

Interview with Dr. Larry Gahan

Conducted by Danielle Kreh

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Oral History of Clemson's Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management Department

Introduction: This is a recorded interview with Doctor Larry Gahan retired parks, recreation and tourism management professor at Clemson University, conducted by Danielle Kreh on October 21st, 2021 as part of a thematic research collection project for History 8500 digital history.

Interviewer: Do I have your consent to record this oral history?

Dr. Gahan: This yes, yes.

Interviewer: Great. And can you state your name and your title for the recording?

Dr. Gahan: Retired, that's my title I'm Larry W Gahan and I was formerly alumni distinguished professor in parks, recreation and tourism management, and I'm retired. Retired in December of 2000, so I've been footloose and fancy free since that time and ended up being essentially a community service person going on different projects and joined the Rotary Club, which I hadn't had the opportunity to do before, so it's the- which has been very good. That's all I have right now.

Interviewer: Great, so getting back into what you were saying before we started the recording, you said you came in what year?

Dr. Gahan: August of 1968. So that was a couple years after the program has started. Two years after the program had started. Linda was five months pregnant with our oldest son. And she had finished her PhD at the University of Illinois. And they would not hire a pregnant woman, so the university's loss was the community's gain because she became active in a number of various social groups and volunteer groups and things like that. And it was called RPA. So you might put RPA slash PRTM because we changed the name when we added travel and tourism. I'm not sure exactly what year we changed the name, but I would say it was in the early 70s. 1970 and Dick Howe was instrumental in adding the travel and tourism program and maybe he was brought in as the person to kind of shepherd that program through. He left Clemson and went to I want to say Mississippi State, but you may have to check on that to be sure. So in the beginning we have and we called them emphasis areas as opposed to minors. Uh, so that we set up a program and you had to take certain courses in that program to be an emphasis area in CLS Community Leisure services, TR, and resource management. And so those were the three that we offered at that time. And you would not start taking those courses in the emphasis area until your junior year and then when you came into your junior year, then you would start taking those courses. And included in that was your internships. I don't know how the internships are set up now. But I was in charge of the internships and so we would place students. The major internship was done following

your junior year or following your senior year and then graduating. But you could go anywhere. You had to have your agency approved. We would look at it and see if there were people there that were trainers that couldn't be good mentors for that agency for that student for that emphasis area. So we had two minor internships, 206 and 207, that was what it was called and they could be anywhere and it would be to your advantage to do those preliminary internships in an area that you thought, you thought you might like to pursue do your major internship. So you're getting experience and you can make a decision about what where I might want to do my internship, my major internship and it would also enhance your opportunity to get the position. With the addition of travel and tourism emphasis area, then we added a lot more internships because you could work in a hotel, you could work at a visitor center, you could work for a Chamber of Commerce, you could work for a Disney, you could work for special events or company that that puts on festivals and special events. That was my area. And as a result of that, we also made contacts with the agencies. So the opportunities for employment were very good because the agency would say, "well, I had this good student and I'd like to have more, you know, I'd like to have- we have a couple of openings and we'd like to hire this person on" so it was it was a good arrangement for us and for the students as well. Yeah, you know, if you did a good job, you could possibly be hired on.

Interviewer: So were you part of establishing the 206/207 and the internships? Or was that already established when you were there?

Dr. Larry Gahan: It was all it was already established, but we would propose programs or courses and then as a faculty we would discuss them and tweak them, you know. Some of the programs were established in the early first years. I think the first internship was offered in the summer before I came. So, the summer was the internship, I think they did the first internship. And also that was the first year we- I guess it would be August because that's when graduation was at the end of summer. That was our first graduating group, so some of the students that transferred in in the beginning already had been taking courses. And it was well, not knowledgeable that students had a tendency to gravitate to new programs. And so we attracted a number of students that way. And you had asked the question, what were some of the problems of you faced in the beginning? And I think it was generally acceptance of a serious academic program. It's fun and games, you know. Go over in, you know, enroll in the fun and games program. And so when I would say... "What do you do" and I said, "well, I'm a professor in parks, recreation, and tourism" "Oh, that must be fun!". That's the typical... and that would just piss me off. I hated that comment and I said no. So , and you may have heard that before. We earned a serious academic and, with the research, and the PhD program, and the Master of Science program... All of those have contributed to, and the fact that we've attracted top graduate students. At one point we had some of the top graduate students in the university. So you know, and I assume that's continuing. So in the beginning we had to well, let me let me start back and say that the South Carolina Recreation and Parks Society (SCRPA) they did- We did not have a program that trained people who were interested in providing parks and Recreation, travel and tourism, or anything like that and so

