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Helton, Floyd Oral History Interview

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FACULTY EMERITI INTERVIEWS
UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC ARCHIVES



Helton, Floyd (1959-1980)
Professor of Mathematics

September 28, 2001

By Doris Meyer

Subjects: Transition of math department to computers, feelings about “atmosphere” at Pacific, teaching math to elementary education students, teaching math to engineering students, emeritus relationship to the University.

Interview of Floyd Helton by Doris Meyer
September 28, 2001

Doris- Hi Floyd. We are going to start this all over again.

Floyd- Okay.

Doris- And if you remember the first question asked about what brought you to the University of the Pacific and the date that you said you both arrived was about when?

Floyd- September one, 1959.

Doris- Right. You said that you met Sam Meyer and something about Sam.

Floyd- Well Sam Meyer had come out here in 1958 to become dean. He'd been dean of Central College for a number of years and after he'd been out here sometime, he invited a number of us at Central to have a look at College of the Pacific. And I did. I met I with him and Dr. Burns, the president in Kansas City and had a conversation and we ended up agreeing to come to what was then College of the Pacific. It was a good move on our part as it turns out.

Doris- I hand it to you, that's great. Was the math department then a very small department? Or how many of you were involved.

Floyd- It was very, very small. It had one full time faculty member, Dr....

Marian- Dr. Warren

Floyd- Dr. George Warren, who was with Stockton College. He was teaching part time at Stockton College and part time at UOP. The first year I was here, the year 58,59, he and I were the only math teachers. I taught elementary courses and he taught primarily business related mathematics and his courses at Stockton College.

Doris- Right, and Floyd then did the department gradually increase in size from the two of you?

Floyd- Yes it did. In about, well Dr. White then retired as chairman of the department after that first year, and the next two or three years I don't know the exact number of years, we began to add other part-times. I wish I could remember the names of them. One lady who was here and I were the only math teachers then for several years. Gradually added to it, so that by 19...1962, or 3, somewhere in there, were four or five of us. 1970, we employed three new math teachers and the department then moved from there and I retired in 1980. We had, I think it was, 8 or 10 mathematics teachers.

Doris- Floyd, what prompted that increase of those three people at that time? How come the math department grew rather suddenly? Do you remember?

Floyd- I am not real sure, but I suspect it came from the fact it was limited by the amount of staff available to handle it before. When there was staff available, it grew. I don't know that for sure that was it. But it grew then rapidly, but for the many years I was there, when I left here there (mumbles) math teachers at that time.

Doris- Right, and this was all when the University was called the College of the Pacific.

Floyd- It was called the Pacific when I came, yes.

Doris- The math department was under...

Floyd- Dr. White.

Doris- Yeah, Dr. White. But it was not a separate division it was part of the whole division, just like English and History and what not.

Floyd- Yeah, that's right.

Doris- So it was part of what they called the College of the Pacific, which was also the name of the University at that time.

Floyd- That's right.

Doris- Lets see, what are some other questions here? What were some of your first impressions of Stockton when you and Marian arrived?

Floyd- I don't know. To us it was kind of an eye-opener. We lived in a small town in Missouri, town of 3 or 4 thousand.

Doris- Uh huh.

Floyd- The College was small, about 6 or 7 hundred. So it was quite an eye-opener. I think the thing that I realized first of all was the diversity and population here. We did not have Asian or even African Americans there, in Missouri. It's a map thing, and it was very, very rare, and the diversity caught my attention and I've always enjoyed the fact that it is that. I enjoyed having classes with a variety of nationalities.

Doris- Thank you, thank you. Lets see, were there any particular persons or person that really helped when you first arrived? Was Dr. White helpful? What about other people?

Floyd- I can't remember anyone particular. Dr. White did all he needed to do, or could do, I guess. I can't remember any particular events at that particular time. First two years things went along, just gradually expanding a bit, but still quite small.

Doris- So, the courses that you first taught here, were they similar to those that you taught in Missouri?

