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USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
USF 50th History Anniversary Project

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TRANSCRIPTION

G: Today is November 25, 2003. This is Mark Greenberg, the director of the Florida Studies Center at the USF Tampa Library. I'm with Kelly Browning, who is president of the Graduate and Professional Student Organization here at USF. We are going to spend some time this morning as part of our ongoing project to record the history of the University of South Florida, as it gets ready to commemorate fifty years of service to the Tampa Bay area. Well good morning, I'm glad you could be here.

B: Good morning, thank you.

G: I want to ask you some questions about yourself as background. Then we'll talk about the Graduate and Professional Student Organization and your activities there. Can you tell me where you grew up?

B: I grew up in Montana. I was born in Condo, Montana, and I lived in Montana most of my early childhood. I lived two years in Australia, [then] came back to Montana, my mother and I. I moved approximately thirty-seven times and went to eighteen different schools by my senior year in high school. We moved a lot. [I] went to Oregon for high school, and University of Minnesota, Morehead State for my undergraduate work in criminology and political science. [I] came back to Florida, to the University of Central Florida. [I]

graduated with my master's degree and am now here in Tampa.

G: I'm sure there's a reason why you moved around so much, was somebody in the military?

B: No, nobody was in the military. Mom and I just seemed to move a lot. There was no good excuse.

G: How did you get interested in criminology and political science? Where did that come from?

B: I think that the political science major was, my mother's very active in a lot of different organizations and I've always admired her. She's certainly my number one role model. I was always very interested in causes, and trying to save the people. So the political science part came into how can we change things at a larger level. How can we really make a difference on individual but more of a society difference? The criminology part I think is just the same fascination that most people have with CSI, or Law and Order, or any of the other interesting aspects, trying to understand why humans do the things they do.

G: When you were looking at Ph.D. programs, you were at Central Florida for your master's degree in criminology?

B: That's correct.

G: What criteria were you looking at? What made you choose USF?

B: There's several things. I looked at different programs in different states, but I had also started researching starting a consulting business here in Florida. I thought I would like to stay in Florida and continue my business. I started shopping programs. I looked at the university up in D.C., and University of Cincinnati, Tulane, Albany. [I] talked to all the

people that are involved with those universities at the American Society of Criminologists Conference, which was held in Toronto, Canada. [I] had the opportunity to meet the graduate program director at the time from the University of South Florida up there. I was really impressed with the openness of the program. I was very concerned about being able to run my business, because I needed to do that to pay the bills, as well as to further my education. Would I be able to do both of those things at this university? That's Dr. Rich at the time, and I found him very receptive to all ideas. I wasn't sure exactly what I wanted to do. I felt like if I went to some of the other universities I really needed to be focused entering a program on only doing one thing, and I had several different interests. I felt that this program was a better pick for me to allow me to kind of fidget my way through and figure out what exactly I wanted to focus on.

G: Tell me about the business. What is your consulting business?

B: I started a research consulting business pretty much out of luck. I was working with a mentor at the University of South Florida that had a call about doing a project with the National Center of Forensic Science in Orlando. She had no interest, but she said, I know somebody that might be [interested]. I kind of got involved that way. What they were doing was they were studying fire and explosion investigators, and what kind of background they had and how do you become a fire explosion investigator. It was very new to me. I found it fascinating and I did that project for about two years. They were happy with my work, they passed my name on to somebody else, who passed my name on to somebody else, and I had another opportunity interesting whether somebody asked me, well what's the name of your business? I said, ok, I'd better come up with a name

for my business. Of course my last name is Browning, so I said Browning Consulting. I had business cards made the next day. Since then I've had an opportunity to work in some wonderful areas. I've worked on about four federal grants. Federal or state grants. Some studying mental illness, dual diagnose, treatment centers in Bush County. Probably the one that taught me the most about myself was a study on adolescent suicide. I had an opportunity as the principal researcher to design a study to study why adolescent suicide rates in Florida in Busch County were so high. I went and I interviewed families who lost their children to suicide. I learned a lot about myself, and a lot about life, and appreciate it a lot more. My business taught me a lot about being thankful for having the opportunity to go to school, and to have all the wonderful things and opportunities that have been brought into my life.

G: About race is another question. Why the desire to pursue a Ph.D.? How is this part of your overall life goals or career goals?

B: For me the Ph.D. is not so much about the Ph.D. letters. It's more for me about something that I can take away from it. I've always had the desire. I've been very, very lucky to be able to go to college, and I know that. I've always said there's two things I want in life; I want to build my own house, and I want to obtain a Ph.D. I built my own house about two years ago now, and hopefully, in July, I will have my Ph.D. For me it's about personal growth and just something to be able to say, I've done this, I've accomplished this, and nobody can take that away from me. I'm from Montana; you never know what they say. No, I saved up my money from my business. I scrimped and scraped and had roommates until then. I put money down on a house and had it built out

in Orlando Lakes, which is just north of here. That was an interesting experience while going through my Ph.D. to build a house. I had no idea how much stress would be involved. I didn't lay a brick, but it was a very stressful process anyway. It was a wonderful process, and I'm very happy with it.

G: Tell me about your dissertation, what are you working on?

B: My dissertation is something I hadn't planned on working on. I had several opportunities to do dissertation topics and nothing that was really grabbing at me. Like all graduate students, I've come to find that the things that were most interesting, there's not somebody to work with you necessarily in that. That's a reality. I think also part of being a graduate student is realizing you need to be flexible. I went to my chair, and I said I need some help. I need to come up with a topic that you will work with me on. We came up with homicide suicide, lethal violence. What I'm working on right now is trying to analyze at a county level the rates in Florida of suicide and homicide and how they correlate. Whether or not that as suicide raises, does homicide raise? Because that's kind of been the old standard. What we're finding is that it's not necessarily just that the rates raise at the same time, as much as it is about why people choose either homicide or suicide. That's the interesting component. Why do they choose that?