the professional society started pushing for "Why don't we get an academic program and let's start?" Now this is my recollection so I may be completely off base, but we had to provide the programs through the university committees and we'd have to get approval to offer a Bachelor of Science program through the various Commission on higher education at the state level, and so we'd have to go through the university system. We would have to go through the university committees to get approval and then it would go from the university to the Commission on higher education and we'd have to get approval, we'd have to present the program and what it was, and all that sort of thing. And then once it was presented to the Commission on higher Education, then it would go to the- and they recommended it- then it would go to the state legislature. And so it took a while. But Bert Brantley was the one who was brought in to sort of shepherd that program through and go through the steps and luckily enough, we had the support of President Edwards. And he was 100% behind doing this and so that helped 'cause he could kind of move things through. So that that eventually we started in the fall of 1966, having gotten all the approvals and everything to offer a Bachelor of Science program. So as soon as we got that approval, then we started gathering students and a number of students didn't know beans about Parks and Recreation, but they wanted to- they didn't like the program they were in, so they enrolled in RPA. And we started, we had Bert Brantley and he talked some courses during that time, even though he was a department head, and Jim Sellers, who happened to be a former student of Bert Bradley at NC State. And Revis Frye, who came from, well, he was more of a sports person, but he was on the faculty. Gordon Howard was from... and Gordon is another person that we could talk to in the early years because he came a year before I did so he was here and going through all the getting a program started and stuff. And then there was another young man I can't remember. I think his last name was Johnson. And he really only lasted about two years. I don't know where he went. And then Marvin Keith, and Marvin had been the director of a city program in Parks and Recreation, and so he taught some of those courses and he also got started the TR program. And so that pretty much... and then then we were, Jack Stevenson and I, were added the next year and Jack received his degrees from Davidson and then Indiana University and I came from University of Illinois and then we added Bob McClelland and Ann James. And so we kept building, bringing in faculty who could teach various academic areas that would fit within the emphasis areas that we had. And that's when we brought in Dick Howe to help establish a travel and tourism program, and that's when we changed our name. I'm not exactly sure what year that was, but it was before 1975 because then we moved. We were in the College of Education in the beginning and Dean Landreth was the Dean of the College of Education was very supportive. They looked at us because we had the numbers of students. And forest management, forestry, did not have the number of students. So they looked around for a program with student enrollment and we had the numbers, I want to say 400, maybe even 500 students at that time. Because forestry didn't have that build, therefore we became the College of Forest and Recreation Resources, and I think, and moved into Lehotsky Hall about 1975. So the college was formed before that and we were in Godfrey Hall. I had an office on the floor. There were hallways. It was kind of like a T and there were hallways that would, so you had offices along the hallway and we were the third hallway down in. That's where the Department office was and where Bert Brantley's office was, and mine was next door to it. But we moved into law school with a brand new building. And the only problem-

you may want to drop this out- but the only problem was that Lehotsky had been a critical person against us organizing. He was in forestry and he didn't think that any college or university should legitimately have a Parks and Recreation program. But the money was behind forest management, forestry, and we had the student enrollment and that enabled us to merge together. And we found out that they weren't bad guys after all, there's just one person that was causing a problem. So we formed the College of Forestry, Recreation, Resources and I guess we lasted over 25 years. So I don't know what colleges we're in now, I can't keep track. Well, I had heard that Lehotsky was under renovation and they may even tear it down. We have a neighbor that is in charge of, I guess the construction and projects are on the campus, and he tells us that Lehotsky is on hold right now. But it has been proposed that it- one of the proposals was that it be torn down. Anyway, so that was which colleges was PRTM, well, RPA or PRTM, part of during your time in the department. So it was the College of Education and Forrest and Recreation Resources were the two during my time period, so I was there for 31, 32 years and I will shoot Brett Wright \*laughs\* you can record that. He's a great guy I loved teasing.

Interviewer: Was the Masters or PhD program added while you were there?

