Records of the Graduate School Oral History Project
Lavon Brown, Interviewee
Becky Haglund, Interviewer
February 27, 1980

Part I

Becky Haglund: It is February 27th, 1980. My name is Becky Haglund. I'm interviewing Mrs. Lavon Brown at her office in the Graduate School, second floor at the Administration Annex.

Okay. Why don't we just go ahead and go down the line of the questions. Why don't you start off by telling when you came to CSU and the different positions that you, positions that you held while you've been here?

Lavon Brown: Okay. I came to CSU in August, the 1st of August in 1963. I came as a secretary and at that time, the graduate dean, the previous graduate dean, Dr Horlocher had retired in June and his secretary had left in July. I came on board the 1st of August and the new dean, Dean Bragonier, came the 1st of September. And at that time that's all there was in the graduate school office was just the graduate dean and myself. It had a secretarial rating at that time. And at that time we handled everything that had to do with the graduate education. That included processing the applications, the admissions, the assistantships, the scholarships, doing all of the graduation clearances, checking in all of the CVs. We had notification for all of the assistantships, but all of the operations that had to do with graduate school. We were doing them there.

Becky Haglund: Okay.

Lavon Brown: Now, let's see, just through the years now, I've been here all of that time, to the years of my particular classification has changed upwards, to presently I'm called a University Staff Assistant II. And my duties have changed in the last three or four years to more of the accounting art and the statistical reporting. The Dean now has a secretary who takes care of the secretarial responsibilities.

And I'm still the office manager from the standpoint of the staff. However, there isn't a lot of managing. They all have their separate duties where we were doing everything. Before there was one girl who takes care of the graduation, one girl who takes care of the assistantships, one girl who care of the secretarial duties, one who is a receptionist and takes care of mail and we no longer handle the applications for graduate students.

I think, well that's about it. We have the five state classified positions. There were I think 625 graduate students, I believe when I came here in 1963. We now have about 2,400 on campus students and about 1800 off campus students. That's full term. It's slightly fewer in the spring and of course there are fewer in the summer, but we have a lot of graduate students who come just summer
only who really don't reflect in that 2,400 totally degree seeking students because they really never ever show up in the official statistics because we don't count people, we just count numbers of people who are registered.

Becky Haglund: Was the growth that came over the years ... do you see it as being something that was very certain in a certain period of time or did it seem to be a very gradual?

Lavon Brown: No. It took a pretty sharp upturn from 1965 to about 1975. In that 10-year period, then the last four or five years, our enrollment has pretty much stabilized and we have an increase, but it's not nearly at the high percentage rate that it was before.

Becky Haglund: Okay. For the next one, changes that have occurred in the organization, the administration. Basically when I was thinking of, was major changes in last few of administration, how things were handled, things like that. Major changes that you have seen.

Lavon Brown: Well, I think probably the swing has been the graduate education. The graduate school was pretty much formalized and rigid and centered in the graduate dean up until 1963. Of course, this was possible because there weren't so many graduate students, nor were there as many graduate programs as there are now.

Beginning then in 1963, there was a gradual decentralization of the responsibilities for the graduate education. One of the things that, I think probably placing the responsibilities for programs and the success of the programs in the hands of the faculty, began to emerge as a role at that time.

There was a lot of change during that 10 years. The growth was so fast that most of the time had to be taken up in initiating new programs and taking care of all of the duties that were attended to. There are 32 PhD programs now and 15 of those came into being between 1963 and 1968. And that takes a lot of discussion, the programs began of course at the departmental level and have to go through all of the channels, clear up through the North Central Association accrediting. And that's quite time consuming and it takes a lot of watch dogging from the graduate dean from the time that he knows the program is beginning talking at the preliminary stages to see that the budgeting, the faculty, all that kind of thing is feasible. And then guiding it through the graduate council and curriculum committees, Faculty Council and through State Board and through CCHE before it ever even thinks of going to North Central.

So we usually figured on, or at least a year before they're not. Now, besides all of those PhD programs, there were probably close to 30 new masters programs that came into being.
Now one of the things, one of the first things that the Dean Bragonier did relative to programs and everything was to go into North Central. And work out with them. A system of identification of the degrees that were offered from CSU.