G: You expect to graduate...

B: Well I would like to be done with my dissertation in July, so I would be graduating over the summer, 2004.

G: Who's chairing your committee?

B: Dr. Dwayne Smith, and he's the chair of the criminology department. He's been very

supportive. Like I said, I came to him one day finally and just sat there for an hour. [I] realized that I'm not going to change the world with my dissertation today, so what do I need to do to come up with a topic, get completed, and then be able to go out and save the world?

G: In addition to all the things you've been telling me about, you're also involved in campus life. Are there things we need to talk about before we talk about the Graduate and Professional Student Organization? Are there other organizations that you became involved in here at USF before you got involved in?

B: Actually no, there weren't. I think I kind of came out a different way. I saw a flyer one day on the wall that said, are you not satisfied with graduate student life at the University of South Florida? Do you want to make a difference? I've never been one to be overtly involved in campus life. I've always had a lot of volunteer activities outside the universities that I've attended. But I thought, you know, there's some things I really think could be done better. So I thought, well it can't hurt to go to this meeting. I walked out of that meeting as treasurer of the Graduate Professional Student Organization. I'm kind of shaking my head going, I didn't think this was what I was going in there for. I had an opportunity to get exposed to graduate student life, an inner life that I felt could be improved for so many graduate students on this campus. I'm very proud of the University of South Florida. At the same time, I think when you're proud, there's nothing wrong with criticizing. I felt there were some things that needed to be improved, and I wanted to make a difference.

G: What were those things? What did you see when you got here?

B: One of the things that happened for me was communication. I felt like there was no communication for graduate students at the University of South Florida. There's a lot of communication about undergraduate students and what was important to them, but very little specifically on graduate student life. Like there was a lot on homecoming. And homecoming is very important to a university. When I was an undergraduate I was very active in it. As a graduate student I had different interests. I wanted to try and find a way to create a climate that was conducive to those interests. I also felt that communication. I had come here knowing I was going to teach. I started teaching, only to find out three weeks into the semester that I had an office and a phone that I didn't know about. It sounds silly. As I share this story with other people, I'm not the only one that's happened to. There's just some really basic things that I think, there's nobody in the middle to share, oh by the way, here's some of the things that are available to you, or special to you as a graduate student. I wanted to try and get the word out. What I found is that there weren't a lot of things. It was about the things that existed, pulling demand, and then creating new.

G: How are the lines of graduate students different from undergraduate students on this campus? Where's the distinctiveness in that experience?

B: I think that at least me and from my perspective, how life as a graduate student is very different because normally number one, you're solely independent. You really don't have the financial backing. You're also older and so it's not that you can lean back on your parents at times and move back home if you needed to. Even more than that I think you, like everybody in life, you go through growth spurts and maturity spurts. Things

that become so important as you get older that you could have cared less about when you were younger. I don't think that means that they're any better, you just change. It's about change. I think that a lot of graduate students are married, or have significant others of some sort that they want to be involved in their life. As a graduate student you can't take your courses, and then leave, and never think about them again. Everything you're building in your graduate student career is for your future. You want everybody involved in your life to be involved with that. There's very little that I've found on campus that you can have as people that are important in your life involved in, as far as your schooling. I think as an undergraduate I was taking classes in English, and the sciences, and as well as political science. Biology; I had so many different areas I had to take courses in. Nothing focused. I think when you hit the graduate student level, you focus on your topic, whatever that topic might be. I think by doing that, you have to find a way to make your life more focused, if that makes sense.

G: What sorts of things does the Graduate and Professional Student Organization do?

B: The Graduate and Professional Student Organization, known as the GPSO, we basically overlook, for all graduate students, issues that relate to academics, policies, and social and cultural issues, in any way they impact students life. Some of the projects that we've worked on to try and better the life for graduate students on this campus, we've tried to create an atmosphere where they feel special and unique and that they have special services. We were able to obtain a graduate student representative in the financial aid office, which we thought was very important, because graduate students qualify for different loans and different scholarships than undergraduate students. It's important that

there is somebody that's specialized in that. Vandine McKenzie was chosen, and she's been wonderful, I've had a lot of good feedback from graduate students that have had to talk to her; you know I've got this special situation, I got married last year and now they're changing my financial aid. I think that's more applicable to graduate students. We also know that presenting your research or your papers at conferences is very very important in networking the University of South Florida's name, as well as your own name, and making a mark. So we created a program known as the Conference Presentation Grant Program, CPGP. The CPGP offers up to \$350 this year for students who travel to a professional conference and present their research. I just feel like that such a crucial part as a Research I university to be able to get our name out there and see the University of South Florida's name, as well as our students to get out there and do research. That's what gets us that renowned name, besides just the fact that we have nice weather down here. Those are some of our large programs. We work on pretty much all-different areas. We just received an application two weeks ago from Derrie Perez, who's the dean of the USF library system. She had met one of our proposals for having extended library hours. That was another thing that for graduate students, those two weeks prior to the end of the semester, were just a nightmare to get in between ten and five, whatever it is. They were able to meet those needs, and the library has been one of the best resources on this campus for graduate students. It's so crucial. It's so important to graduate student life to have a place that has great resources. We know the library struggles with funding, as many areas on campus do. They were really willing to work with us. They didn't have the extra money to pay extra staff to be here for those extra