Floyd- Yes, the standard freshman college mathematics courses and I've been used to teaching them. In fact I've been teaching them for several years, more on that, 20 years. So that part of it there was no particular strain on me. I looked at the possibility of adding some different courses along the line, and eventually did. 1970 maybe before that, we employed, well in 1970 we employed three people completely new. Dr. diFranco who retired just recently was one of them.

Doris- Uh huh.

Floyd- Dr. Smith who I think has already retired was another one and Dr. Bill Brown, not too many years later, moved onto another location.

Doris- Uh huh.

Floyd- It was a staff that worked together real well.

Doris- Marian? Go ahead Marian.

Marian- Isn't that the same time you hired Bill Topp?

Doris- Bill Topp?

Floyd- Oh yes, Bill Topp came that same year, yes, Bill Topp, and he has retired also finishing those people, four of them have served their full years time and retired.

Doris- Yeah, that's right. What year was it that you retired?

Floyd- I retired in 1980.

Doris- 1980.

Floyd- I was there 21 years.

Doris- Right.

Floyd- I've been away from there for 21 years. (Laughing)

Doris- You know, someplace along the line there, computers and computer science and that came into the math department. Were you still involved at the program and those early stages of that?

Floyd- I didn't get into the computer program. Just before retired Bill Brown was very active in it. I remember taking a[n] introductory course under him, in order to know something about computers. I knew practically nothing at the time. Later on Bill Topp and diFranco also gained quite expert in the area. I never taught any computer courses, however I made a point of becoming familiar enough with them so that I could use them in some of the arithmetical parts of the calculus. Calculus was my favorite subject. So I did learn a bit, but never became particularly expert at it because by the time I retired, my eyes wouldn't let me. (Laughs).

Doris- Now, let's see, you said that regard to the business aspect of math, that originally Dr. White handled that. Then who, do you remember who in your department moved into the business part of math?

Floyd- I think that we essentially dropped that, as I recall it. It's since developed its own subject matter.

Doris- Sure.

Floyd- Essentially it was a computer. But we didn't have the business math as such after Dr. White retired.

Doris- Right. Okay, lets see, you know one of the questions I asked you about some of the individuals at UOP that you felt comfortable with. You mentioned Sam Meyer and how important he was in actually attracting you.

Floyd- That's right.

Doris- Some of the early people you worked with, either in administration or whatever, do you have some recollections of those people and how helpful they were?

Floyd- Of course Sam Meyer for a number of years, and I already knew him, so that made a contact. I...

Doris- The math department itself, you felt good about Bill Topp and diFranco and so forth?

Floyd- Bill Brown.

Doris- Bill Brown.

Floyd- And Doug Smith.

Doris- Doug Smith.

Floyd- But earlier on, one of the earlier, even before those people came along, there was a lady here, who joined the staff, was that Christianson?

Doris- Oh Chris, no.

Floyd- No Christianson?

Doris- No not Deanne Christianson.

Marian- I don't think she joined that soon.

Floyd- I don't think she was here that soon. She became a member of the faculty and was still teaching when I left. She, I think directed this centrally tutoring support...

Doris- Deanne Christianson huh?

Floyd- Deanne Christianson yes. She was good, she was very good.

Doris- Well that's great. Yeah her husband Lee was in biology, you remember?

Floyd- Yeah that's right. Yeah.

Doris- Let's see, you've kept pretty much a relationship with the University, I know because you come to the Emeriti meetings, and that sort of thing. Is there anything that sort of caught your eye from those initial days to the present day and the movement and

the changes and what not that you felt either good about or that you questioned? Or anything about that, the philosophy and the movement of the University?

Floyd- I think there is a certain liveness about it. For example, the part of the special colleges...

Doris- Right, the Cluster Colleges.

Floyd- Cluster Colleges, I was trying to think of the term. The Cluster Colleges. That was a very lively activity and we weren't directly involved with the academic side of their program. But there was, that kind of liveness going on on campus. In the meantime our department was growing and that was lively.