Dr. Larry Gahan: Yes, it was. There was a professional program called MRPA and that may have been MPRTM. I'm not sure exactly, but we had to fight tooth and toenail to get that master's program. It was not a Master of Science, and it was referred to as a professional degree. So that that was the next degree after the Bachelor of Science. Then was the Master of Science degree that was added after the professional degree and then the PhD program. And there were some resistance to want to add a PhD program and luckily enough I sat on the graduate committee, the university's graduate committee, and when that came up I was able to represent it. We prevailed and we've had a number of people go through the PhD program. If you're interested in teaching at the university level that that would be a good thing to do after you finish your master's. I guess those are all the notes I had, so I'm just going to let you ask some questions. And we may include some other people in our discussions so that you can get some other viewpoints and people that remember things better than I do.

Interviewer: Yeah, so this has been awesome information so far. So you mentioned Doctor Brantley.

Dr. Larry Gahan: Yes.

Interviewer: And his name has come up everywhere in the research that I'm doing. He was obviously a very big part of the formation of the program. So was he brought on before the program got started and his goal was to set up the program? Or was that after the program established?

Dr. Larry Gahan: No no, it was before the program and I believe that's correct, 'cause I wasn't here but I think he developed a good relationship with the president, Dr. Edwards at that time. And having that behind him helped pushed the program through. You know, because there were a lot of naysayers and he came from NC State. He's about 90 right now, maybe older. I think he was eight years older than myself and Jack Stevenson was ten years older than me, when we both came in '68. So he helped set the program up and of course he met with the South Carolina Recreation and Park Society and I'm sure presented the programs to the various commissions here locally, I mean here at the university, to get approval and then to the Commission on higher education. So he came- I think he got his PhD from North Carolina, and he grew up in North Carolina, so that was appropriate. He brought Jim Sellers from NC State, who had been a student, and so he knew that, and he probably knew Marvin Keith, and he probably knew Revis Frye. So all of those people that would fit into what he had in mind to get started, and Gordon may remember, Gordon Howard may remember "Blank" Johnson. "Blank" Johnson because he only lasted two years. I don't remember that he fit in very well and so he was gone before I came so I didn't have a chance to meet with him. It was an exciting time in the beginning, and it continued to be because we were adding new things all the time: New emphasis areas, new faculty members. And Johnny, his wife, because the students were older, some of them were returning from the Vietnam War and going on the GI Bill, and they would come to Clemson and they were already married. And so Johnny had programs for the spouses and she would get them together for lunches or for an evening, afternoon tea or something like that. And we would all meet at his house, and Johnny would serve meals and stuff like that. So there was a lot of... like family, that we were because we are all promoting the same thing so there was a lot of camaraderie in the beginning. I don't know if that's still the case or not, maybe so. I don't know the faculty member anymore, but Bob Brookover was a former student of mine and I've teased him about being on the City Council and all that kind of stuff and. In fact I have- Well, Fran McGuire is on the City Council and been a former faculty member with me. And I have two former students on the City Council right now. And Bob, Robert, Halfacre was in school with my youngest son and in the Boy Scout troop that both my sons went through. So I have all kinds of connections. So there was a lot of family feeling among the faculty and we all pulled together 'cause all of us were fighting for the same thing. So I hope that continued, you know, and perhaps as a student you would, you would see that. The retirement part is missing the interaction with the students. Not the complainers or the ones who didn't work hard. But the ones who were good students and so that's pretty much my recollection of what went on and what happened. But I don't think we have very many married students anymore like we did back in the early days.

Interviewer: Not in undergrad, yeah.

Dr. Larry Gahan: And because we didn't have a graduate program at that time, you know, so it was four years or maybe two years in and out. Out working in the field and some of those early guys we've probably lost, you know they've retired and 'cause we've celebrated what was it? 2016, 50 years we had a reception at the Maverick Center. I have to tell you that I started out in accounting the law at the University of Illinois. I was going to go back and take

over my dad's accounting business, and that's what I'd grown up in. But accounting and I didn't quite get along and I switched him to physical education, and that's what I got my bachelor science degree in. And then, during that time we had to take a recreation course as a phys ed major. So I had Charles Brightbill who was introducing recreation as a community leisure service, and I did well on that it was a no brainer for me. You know? Why are you struggling with this course? It's, you know, so easy. And so he said, he called me in and said, "Why don't you pursue a graduate degree in and recreation? And so I said, "yeah, I don't I didn't have any plans." I said, "OK." So I started the graduate program and then I got my masters and then next thing led to the PhD and so I got that and then I came to Clemson. And the rest is history. But I'm glad I did because we have proven all of the naysayers wrong about a serious research area and all that kind of stuff.