hours, but they figured out a way. It took six, seven months, but they were able to do it. We're really proud to say that that's one of our proposals that came through as well. We were able to obtain a graduate student counselor, extended library hours, the Conference Presentation Grant Program. One of the programs or projects that we worked on, the proposals that we proposed for financial aid office was full-time graduate students for need-based scholarship money. One of the things I found out, Dean Dale Johnson, previous dean to the graduate school, I had a lot of questions about where all these fees go. We know the university needs to run on fees. Sometimes they don't make sense. What I did was I started searching through of the financial aid fees. What I found is that graduate students pay roughly over a million dollars a year in financial aid fees at this university. Okay, that's fine, but where does that money go? When I started digging around I find out, okay, most of it goes to need-based scholarships. Well that's terrific, I mean, that's what it's all about. Graduate students didn't qualify for those need-based scholarships. They were paying over a million dollars a year at this time. Well that just doesn't make sense. Like many of the things that I've been able to encounter as president of the Graduate Professional Student Organization, when I asked the question, why is it this way? Let me understand. They said, it's just always been that way. I just said, well that's not a good enough answer, and we need to change it. We worked with the director of financial aid, Leonard Booty, and his staff, the dean of the graduate school, Dale Johnson at the time, and put in a formal proposal requesting that graduate students qualify for these need-based scholarships. As of fall, 2003, this semester, graduate students qualify for up to \$2000 in free money. I think that's really important because

that money is money that graduate students won't have to take out in student loans, that will help improve the retention rate. This money, there's so little of it to go around, but it goes to those that really need it. I like to think that I need it, because I get funded by financial aid, and the amount of money I show as an estimate of family contribution isn't much, but I didn't get any. When I started searching, these are people that really need the money. We're very happy with those proposals.

G: Is there a social side to what the organization does? I mean do they bring graduate students together just for camaraderie and that sort of thing, or is it all professional in orientation?

B: No, actually, we knew that was something that was really lacking at the university as well. What we do is we offer a fall social event and a spring social event over the past two years. In addition to that this year we are getting together for the spring semester a significant other social event. We think that's very important. Divorce rate of graduate students is very high, and when we talk to people about why, they say, I just felt so not included, or excluded completely from that side of their life. That's a big part of life. Graduate student life is not just one little piece of the job that you leave at home. We have a significant other social event that we're going to have out at the USF park outside, and have a picnic where people can bring their children and their families or significant others, and just have an opportunity to socialize. What we found the first GPSO social event we held, we had about thirty-five people attend. When you have about 7000 plus graduate students that's not necessarily a really positive thing. We just keep getting the word out there. At our last social event I believe we had about 230 people attend. It was

wonderful. Most of the people I had never met before. I would say I had met about ten percent, probably less. They're from all different programs, and all the feedback was, this is so nice to be able to meet people outside of my one little department where I just hibernate. That's what graduate students do, you kind of get reclusive right into that department. It was a great opportunity for us to meet. I meet people in the biomedical science, which I would never have an opportunity as a criminologist to meet otherwise. Social sciences areas, English department, visual and performing arts, just all the really important areas of campus that I don't have an opportunity to meet people in. I've also found I'm networking with those people at these social events. I hear them talking about dissertation topics, and it's really nice for them to be able to say, well I had this problem, how did you deal with this? We are creating an atmosphere that's a little bit more conducive to graduate student life. I think we have a long way to go, but I think we're moving in the right direction right now. Part of that is we had no funding. We had funding from the student government, which is primarily undergraduate, and I believe our first year our budget was right around \$1600. Well when you're overseeing 7000 plus students, that just doesn't go far. We knew we needed to create a way to make some money. We needed money to make the organization sustain. We looked at a lot of different areas and ways we could possibly do that. We approached the student government about getting a larger chunk of the A&S fees that all students pay. That proposal was met with about a thirty-six power-point slide presentation of why it couldn't happen. We checked out offering a five-dollar graduate student fee, plus per credit. That seems to be the trend of the university for charging fees. Ultimately what it came down

to is I spent a lot of time talking to graduate students and administrators about ways we could do this. What we found is that in the Florida statutes, there was a little provision for a graduate student fee. It was a thirty-five dollar fee. They call it an orientation fee. I was very reluctant to move on having another fee for students, but I also know it takes money to do things. I met with the graduate students that attended the general assembly meetings, and talked to them about it, and asked them how they would feel. Ultimately what we came up with was the best possible solution, was the best possible solution for us as graduate students we felt, was a one-time fee. That one-time fee was implemented this semester, fall 2003. It's a thirty-five dollar, and we call it a graduate student comprehensive orientation fee program. We do that long name so it's not just used for an orientation process, because we think as graduate students it's not just about that one-time shot at, here's about the university, but it's through the whole year. By calling it a comprehensive orientation program we are able to offer the social events. We're able to offer money to some of the students that want to attend conferences but maybe aren't presenting, or need to do something. We're able to lobby. I was up in D.C. two weeks ago lobbying for graduate student rights. I talked to five of our state representatives, four Congress people, and one senator. I really expressed the importance of making thing like student loan interest tax deductible. The interest of not having the quote marriage tax we call it when you're a graduate student. It's actually a disadvantage to get married while you're a graduate student. We asked them to increase the amount of funding for unsubsidized loans. The average graduate student pays about \$26,000 a year for the graduate student education, and they take roughly \$22,000 out a year. That's a lot of

money. It's a large investment as a graduate student to go to graduate school. Most don't come out making millions of dollars. We know that going in. We're here for a different reason. I think that by lobbying our representatives it's very important that they realize, we will be taxpayers, we will be the productive members of society. If we need those breaks while we're in school, we need them to vote towards the higher education acts.