Doris- Right.

Floyd- There's just a general sense of gung-ho place.

Doris- Do you still feel that way?

Floyd- I certainly do. I tried to keep in contact with what was on campus, but it's a little difficult because I don't drive anymore.

Doris- Uh huh.

Floyd- I go to the major things and one of the reasons I go to Emeriti, is it gives me a chance to keep in touch.

Doris- Right.

Floyd- I've never missed a commencement yet. It's not the fact that I don't know anymore, but it gives me some contact to the University.

Doris- Right, yeah that's great. There's a sense of loyalty there that I feel it too, and I know how you mean. Well lets see, we've said here this question about programs, what programs have you been involved in and we talked about well, there was a point now that computer science, they moved into their own department there.

Floyd- Gradually.

Doris- Do you remember how long after you retired there was a computer science and then a math or anything about that?

Floyd- I don't think it was more than maybe 5 or 6 six years, if that much. It came fairly soon because a number of the men were very active with computers already.

Doris- Uh huh.

Floyd- And it was very natural for them to do that. I did, I got involved because, well for one thing, I was so busy in so many other things and these men were taken care of very well, so I didn't have to be terribly active in it. By the time I retired, my eyes had gotten to the point to where it wasn't practical at all. So I never really became effective with a computer. My wife does a better job with it (laughs) than I ever did.

Doris- I remember Floyd too that at some point there were some classes that were brought in for elementary teachers and for secondary math teachers. Do you remember about that?

Floyd- That's the one I was going to mention. Two different situations. One of them is a class that was taught I think in the summer, Dr....Marian what's his name?

Marian- I'm not sure.

Doris- Dennis Parker, no he came later huh?

Floyd- Yeah he came later. What's the name of the man that we heard the other day at the service?

Doris- I didn't go, but it was a...

Floyd- Oh who was it? Charlie Jones is always interested in.

Doris- Uh, John Schippers?

Floyd- Yeah, John Schippers.

Doris- Oh John Schippers right.

Floyd- He and I for a number of years taught jointly in a course of math, primarily for teachers. Then there was a time when I was teaching a regular course during the school year, I actually ended up at the end of my time civic, I had developed a textbook for that particularly course. It never got published, but I got it finished. It was a feel of extremely attractive to me, and an interesting sidelight on that, frequently I'll bump into someone who was in one of those classes and is in the Stockton Unified School, and I find that very interesting.

Doris- It is rewarding to know that.

Floyd- Oh yes, and I taught a course over radio and math teachers too.

Doris- Is that right?

Floyd- Yes, channel 13 I believe it was, one of the channels in Sacramento. They had, at that time, a station downtown here and I went down there to do my presentations. But that was an interesting experience too. I was very much interested in that ere of mathematics. I had written a textbook before I left Missouri on special mathematics for college simply because too many students were coming in to the standard algebra courses and they simply weren't ready.

Doris- Uh huh.

Floyd- This was kind of a bridge and I ended up writing a textbook for that. It didn't get a chance to use it.

Doris- Right. Was that textbook and those courses, were they directed to elementary or secondary or what teacher types?

Floyd- Essentially it was freshman/sophomore courses in math.

Doris- Okay.

Floyd- Courses that preceded calculus and so often they were not adequately prepared for the calculus when they got to it because of that poor ground hadn't been dealt properly.

Doris- I've got it and I understand exactly. Was the presentations that you did were they radio, you mentioned radio, or were they TV?

Floyd- I didn't do any TV, I did do the radio out of channel 13 downtown and the others I did it test runs right there on campus.

Doris- Right and then the teachers in training came into your class.

Floyd- Part of that was that's a period of time there, I don't remember the years, when in fact it was called the "new math". What I was doing was essentially orienting them to that.

Doris- I wonder whether they're using this "new math" now.

Floyd- I, I really don't know. I wrote a textbook for it, but never had a chance to use it, it never got published.

