking much effect. Are there things you still try to do on campus?

Christensen: On occasion, yes. I do still try to stay active in the activities associated with Women's Awareness Week every year. That is about the extent of it. I do that primarily because it is a forum for expressing some of my opinions about these things and trying to sensitize people regarding issues that we have to deal with, particularly with respect to sexual harassment. But apart from that, no, I do not involve myself for the simple reason that I think we are beating our heads against a brick wall. I think that we only get what the administration wants us to get. Quite frankly, I'm a little tired of it. I'm tired of trying to deal with them. I'm tired of the lip service. So, I just prefer not to be involved in it. And I got tired of the general apathy of the Career Service employees as a whole. There are just a few people and there are probably 10 all together. Everyone knows who they are because they are so outspoken and because they are very visible, and apart from that, the average career service person seems to be quite content with his lot in life. You get tired of fighting other people's battles for them.

Hewitt: Is there anything you'd like to add to this interview to sort of sum up your quarter century at USF?

Christensen: I guess I would have to say that despite the disappointments that I've experienced over the years, and there haven't been many of them, there have been one or two major disappointments where I felt the University had failed me personally; but by and large, my 25 years at the

University has been, as I have described it before, always like a paid vacation. It has been a tremendous experience and I quite frankly can't imagine working anywhere else. I came here as a teenager, my daughter is now older than I was when I came to work, and I expect they will drag me out of here kicking and screaming when I'm about 90 years old.

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