G: One of the things that occurs on most campuses, and it often makes the news, is the rights of graduate students as employees in particular whether or not they're part of the collective bargaining agreement and the use of graduate students to teach and to serve as teaching assistants. What role of responsibilities does your organization have to employment issues as they relate to graduate students?

B: At the University of South Florida, we have a GAU Graduate Assistants United, which is the Graduate Student Union we refer to it as. The GAU is solely responsible for dealing with all employment issues. However, the GPSO considers them like a sister organization. We support what they do, but we understand we have different methods to use to obtain what we need. What we do is we support them. We know that they're important, they're a needed resource for graduate students that are teaching. I taught over 1100 students at this university, so I can appreciate that. They need to have their voice in active ways that they can. We support them. We also think that there's a lot of areas that I deal with that encompass graduate assistant life as we call them, the graduate student employees. That's your health insurance. I don't think that's just an employee issue. I think that's a graduate student issue. The right to feel free of retaliation if you're

uncomfortable with something and saying, no, I'm not sorry, I'm not comfortable babysitting. I'm not comfortable helping you out this weekend house sitting. That's not my job as a graduate assistant. My job is to teach or do research or whatever they're hired to do. We're working right now with the GAU, Anna Bass is the current president of the GAU. We're working with them to create a culture of fairness and of comfort when they have a problem. One of the things, and this is true of all universities that I've met graduate student representatives from, there's always this fear. It's a genuine fear in many cases. It's this fear that if I say no, it's going to hurt my degree, and that's a scary thing. We're working to try and create a program. We met with President Genshaft. I hold graduate student luncheons with the president and top administrators. We met with her about two weeks ago, and we brought this topic up, and we asked for some guidance because we're not exactly sure how to combat it. We're not sure what the solution is. What we're doing right now is trying to work with a way to come up with a plan to at least have some sort of strategic plan, a place, here's where you can go. We know that they can come to us for efficacy, but how much more can we do. So that's what we're working on right now.

G: What sorts of things come up at the lunch? How often do you have the luncheon? Tell me about how the president related to graduate students, whether you think she has a distinct view of graduate education here.

B: The graduate student luncheons have been wonderful resources for us. What happened is last year I was so frustrated because when I would have my few meetings with the president and provost, they were so receptive to what I had to say, and they'd be like, you

know, this is the first time we've heard this. And what I realized is that like any other department or area, there's a gap. There's a gap where, here's the people that know what's going on, here's the people that want to know what's going on, and somewhere in between here, all the information doesn't transpire. I said, what would you think about having lunch with graduate students? She had mentioned, you know, I have lunch with the student government sometimes, but those are mostly undergraduates. She said, I would support it. I think it's a great idea. Call the administrative assistant, let's set it up. I did. Last year we started, and it's about every other month that we have a luncheon with the president. These lunches have been an incredible resource for graduate students. They're very comfortable. I invite about fifteen graduate students, most of which I don't know. I met one on a plane when I was traveling back from a conference, saw my bag that said University of South Florida, started talking. I said, would you be interested in attending a luncheon? Some I meet just walking through the library and just making conversation. These aren't people of the cream of the crop that we're picking. These are your average graduate students. They're amazing. The information that they bring to these graduate student luncheons, they brought up a lot of the problems with the financial aid. That's why the GPSO submitted a formal proposal to have a graduate student counselor. They brought up issues at the graduate student luncheon about financial aid scholarships and how graduate students just don't have it. That's when I started digging into the fees. Really every positive proposal that's come forth, the library proposal, extended privileges for graduate assistants that the GAU worked on, a lot of that came out of these graduate student luncheons. The president provost last year, Provost Stamps

was provost last year, had an opportunity at one of the luncheons to hear about Magnolia Housing. Well Magnolia Housing is supposed to be graduate student housing. I had never been there. I've always lived off campus. I was out of touch with that side. A student brought it up and said, you know, it's just not conducive to graduate students. Pretty soon three other students around the table said, it's not. They said the way it's set up, and the amount of people that are sharing. The president was very interested to hear that, because they thought they had done something for graduate students, and they had, but it wasn't effective. They went in there, and they've done some revamping, and from what I understand it's had some really positive changes. The luncheons have been a very positive experience. President Genshaft came in, and her number one priority, she said, was graduate student issues and research. I think that's wonderful. I think that it's up to us sometimes to bring to her, now how can you make that happen. That's where I think the GPSO falls in. I think we are able to bring the issues directly to her, instead of having to go through three or four different people. These luncheons, it's a one-on-one situation. It's very comfortable. President Genshaft has been known to kick off her shoes, and sit back, and just really talk. It's really a good feeling. I always ask the students afterward, how do you feel? Do you feel like she listened to what you had to say? Do you feel like administrators were there just kind of as, you know, okay, here we're doing our job, or that they really were listening? I've never had a graduate student come out of that meeting, even ones that maybe were skeptical of the administration going in, say I really felt like they weren't listening. Every one of them have said, I really feel like that made a difference. Something I said made a difference. A this past luncheon a couple weeks

ago, one of the students brought up that there wasn't a sidewalk on a road over, somewhere that I've never been. They said I've seen so many people almost get hit by cars walking. Vice Provost, Robert Chang, was there and he said, now where is this? Next thing we know, they're working on it, because that's a safety issue. Some of them are simple like that, and some of them are major like we need a financial aid person. I think that these graduate student luncheons are absolutely crucial. President Genshaft was one of the people that brought up the significant others. She said, you know, I know that as a graduate student, and some of the universities I came from, we had a lot of different things for significant others. What do you offer? I said, well nothing that I'm aware of. Let me check into this. As I checked into it, I realized, it was a lacking resource, and something we needed to do better at. That's why we're trying to hold this significant other social event.