Doris- Oh, that's right. Okay, gee, we're doing, I think we're doing well here.

Floyd- I wish my memory was better.

Doris- You're doing great.

Floyd- I was scared of that.

Doris- Controversial issues. You know one question here talks about your attitudes toward the administration and over the years we've questioned the administration sometimes it seems like faculty are working nicely with administrators. Sometimes it

seems like we're bumping heads with them. How's your feeling about the relationship of administrators to faculty and so forth over all those years?

Floyd- Well I guess there were times when there was some difficulty but it never got rough as some controversies do. I was chairman of the COP council after UOP was developed.

Doris- Uh huh.

Floyd- At that time, we carried on various relations with the administration and I don't remember anything that was really terribly controversial. I wouldn't say there wasn't, but I don't think there was.

Doris- Sure. Does it seem like to you that now, well you mentioned that you think it's a lively place and continues to be a lively place. So do you feel pretty good about the administration as you hear about it in the meetings?

Floyd- Yes, particularly in recent years I've been very much impressed. I keep up with any news about the campus and I've been very much impressed with what has gone on.

Doris- Well that sounds okay. Lets see, do you remember any particular controversies or any questions in the math department as it moved ahead? Does it, at one point there the school of business, were they a separate school when you were there or do you know any recollection there?

Floyd- I don't remember when the school of business became separate from it. The course of mathematics business, evaporated sometime not too many years after I came here. I don't remember the circumstances probably because no one particularly interested in teaching it.

Doris- Which class was that again?

Floyd- The class when I came here that Dr. White was teaching class in business mathematics.

Doris- Oh yeah, that's right.

Floyd- In fact, I think I may have taught it one year because they needed someone to do it. But it wasn't my specialty at all.

Doris- No. So it sounds like the business math courses sort of, something happened to them for awhile. Then when the school of business came in, then they went ahead and then the math department as you knew it moved ahead with algebra, calculus, trig and all of that. Then computers came in.

Floyd- And the computer course, we still didn't have a computer course in the math department, I don't think, my last year there. But we were all using the computers and getting clean with them more and the area there where they were operating. Somebody else holds the course [who] were quite expert at them. I remember taking a short course under Bill Brown on computers so I could do the part I needed to do connections with my calculus course. I hadn't gotten three or four in girl (?) (laughs) and that was a help to me so I could at least speak the language that was needed in that connection.

Doris- Right. What about the engineering students? Did you have any connection with math and the engineering students?

Floyd- Well, we of course had engineering and physics students a lot of them. I don't remember anything particularly geared to them. But I do remember some excellent students who were majoring in engineering. One of them for example later on was in charge of one of these satellite programs, a lady. There's others besides that one that I don't remember. It became quite important in engineering

Doris- Did you mention her name? Did you remember her name?

Floyd- I can't think of her name at this time. My memory of names has gotten...

Doris- But she was a lady engineer and then has moved into the satellite program. Then the science people. All of them, like you mentioned physics. So you were serving the chemistry people?

Floyd- Yeah chemistry and physics and I guess not directly biological sciences. But chemistry and physics we had it very heavy.

Doris- Uh huh.

Floyd- I was familiar with them and their work quite a bit at one time.

Doris- Were their courses in statistics?

Floyd- We had, yes, I taught the course one time. I really wasn't too well prepared to do so. But we had a course in elementary statistics at one time. I'm sure they have it now in the business math program. But that was sort of a single course to get them aquatinted.

Doris- Okay, lets see. Do you remember the sixties with the turbulent times about the Vietnam and the flower children and the all of that? What is your recollection of that? Do you remember much about that?

Floyd- I don't remember in detail. It sticks in my mind it was [a] very rough time and quite a bit of difference of opinions of what we should be doing.

Doris- Uh huh.

Floyd- I can't remember myself what I thought about our activity. I think perhaps I sort of wished we hadn't gotten into it.

Doris- Well of course, yeah.

