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ACADIA REGISTRAR IS FIRST TO HAVE ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE UNDER NEW ACADIA POLICY

David Green, Registrar at Acadia University, shares his experiences at the University of Florida, Gainesville.

Report on Administrative Leave

January - May 1981

This past January, after some five years of applying for either Sabbatical or Study Leave, I commenced a four month Administrative Leave from my post as Registrar of Acadia University. The term "Administrative" coined, perhaps euphemistically, so that my rights or privileges as an employee would not be confused with those of members of Faculty, did not diminish my pleasure at having received it. The stated purpose of my leave was to obtain a greater knowledge of sophisticated Student Information Systems, to experience the functioning of a large Registrar's office, and to have the opportunity to read more seriously in my own disciplines. I also wished to experience warm weather in winter-time. The University of Florida, with a total sessional enrolment of around 51,000 students and located in the northern Florida city of Gainesville, appeared to offer me all I sought.

Through Bob Fullington, Associate Registrar at the University of Florida, who I already knew through AACRAO, I was made welcome to the University of Florida, was given my own desk and freedom of the Registrar's Office, was invited to attend any and all meetings, and was introduced to various other employees of the university. All those persons employed by or associated with the Registrar's office, they numbered about 80 in all, were friendly and talked freely to me about their own jobs. I was impressed at how hard they all appeared to work as individual parts of an extremely efficient, highly organized Registrar's office. Each of the various tasks performed by any Registrar became the specific responsibility of divisions and sub-divisions of the Office. It was rather like seeing a large part of my own job torn into pieces and scattered around a large building. I was unimpressed with the salaries paid to employees of the Registrar's Office, which seemed quite low. Perhaps this was because all employees of the University of Florida - including Faculty - are civil servants. One advantage of this, from my perspective, was that Faculty who did not submit final grades to the Registrar within 48 hours of an examination ending, could be reported to the State authorities.

One division of the Registrar's office consisted of programmers and systems analysts, about 12 persons in all, who maintained and developed a highly sophisticated Student Information System. The office possessed its own "small" IBM computer on which the day's transactions were made, before being transferred at night to the "larger" machines of the University Computer Centre. Nearly every desk appeared to bear a terminal through which data entries could be made or information obtained, access being limited to the employee's area of responsibility. Terminals, for information purposes, were also found in the Accounts Office and in the offices of the many Faculty advisors. The most recent development to the System was an on-line degree audit programme which was also accessed by the Faculty advisors. Since, for any area of study, one could see clearly displayed which course requirements had been fulfilled and which had not, it rendered fairly simple the advisor's task.

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I was fortunate to be at the University of Florida at a time when it was changing from the quarter to the semester system. This involved not only changes to the Student Information System, but also resulted in senior staff of the Registrar's Office holding information meetings, after hours, in residence and classroom, to explain to in-course students the effect this change would have upon their progress towards a degree. To the credit of the Registrar's Office change was seen in its human as well as technical dimensions. The University of Florida, along with its five sister state universities, was part of a computer network. An advantage of this to the Registrar was that his information could automatically be stored or processed anywhere in the state, wherever the system determined it was most appropriate. Thus data could be entered in Gainesville, processed in Tampa, and stored in Miami. Efforts were also being undertaken to transmit transcripts from the University of Florida through the network to another university and have them printed there, one answer to increasing postage rates. However, after five years of study by a group of computer personnel that had come to number eighty and located in Tallahassee, the state capital, little had resulted from efforts to develop a common Student Information System for all the State universities. I also observed how efficiently, and in a period of only eight days, all the university's students, from every discipline including medicine, agriculture and law, were registered.

The University of Florida provided me with the knowledge and experience I sought, gave me time to read seriously, and the weather was warm and sunny. The sporting facilities available were excellent, dozens of tennis courts and outdoor squash courts, and first-class basketball games in a splendid new gymnasium. I was intrigued to learn that university athletics live in their own separate residence, and that cheerleaders must fulfill athletic eligibility rules. Soon after my arrival in Gainesville, an attractive blonde lady was imported from Georgia to replace an injured University of Florida cheerleader, was quickly registered, and declared eligible to "cheer" that night. However, I was disappointed with the seeming lack of cultural activities at either the university or in Gainesville. Visits to the Departments of History and English to enquire about attendance at public or departmental lectures were met with suspicion. Concerts and plays were few and far between. In his bestselling novel, "The Girl in a Swing", which I read whilst in Gainesville, Richard Adams remembers "a dull town and the spacious and slightly less dull university campus". Adams had earlier been a writer-in-residence at the University of Florida, and I came to understand his opinion. The university did not appear to include the community in its activities. Consequently, I was glad to extend my travels to include the historic town of St. Augustine, the CUMREC conference at Miami, and the College of the Bahamas in Nassau.

From my administrative leave I gained a great deal of knowledge about Student Information Systems and since my return to Wolfville have helped develop, at little cost, our own outdated Information System. Many of the changes are already apparent, and by next Spring we should have a fairly sophisticated system in place. I also gained new ideas about office and registration procedures and techniques that have, I think, resulted in a more efficient Registrar's Office. By seeing both my own job and the office broken into its constituent parts at the University of Florida, I was able to separate the many responsibilities one from another, and understand them more. Especially did I recognize and appreciate the academic component of my own job. The opportunity at Acadia, through being Secretary to the Senate and a member of most academic committees, to help develop, influence and safeguard the academic process, was simply not present in the University of Florida Registrar's Office. In addition, I was given the opportunity to think, free of the daily harassments that beset all Registrars, and to develop in February a healthy tan.

Editor's Note: When David submitted this report, he reminded me to note that:
1) he enjoyed himself and 2) he learned a LOT!

(Diane Morris, Editor)