G: There's also great ethnic diversity among graduate students. Is there anything that you are doing that would incorporate the fact that there are probable graduate students from how many dozens of countries around the world that come to USF? Can you say anything to the diversity of the graduate student population?

B: The graduate student population at USF, like many universities, and even more so maybe just because of the area we're in, is very diverse. Any time I say the graduate students, I'm always cautious because it's the graduate students that may be participating in general assembly meetings. We know that that's not all graduate students. I've had the opportunity to meet students as old as sixty-six years old that are graduate students, and students as young as twenty-one. I've had an opportunity to meet students from other

countries that I have the language barrier issue with, and that's really a challenge. I feel that that's something I have to work on. I stay in contact with the Students of India President Visanta is a wonderful person who leads the Students of India in amazing ways. It's really a very close-knit community. One of the things that we did this year is we developed a relationship so we can make sure that we're trying to service those needs of international students. Right now with the different tracking systems for international students, it's been a huge barrier to international students. It's made a huge impact on graduate student life at the University of South Florida. We had not one new graduate student from India this year, and we have a very large population of Indian students on this campus. I think that one of the things for the GPSO last year, I think the goal was really about making sure administration knew who we were, and being validated. That's what we needed to do last year. This year we have moved to trying to take it from that broader and broader level to really making contact with the different student organizations that represent black student life, or Latino, or whatever it might be. We've really worked on making communication with those student leaders. As of now, where I see the focus of the GPSO going, is to be that umbrella organization. To being the one that communicates directly with the administration like what we're doing. But then also, and the piece that we're trying to work on this year is making contact with the individual student organizations, graduate and undergraduate. In general, graduate student organizations, and really making sure that we have that top to the middle and then the bottom to the middle. That's really where I see the focus of this coming year. We really have done amazing things in two years. We've made an organization out of something

that didn't exist. That was primarily from the support of at the time, the dean of the graduate school, Dean Dale Johnson. He knew there was a need. I think one of the other ways that the GPSO really tries to hit on the diversity at this university, is we are responsible for helping to put graduate students on university-wide policy committees, which are crucial. They're the ones that make all the decisions for students. People have said, well where did that come down from? Well no one consulted me. What we've done is we have made it a priority to make sure that graduate students sit on these university policy committees. There's Women of the University Policy Committee, there's, a little bit more simple, but make a big difference, the Parking and Transportation committees, which is always an issue for students on campus. I think that's true anywhere. We have one on sexual orientation on this campus. There's just the library services. The decisions get made at the top level, and if you don't have student input, you're lacking. What my job, I believe, had been involved this past year, is really running around saying, well do you have a student on that committee, and if you don't let's put one on that committee. Graduate counsels is probably one of the most prestigious and makes the largest impact on graduate student life. They make all the academic policies that relate to graduate student life come through graduate counsel. One of the things that I did is I went out and we tried to find an international student, just students that represent all the different areas of life. Students that aren't all from social sciences, or all from the medical sciences. We're able to do that. We have three student representatives on the Graduate Counsel. They are voting members, they have full rights, and I think that's very very important. I've seen in the two and a half years I've been

involved sitting and watching Graduate Counsel, a huge transformation, where they start realizing that there's a different perspective. It's been very valuable both to the faculty members as well the graduate students to see the other side of it.

G: Something you said a couple minutes ago, the GPSO is how many years old?

B: Well, in 2000, is really when the idea started originally. The GPSO as a recognized organization on this campus is three years old. It's very new, and we've done some amazing things.

G: What did graduate students do before then?

B: That's a really good question, and from what I understand, they didn't. They fledged. I understand that there were graduate student organizations throughout the history of the University of South Florida that tried and came about, and then kind of fell behind. When I looked back, trying to understand, there weren't too many people that could tell me a lot about them, but as I tried to understand a little more about them, I realized one of the crucial things was the lack of funding. Without funding, you just can't exist. A lot of the undergraduate student organizations go out and do car washes. Well that's great, and when I was an undergraduate I did those things. As a graduate student, that's not what I have time for. I'm lucky if I can stick my head out of the library for five minutes, or away from my computer. We really needed to find a way. That's where I thought that financial, as hard as it was to implement a new tax on a student, it was a one-time fee, and how I saw it was, well \$35 one time. I have the opportunity to present at a conference a minimal if I'm a Ph.D. student at least four years. That's \$1400 in free money to travel to a conference. That's just saying if I don't just the financial aid

counselor, I don't get the need-based scholarships, I don't sit on a policy committee. I felt that if we had to do a trade-off, it was a pretty good trade-off. Prior to the GPSO I don't think there was a lot of support. I think it was really individual support. Now I get calls from all over the university saying I heard about your organization, I'm having this problem. Can you help me? I think it's just about them knowing they have an advocate. Somebody that if I don't know the answer, and many times I don't know the answer, I can go out and find the answer and give them, here's the direction you can start down. One of the other things that I think is absolutely crucial at this university that GPSO is able to do, is each time we had these presidential luncheon meetings, I would hear students come up with all these little different ideas, and they were like, if only I would have known these things when I started. I say that, this is my fourth year, and I'm like, oh gosh if I would have known that was available, or this existed. It became very clear that we needed an orientation. There has never been a graduate student, university-wide orientation on this campus, prior to fall semester, 2003. I said, all right, let's do this. I have no idea how we're going to do this, but let's figure it out. I called up a few other universities. Most of them don't do graduate student orientations either. Some of the departments do orientations, and some are better than others. Some are excellent, and some, hi, welcome, go figure your way out. We knew we needed a graduate student orientation. We didn't have any idea what to expect. We got this fee approved, and within two months, we put together a fall, 2003 orientation. I didn't know if fifty people would show up, or 500. We just really didn't know. We got all major areas on campus to support it. We had representatives from the library, we had representatives from the