Floyd- I don't remember very much in detail.

Doris- I think our University as it looks back, we felt that we were rather apathetic...

(End of tape one) (Tape 2) Hi Floyd. We were yeah, let me bring us up to date where we are. Floyd, we were just now talking on the previous tape about whether there was any, a reaction on our campus to the turbulent times, we call it, of the sixties. You were remembering some of your feelings about that time. Can you remember anything more to add about that?

Floyd- It didn't stick with me very sharply. I don't remember having any lively discussions with anyone about it. But I remember my attitude was sort of, I don't know, I wish this wasn't happening.

Doris- Right. So it wasn't a time that you thought the University was behaving inappropriately or what not? It was just okay.

Floyd- It was just okay. I think it had about the same thing I had. Just wish it wasn't happening.

Doris- That's right. There's a question here about things that you were involved in that you think was important to the growth and development of UOP. Do you feel, you mentioned just now about your relationship to the COP council or to the academic council. Which of those were you involved with?

Floyd- I was chairman of the COP council.

Doris- Right and what was going on. Do remember anything about what was going on at that time? Anything that strikes you that says, oh yeah I remember we brought up about this or that. Or how did you feel about your role as a leader in that, do you have any feelings about that?

Floyd- At the time, I don't remember any serious controversies that upset things. I don't actually remember what years those were.

Doris- Uh huh.

Floyd- But there seemed to be move along sort of business like, is what you were concerned at that time.

Doris- Uh huh. You know you were talking about the math department and now you're continuing to show interesting in the University. Have you always felt like you're a part of the University? Or do you feel like you were only related to the math department? Did you feel any larger relationship to the University?

Floyd- Well I wasn't active in a very much larger area, so I suppose I'd have to say no on that. It wasn't that I wasn't interested, but my energy were put in things more closer related to math and to COP.

Doris- Yeah, I know how you feel because I too when I was teaching, I was tied in with my department. But now, as I'm retired, just as you, I feel like I am part of the bigger picture don't you?

Floyd- I have the same with Emeriti. One of the things I like about Emeriti, I just feel like I'm part of a larger organization. When I was teaching, obviously I was tied up with the details and so forth that there was limited room for that.

Doris- Yeah, maybe that's something that we might, or the University might want to think about. Whether their really including all of their, particularly their young faculty in the larger picture.

Floyd- The Emeriti group itself has been very well treated by the University...

Doris- Oh yes

Floyd- It seemed to have had respect for what it was doing and appreciated it. I don't know whether it had the same feelings about the entire faculty or not. I go to the commencements and to, go to the Emeriti group ever since it started. I've always been pleased that such an organization developed and with the leadership with some of the people had and for example, they've just done a tremendous job with that organization. The University recognizes it now, you can tell that.

Doris- Yeah, you can tell that. That is really true. You were talking; there's a question here about the campus community and the larger Stockton community. Sometimes we've heard that the University is an ivy, an ivory, an ivy tower sitting in the middle of Stockton and that we are not adding to the community or helping the larger. Do you ever felt that way?

Floyd- I've never felt that way. Part of it may have been that I was so active in my own area, that I may have not branched out as much as I might have done. As other people probably did do. It wasn't that I didn't want to, I was just, my hands were full.

Doris- That's right. No I think its not, its just something that we hear. We hear well the University is a beautiful campus but then there's the rest of Stockton. You know?

Floyd- I don't sense that. That there's that feeling, I don't know.

Doris- Well that's okay then. What about here at O'Conner Woods. Did the people here, when you say well I was a professor at the University of the Pacific, do you hear any grumblings or any admiration?

Doris- I can't remember any, have you Marian?

Marian- Not really.

Floyd- Nothing as critical of UOP. We have a number of UOP people here, so they are kind of familiar with the characters involved. So I don't sense any of that all.