Prior to Dean Bragonier coming on campus, the programs were approved more by specialization than they were by department. For example, instead of having a PhD in the Department of Animal Sciences as we have now, it was a PhD in Animal Production, Animal Breeding, Dairy Breeding, Wool Production, Dairy Products, five or six different specializations. And it was just becoming a regular Pandora's box from which you could really make no sense at all.

And so he went in to North Central and this stuck with them and they made a conversion table. And as a result of that, now the degrees are identified by departments. Then the specializations are just identified by faculty within those departments. So they're saying that one of the department has been approved to offer a program. The faculty in that department was approved because of their expertise. There are various specializations, but the department as a whole offers programs. So that helped. That was a big step forward, and it made our North Central review in 1973 much smoother and better organized than it would have been otherwise if he hadn't gone through all of that.

Most of that time because of the tremendous growth pattern was also spent in developing the policies that actually did graduate school still operates under most of them anyway. And it was mostly a time of just establishing the graduate school and getting that, the graduate education recognized as a unit within CSU. All of that 10-year period between '63 and '73.

During that time we had assistant deans. They were ... most of them came in on a year basis. There were about five faculty members who came in as half time assistant deans. And then in 1969 we had a full-time assistant dean. And then it went back to half time and we are now back to having a half time assistant dean and a graduate dean intern who is a faculty member who is appointed on a half time basis to handle various things that have to do with the graduate school.

When Dean Bragonier was here, he handled most all aspects of graduate education at the administrative level as well as being available for the student relations part of it and all the PR and the contacts and things like that.

Now it's a little bit different than what the dean assigns a lot of the these students related kinds of things that have to do with student problems, admissions, quality control, financial aid and that kind of thing to the assistant dean. And before that, the dean did that.

Becky Haglund: So. Now is the dean more gotten the promotional type-

Lavon Brown: Yes.
Becky Haglund: Work?

Lavon Brown: Yes, he is. He’s making the link now between the graduate education and the research, which was pretty much left without much done about it. During the 10 years that the graduate school was growing so fast. There’s more time now that everything is pretty much basically organized and running on a pretty smooth keel that the graduate dean works under, he is directly responsible to incident later the Vice President for Academic Affairs. And he is more involved with issues types of things. Like most recently has been the productivity studies that have been going on with the state things that have to do, he attends the current commission higher education meetings and is the vice president’s representative there. And of course that’s where courses, programs and everything are approved as well as the basic policies that affect graduate education.

He works very closely and part time with the Vice President for Research, which makes a direct link then for getting the kinds of things done for graduate education that has to do with research.

A lot of the time has been freed up. It used to be that the graduate dean along with the Graduate Council had to approve all courses of graduate level. When a course was initiated at the departmental level. It came up through the college curriculum committee then to the graduate council. If it was graduate level, then to curriculum committee and most of the time in graduate Council meetings at that time was spent either in approving graduate programs or approving faculty for membership on the graduate faculty like that.

Becky Haglund: [inaudible 00:15:06].

Lavon Brown: That was just hours and hours of time were consumed doing that. Now since Dean Meiman has become dean the courses are not routed through the graduate council. They are just handled by the curriculum committee. The thinking being that those people are apprised of everything that’s going on curriculum wise. The graduate council was at a disadvantage because they didn’t know what undergraduate programs were being started, what undergraduate courses were relating and the whole thing. And it just seemed like a duplication of efforts.

And so the only thing that comes here are the courses that are proposed that bear the GS prefix, graduate school, and there are about, only about five of those. But the programs still come through the graduate council. If there are new degree programs proposed, they come to the graduate council and they still approve it. So that was a big step in clearing away some of the time-consuming things at the graduate council.

Then the other thing was shortly after Dean Meiman became dean in 1975. The graduate faculty as an entity was disbanded and there is now not an identifiable
unit of people referred to on university’s books as that, so to speak as graduate faculty. This was another decentralization.

The 50 departments each have their own code that described their criteria for their faculty to serve on graduate student committees. So we keep track of all those people. Now all of the faculty, we have the list of all of the faculty who are serving on graduate student committees. We have a list of all of the graduate students and the members of their committees.