athletic center. We had representatives from Parking and Transportation. We had representatives from computing centers. The president of the university came in on a Saturday, the Saturday before classes started, at 8:00 in the morning and spoke. The dean of the graduate school; we just had some wonderful people in all areas of life. How to get a student ID card, real basic things, how to purchase your parking permit. Did you know you could buy student health insurance? Real basic things, but what the goal was is to make it a one-stop-shop. Here's where you can gather the information. We put together a three ring binder with information on those areas on campus that were represented. There were so many more that weren't represented, we wanted to get the information out there, so we put a three ring binder. We called it the graduate student orientation binder. We had over 600 people attend fall semester. It completely blew my mind, how successful it was. I think what's so important about that was, obviously there was a need. These were new graduate students. From that orientation we're making a lot of changes for the spring. We're going to do this fall and spring every year, which is always interesting; trying to get it all done. It took a lot of work. I'll tell you what. The graduate school at the University of South Florida is amazing. I have worked in my business life, and as a student, in many different areas. The graduate school is probably the most under-funded area on this campus that services all graduate students. The staff over there are so incredible. All of them came in that could. There were just a couple that couldn't. And those that couldn't came in prior and helped me stuff binders, and stuff bags, and put together decorations. Really came together and helped out. Came in on a Saturday. Some of them got there as early as 5:00 in the morning to help me out.

They came together, they didn't get paid, and really tried to make a difference for graduate students, and they did. They made a huge difference. I have had contact with several graduate students since then. Some of them I've invited to the graduate student luncheons with the president, just hey, hi, how you doing, would you like to come? Yeah, I'd like to come, with the president of the university? You mean she meets with graduate students? I said, yeah, she does. The orientation I think has been one of the most, probably largest impacting things that the GPSO has been able to do. Now we've learned a lot, and there are a lot of things that we wouldn't do the same way the second time. We'll probably continue to. We really had a good time, and the students that went there, we handed out a survey. They did a little survey, cause we're graduate students and we like that kind of stuff; research. We had nothing but positive comments. The comments that weren't positive, it wasn't that they weren't positive, they were constructive criticisms, like maybe don't have quite as long of a speaker. To have that whole group of people come together from this campus; the registrar's office, the financial aid. On a Saturday morning before classes start, when everybody's crazy busy, come together and sit there and listen to each other. I had deans come up and say, you know, I didn't know that about this other area. I think that was a really important thing that's going to advance the culture of graduate student life here at the University of South Florida. I see it as, maybe for somebody like me that's been here four years, some of it's too late. I've already pretty much finished my degree. Some of that information is too late. However, this new culture of graduate students that we're starting, I see in four years, they're going to be so much more informed and positive. How does

communication and being informed make people positive? It makes people understand what's available to them and that's a wonderful thing. Four years from now I expect to be able to come back to this campus and see just an incredible graduate student culture; that I look forward to seeing. People say, well why do you do that, it's not impacting you directly right now. Well I think it does. I think ultimately if I walk out of here with a degree from the University of South Florida, and it's hanging on my wall, and four years after me there's this incredible graduate student culture. People get to experience all over the nation, oh you graduated from the University of South Florida. I get to say, yes I did. That means my degree is worth something. It's worth even more. I see this as really being able to make a small advance and leaving something better than when I came. I think that's really important in life to do that. I think everybody needs to really step up the pace and realize we need to leave it better than when we came. I feel like I've had an opportunity to do that. It's not because of Kelly Browning as much as it is the amazing graduate students that have been able to bring such incredible ideas forward and share them with me. It takes guts to stand up and say, hey this is wrong, this isn't right. What can we do about it? At the same time, this little bit of luck to be involved with the administration that I do believe cares about graduate student life. Do I believe it's perfect? No. But I do believe they care about graduate student life and I think that President Genshaft and now interim Renu Khator, both are working very hard to find a way to meet the needs of graduate students on this campus, realizing they haven't been there and as a research one university, we need to make those needs met. It's just an absolute must.

G: Are there specific things you mentioned a few minutes ago, just some things you were working on for the next year? Are there some long-range goals or just some very specific things that you think that this university needs to do as a research one university or just in general that you feel are critical to make graduate students as productive and positive as possible?

B: I do, and I think those things change all the time, and that's the importance of having graduate students involved in the decisions and the proposals. There's a hundred things I think are important. That's not necessarily what graduate students think are important. That's sometimes hard to realize. I have to always be communicative of that. I think number one key is the administrative to stay in touch directly with graduate students. Not graduate students who go to their chairs who go to the deans of the colleges and go to the deans of the graduate school, I don't think that's the right method. I think these graduate student luncheons are crucial. Maybe having some kind of social community open house Tuesday nights at 8:00. If you have an issue, come on in, the administration is going to be here, let's talk about it. I think that that's one of the areas I'd like to see it move to, because I think a lot more comes out that way. I think the positive networking between the GPSO and the administration is crucial. One of the things that I've found is that there's different methods to getting things achieved. You don't have to be so nice that you can't get anything accomplished, but you do have to be respectful. I have to deal with people the same way I want to be dealt with. Coming in and demanding things isn't always the answer. Bringing attention to this isn't right, here's the reasons why, and here's a solution, or a possible solution, I think is the key. That's important. I think that