Doris- Oh. Well that's, you mentioned earlier about when about when you first came from Missouri and the huge diversity of populations and economic levels and what not. You felt that you sort of admired that, in other words, any thoughts more about any of that? Do you feel that Stockton continues to have a problem with that? Or is there a problem with that?

Floyd- I have a sense that things have moved into relatively smooth operations interconnections between the different cultures. Of course I'm not active enough with certain parts of the community to be as aware of it as others might be. But that's the sense I have. There's nothing really major there.

Doris- Well that's, yeah I understand that. What about, I know you enjoy going to the SIRS meetings. Any feelings there? They recognize that you were a professor at the University? Or are you now dissociated from that in their eyes and that you are just one of the gang now? Or anything there? (Laughs)

Floyd- Well I don't think they give any special attention to the fact that I was at UOP. We have a number of SIRS, a number of them, of people who were UOP people. But I think they have respect for the organizations and so forth. I was a big Ser in the organization in '91, and I remember my associations with people all in different areas. It was quite pleasant, and so I don't know that they think of the UOP people members as being anyone special or anything like that.

Doris- No, no. They're just...

Floyd- They're just good members like most of them.

Doris- Sure. What about the future of the University. Do you have any feelings, you mentioned something about, again the liveliness sort of caught eye. As we move forward even now, do you, what do you think about the future University?

Floyd- Well, contrast to with what I think now, is what I thought 5 or 6 years ago, I don't the exact time, but there was time when it seemed to me like the leadership was weak and going wrong. But in recent years, I've been impressed with the here, about the leadership, reading the paper and things that I've been to on campus and so forth. I really have been very much impressed.

Doris- Yeah, I remember the financial, there was some financial problems awhile back and we all worried about that and you know. And we worried about tuitions rising and salaries falling. IS there anything else that you wished I had asked you? Or is anything that you and Marian have talked about that you wished that you could remember to say? Anything special that we didn't hit, that would be of interest do you think?

Floyd- I can't think of any, can you Marian?

Marian- No. (Laughs) I think you've covered everything.

Floyd- One little bit, one little item I didn't mention that is of some interest, one year we took on, I went to a mathematics convention in Nevada...

Doris- Reno

Floyd- In Reno, and at that time made contacts, no, no, Reno's where we made contact with diFranco.

Doris- Uh huh.

Floyd- But an earlier year I'd gone down to Austin Texas for annual meeting of the math group and contacted three people and we hired all three of them.

Doris- Is that right?

Floyd- Yeah.

Doris- When, and that was...

Floyd- Smith, Brown and Top.

Doris- And why do you think you were able to, why do you think they came? What was it that you might have used as recruit lies? (Laughs)

Floyd- That was 1970, and I think by 1970 the mathematics department had grown some and I think it had respect on the campus. I don't know off hand just what specifically might have been most attractive to them, but we'd grown enough that they could see that there's a possibility here, I think. But we were able to employ all three of those and that was, they were both, they were all great.

Doris- Oh yeah. That was wonderful. You were a great recruiter for the University that year.

Floyd- I don't know about that, but that was a very good occasion.

Doris- Well doggone-it, well I know that Floyd, you and I and Marian have enjoyed our times at the University and...

Floyd- Certainly.

Doris- Its been a pleasure for me to join the two of you here today and lets hope that this tape comes in handy when some students in the future would like to think a little bit about the math department and how its moved from the, what year was it again that you first came?

Floyd- I came in '59.

Doris- In '59.

Floyd- And there were two of us on staff.

Doris- You and Dr. White and you've seen deans come and go and you've seen presidents come and go. Okay, Marian, thanks for helping us today. Floyd, thanks for taking your time to do this.

Floyd- I wish my memory were better. This is a lot of information that I probably could have supplied but that's something that I've had continued with for several years.

Doris- No, I think you did wonderfully. And this is exactly what they want.

Floyd- I know one thing, nothing better has ever happened to me in my life than having come to UOP.

Doris- Well that's great, that's great. Yeah. That's great. Okay, thanks a million Floyd, and I think we're okay here.