So if anybody says there is not a graduate faculty, that may be true in one sense of the word that it's not particularly identified. But if they were to come to the graduate school and say which people are acting as graduate faculty, we do have a list of people who are acting as graduate faculty and who have met certain qualifications in order to act as advisors or committee members or whatever.

And so there is a graduate faculty, but it's not the time consuming rigid thing that it was before.

Becky Haglund: So basically now it's the department's responsibility to choose among their faculty who will be teaching graduate classes and who will be teaching undergraduates?

Lavon Brown: That's correct. That was another part of the thinking. After all the department is responsible for hiring the faculty and when they're negotiating with a professor to come on campus and say, "Well, you don't have a responsibility for a certain area in graduate study," it really didn't make too much sense then for some other body named the graduate council to say, "Well, I'm sorry, but you can't serve on graduate student committees or you can't teach a graduate course", because that's probably what the individual was hired for. So you can't very well say, well this department head does know what he's talking about when he hired you, you can't do this. And that was a part of the concept of decentralizing and doing away with the graduate faculty as such. That had to be something that was passed on by the graduate council.

So those were two very noticeable changes when we changed from one graduate dean to the next serving administrations. And the graduate council now is read up and they concentrate mostly on policy type things now. And the action is much more progressive. They are talking about things like quality control, program control, looking to the quality of the graduate students to the quality of admissions trying to establish policies that are easily understood, easily administered.

That is one of the things I think that the present dean does too and tries very much to keep things from becoming complicated and weighed down with red tape and paperwork and that kind of thing. And of course it becomes a necessity
with the rapid growth, something had to be done. So there had to be streamlining in the way, way things are done. And so that's what he's done.

Becky Haglund: Are there any particular people besides the graduate deans themselves who you feel have been influential in some of the changes that have occurred? Or have the deans being kind of was [inaudible 00:20:54]?

Lavon Brown: In thinking about that, I really couldn't come up with anybody else really that I could point to say was very instrumental in getting any kind of a change or starting any kind of anything. It was more or less a group effort with the graduate council was the graduate dean initiating the actions that came of course as a result with his interaction with the Council of Deans and then with the executive council. And I really couldn't think of anybody other than just the deans themselves that I could say we're very-

Becky Haglund: So the decentralization, it's kind of made it .. . the people in the departments, what do I want to say, just the fact that it's de-centralized, it's hard to point out in particular people is spread out?

Lavon Brown: Yes, that's right, it is. And that is the main responsibility for the quality control for graduate programs. Now rest with almost entirely within a committee, with the students' graduate committee, and the controls are at that level where the department head has his input from the time faculty members are hired, clear on through the whole process then and the departments, by having this responsibility, it doesn't mean that there are built in controls.

If a graduate department is putting out lousy graduates, eventually it's going to kill itself because nobody's going to recommend to their students that they come to Fort Collins to get a degree in this particular department because their degree is not good, because they are putting out lousy graduate students. So it's a self-sustaining thing. The more quality that they impose upon themselves, the better off they're going to be in the long run.

So you really don't have to worry too much about them going too far astray because they're just cutting throats if they do.

Becky Haglund: Along that same line. Do you have any ... have had any contact with professors who have done graduate work here or gone to other universities. Does it seem that they recommend to their students to come to CSU if they feel that it would be ... depending on their field of course. Do you see there's any events of that of former graduate students recommending to their students?

Lavon Brown: Yes, we do. We don't have as much opportunity here now to, to see that as they do on the department level because all of the applications come to the departments. But I am quite sure that the senior faculty on campus here get a lot of feedback from their students, their PhD students who go out into other institutions and they call and say, "Look at that, you're a good student. I'd like to
have come to CSU and study in the department and everything." Sure, there's a lot of that.

I can't really document it and then I say, I think at department level you'd have a better, but I've had calls from former students who call and I know that they are very pleased with the education they received here and they are maybe recommending somebody to come back and call back to say all of this. Maybe if they're in a different field, who should I send this student to? Or something of that sort. And they have a great deal of respect for the university as a whole as well as just for their own specialized area where they work.