students' health insurance is certainly one of the issues that's very crucial to graduate student life. I myself had medical issues as a master's student that almost ended my career, that put me in the poorhouse, literally. I think that being able to have a students' health insurance policy number one, that's effective, and for graduate assistants, these are your employees. These are the people that are teaching so many of our undergraduates at the University of South Florida. I've had classes as high as a hundred or so students as one person. That's a lot of students to teach. I'm impacting a lot of people's lives. I need to feel like I have the support and that I'm important. One of the ways to do that is to say, hey, your health is important to us. We know that if you can't be healthy, you're not going to be here to teach our students. I think that student health insurance, and I know the university has been working on that for many years, and hopefully we'll see some progression. That's one of the answers. I also think having more of a national appearance is very, very crucial. The University of South Florida does some amazing things. Sometimes I think that we're more recognized nationally than we are at our local Tampa Bay level. When September eleventh happened, we were one of I believe three schools that were chosen to go up to New York and search. We had a wonderful robot that went in and searched. That's incredible stuff. Most people in this community don't even realize that. I think we need to interact better with our community. I think we need to make the community realize that we are a valuable asset; we are important to this community. I think that that can happen a lot of different way. I think from the graduate student level one of the ways we were able to do that is from this orientation. I sent out letters to Staples, Office Depot, Chili's, saying, do you realize we have over 3000 new

graduate students every year enter this community? They buy. These are the purchasers.

What are you willing to do for them in your community? You'll notice that in the four years I've been in Tampa, I've noticed an incredible increase in the Bulls Country signs everywhere. I think that's wonderful and I think we need to really realize that valuable asset. We need to approach the businesses in this community and make sure we're networking with them. We need to ask them for money. We need to make this so the community feels like they've invested interest in that. Everybody wants to feel like they make a difference. Until we allow that to happen, I think we're missing something in this community.

G: What is going to happen when you graduate and leave? Who is going to be here? Who has the vision and the energy and the commitment that you have?

B: I appreciate the compliment, but I think that I've just been really lucky. I've had a wonderful opportunity placed before me and I've had a wonderful group of graduate students that have pushed for issues. I think of being the pawn in the chess set. I'm not the queen, I'm the pawn. I just kind of get pushed to wherever it needs to be. I've been lucky to be able to deal with the right people. I believe that's because most of people at the University of South Florida really do care about graduate students. I've been extremely concerned about leaving the GPSO because it's my baby. A lot of my life has been invested in this over the past couple years. However, I also understand that I'm not the reason for its success. Whoever takes this over will continue to do the right thing. I'm already searching. I have four or five people I'm looking at that I think could be excellent leaders. I think that it's interesting because all of the people that I'm looking at

are very different than myself. I think that's important. They'll bring in a new angle, a new perspective and carry this GPSO organization to a different visionary level. I think that it does take somebody that's going to be extremely responsible, I think one of the keys is to getting this funding, because now we can offer funding to these students. We need to make them feel important. You are representing 7000 plus graduate students and you're important. You know what? I'm going to pay you; I'm going to show you're important. Prior to this, it was voluntary work. I think that's crucial. I think the person that's going to lead this organization next is going to be the person that shows that step forward. While I'm searching and I'm watching and I talk to people about the organization I kind of see how interested they are. There are several students that have contacted me and said, how do I get involved? They're new students. A lot of them were at the orientation. I'd like to make a difference. How do I do that? It's a very important role. It's also a role that somebody needs to handle and be able to multitask. Ultimately my number one goal is a graduate student. That's important and hard to remember sometimes. I have to remind myself on a daily basis, sit down and write, sit down and write. Ultimately we're here to get a degree. If I could run the GPSO I would probably be successful but that's not what my life's about. That person's going to have to be somebody that can multitask. One of the people that have stepped forward and shown interest actually is in the health sciences, which is a totally different field from me, and is doing a little consulting work on the side as well, and my concern is, well do you have time? I kind of laugh when I ask that question because I look back at myself because I was running a business, I was teaching two courses a semester, twenty hours a week as a

graduate assistant, and building a house. I kind of laugh and I don't think it's necessarily about it's going to take the right person. It says, I can do this and I want to do this. I want to see it succeed; I've invested interest. I'd like to see a little more diversity in our organization. I think that's one of the thing our organization lacks, not intentionally. That's somewhere the vision of the next year. I think they need to really focus on making that networking communication with the international students. The teaching assistants we do a pretty good job. We've worked a little bit with the Center for Twenty-First Teaching Enhancement. They're an excellent resource on this campus that I didn't know about till last year. Being able to get that word out there to those people.

G: You're going to graduate, we hope and expect in July.

B: That's correct.

G: What comes next?

B: That's a really good question. I've always been a really focused person, and not necessarily planned. I like to keep everything open. Right now I'm very interested, this GPSO, like I said, was not something I walked into and going, oh I'm so interested in graduate student life. I found a need and I've always been interested in areas that have need. One of the things that I see that's lacking in this campus and most campuses across the nations at big universities is this idea of a strategic plan. What is strategic plan for the university? One of them is graduate student research. There's no strategic plan on how to get there. I would like to see, I think in the future, some way to work out, how do we recruit quality graduate students? More importantly, how do we retain them? We don't necessarily recruiting them, but retaining them. How do we keep them here? What does

it take to take a graduate student. We know money is one of the largest ones. The money here is really tough to come by. What else can we do if we're depending on our legislature to give us this money and every year it's a nightmare not knowing how much is going to be there, and not being able to offer graduate students money up front because we don't know. Therefore, making us not competitive. We have students that have looked at Duke and Harvard and Stanford, BYU, and some of the top universities and they've come here. I think those are the students we need to sit down and talk to and say, why did you choose this? One of the things that I think that I'm going to look at, and I'm spending some time right now doing that, is, could I develop a strategic plan? I like to work for myself. I've enjoyed my consulting business. Could I develop a strategic plan for graduate schools to help recruit and retain quality students? Minority students. We lack in them. How could we do that? So that's one of the areas that I'm looking at. I do enjoy teaching. I'm not sure it's my calling. I enjoy it, but I'm not sure it's my calling. I think if I could make a large impact on graduate student life nationally, that would be fantastic. It still falls into kind of the research area. Right now I'm attending conferences and trying to be like a sponge and just absorb information. I will be leaving next Tuesday for San Francisco to attend the Council of Graduate Schools annual conference. I'm doing that purely to go and try and collect information from the top programs in this country. How do you guys recruit? How do you retain your graduate students? My hope is then to bring it back here and be able to do something with our graduate school and share that information.

G: If you were sitting with a graduate student at this conference in San Francisco or

someplace else and they were thinking about what school to attend, what would you tell them to focus on? Would you say, come to USF, it's as simple as that? Or are there other things that you think affect the way graduate students should be thinking about where they go to school?

B: I think there are definitely other things. I've had some wonderful opportunities. Last year I was awarded one of the Florida student leader awards in the state. That was a wonderful opportunity. There was one other graduate student that made it. I had an opportunity to sit down with some of the amazing undergraduate students at this conference and said, well what are you going to do? Well we're trying to figure that out right now. Graduate school. I'm like, okay, well what do you want? I think that's the key. What do you want? It's not about recruiting all students to this university. It's about recruiting the students that fit; that have a fit. That we fit needs and they fit our needs. I'd sit down and I ask the student, what are you looking for? And be able to offer them guidance. Here's some of the things that we offer at this university that's special, or that's unique, or that you're looking for. Okay, you're looking for a program that has x, y, and z. Well we offer that. Maybe you want to check us out. At this past conference I just came home from Denver on Sunday, and I came down and our graduate director was working a table. Surprised him and said, I'm here. He said, what for? To recruit. I said, students want to hear from students. As a graduate program director you have a vested interest in making sure that they hear all the best of the best. As a student I make sure they get the truth. He kind of looked at me like, well I hope that's a good thing. It was. I had an opportunity to talk to six or twelve different people and ask them what they were

looking for in a program. Then being able to give them an honest answer. I think if you tell them you have something to offer and the student comes here, you don't retain them. They're going to leave. They're not happy. If you tell them you have something to offer you're truthful, they come here, they see that have it to offer, you're going to keep them here for the duration of their career. The people that I've seen lost, even in my own program, in the time that I've been here, have been the people that came here believing there was something that didn't exist. I think being honest number one, but most importantly finding out what do those students want? Not so much what do we have. You have to sell the university, absolutely. It's a very competitive nature. Getting students to graduate school is competitive. It's like buying a car. If I sell you a car telling you it gets great gas mileage and then you don't get great gas mileage, you're going to get rid of the car. If I tell you this is a dependable car, it's going to be a good thing, and then you turn around and you show up with a car and you say, I love it, it's a great car. You're going to be happy and you're probably going to buy another car from me. You're probably going to send one of your daughters or your sons or tell your brother or sister about this and then hopefully they'll end up at this program. I've had the wonderful opportunity, one of my officers is a triplet here at this university. All three sisters attend this university. They go from the medical school into criminology. I think that's really important that we are wearing the different hats that we need to wear, but that we're making sure that we're putting our best foot forward and saying, this is truthful in what we have to offer. This is what we have.

G: I think about my own graduate experience, and I think about haggling. One of the things

that goes on in the job market, I think, is that when you're applying to a school if you want to a teaching position or some type of competitive position, the pedigree of your degree is really important. That they rank over Ivy League schools and there are your non-Ivy League schools. Is USF about its overall name or is graduate education only as good as the department to which a student is applying?

B: That's an excellent question. That's part of what I'm trying to look at. I believe it's only as good as the department that you're applying. Again, if you can't retain your students, it doesn't matter how many you recruit. Ultimately it boils down to, can you keep them. I think our departments really need to step up. We have some excellent departments on this campus and we have some that have just kind of grown with the university and now don't know what to do because we're a big university now. We weren't at once. Now we're this huge university. We're a Research I university. Which is a different group of people than just an urban university commuter school as we used to be known as. I think that the departments really need to step up. One of the ways they can do that, and as the GPSO I'm trying to work with those departments now, they really need to value their graduate students. They need to realize that they exist and these programs exist because of their graduate students. They need those students to come in and feel important. That can be as simple as spending eight dollars on business cards for the new graduate students so that when their graduate students are out there they can network and hand those out and say, hey, I'm in this program. They need to help support travel, research. The GPSO CPGP grants were in no way intended to be the only funding source. It was supposed to be, if your department can come up with a couple hundred dollars and we

can give you a couple hundred dollars hopefully you can afford to throw out a couple hundred dollars and ultimately go to these conferences. I think that the departments do need to step up. I think we've got some excellent programs on this campus. Excellent programs. I think we have some programs that are sad and weak. We need to look at those programs and make a decision. Are these viable? What do we need to do to make these quality programs? If we can't do something about them, we need to get rid of them. They will bring down the universities research one name. You need to make sure students leave here happy and proud. That's what it's about.

G: Kelly, I want to thank you very much for joining me today. I really appreciate the time you've shared with us.

B: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity.

End of Interview