Becky Haglund: You find that attitudes fairly pervasive. Most people are satisfied with the education they've got?

Lavon Brown: I would think so. We have ... I don't know whether you're familiar with the exit evaluations that we have now from the students who are graduating and they have an opportunity as we say, now that they're ... all the strings have been cut, but they can have their day in court. And I would say that the largest percentage by far of the responses that we get are favorable. Talking about very competent teachers and very concerning teachers and good programs and most of the comments are positive. And I think that is a real good indicator because generally speaking, I think things like that are filled out by people, more apt to be filled out by people who are not happy with what has happened. When they get their chance to get their 2 cents worth in, or that last leg or whatever.

There are some, I mean, I can't sit here and tell you that they're all great and all of that. But, but even so we have, I think around maybe a 30% return of the students who do graduate and the percentage of those who have really valid and pronounced disenchantment with the university are very small, really very small. And mostly it's just [inaudible 00:27:04] of you can tell it becomes immediately obvious if there was some kind of a personality clash or a particular professor or just one thing like that, that they'd pick out or one individual and not a general criticism.

Let's see, programs. We haven't hit much on programs.

I'm not sure. Do you mean by that where the strengths are, where are the numbers of people are, where the good programs are? Or?

Becky Haglund: Basically, I wanted to give some ideas of what you felt were some of the more successful programs as far as attracting students. Some of the programs that were attempted that didn't make it for some reason or another [inaudible 00:28:03].

Lavon Brown: Well, without getting too specific, I think generally speaking of course the heavier population of students are in the College of Engineering, College of Forestry and College of Natural Sciences. Those are the areas that received the
most applicants. They're the areas that have the most students. They're the areas that have the most research. And so by virtue of that are looked upon as the areas that are the strong areas in the university.

Now, most all of the departments in those areas are the ones who had been established over a long number of years and have started like Civil Engineering had the first doctoral program, the Engineering areas, Botany, Animal Sciences, Zoology, Chemistry, Physics. Those departments have had PhD programs now since 1955, 1956, 1957, most of those came in to be then.

So they are well established programs. They are programs that prove themselves when North Central came in with its review and gave the university it's maturity status saying that now you know what you're doing, go ahead with it and develop your programs as you see it.

I think some of them do not produce large numbers of graduates. But the CCHE is reviewing now the programs and the degree production on campus. I can't tell you exactly what the numbers are that they are going by, but they are taking a four or five year degree production span. And for those departments who are not producing what CCHE fields is an adequate number of degrees. There will be a hard look taken at those and maybe look to some consolidation or some other type of arrangement. I would say probably there are no PhD programs that are in jeopardy. Most all of the PhD departments are strong departments, producing at least a minimum rate that is acceptable.

Some of the departments offering Master's programs, I can't say that, that probably is the case. They have been on board and I think our last new Master's degree program was probably approved in. Maybe '76 and of course in three years it's pretty hard for a program to establish itself.

Becky Haglund: Yeah.

Lavon Brown: In less than three years. Most of the others that are older, have had five, seven years, still have a very poor track record as far as production is concerned at the Master's level. And those are the ones that I think they will probably look to see.

There is something there working of course within the state systems CCHE in trying to see that the state is covered as far as having an offering somewhere in some of the state institutions of about everything. But maybe not necessarily having every program offered every place. That's what they will be doing when they're making their evaluation. If we have seemingly weak program here that there is something fairly comparable in Boulder for example. Then we would stand a very good chance of losing our program here.

Becky Haglund: Is that basically because of the financial situation when we just-

Lavon Brown: That's correct.
Becky Haglund: Don’t have the money to.

Lavon Brown: That's part of it. Trying to streamline it a little bit so that the tax dollars are put to a little bit better use in supporting strong programs and rather than supporting the weak links, but yet providing for the state's students to get the kind of education that they need if they're in whatever area they're interested in. But I don't know. Of course, I don't think it's any secret that the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences have the hardest time from a financial support standpoint. They just do not have the research dollars behind them and the rest and instruction money's limited for the numbers of students that they're servicing and they just have a hard time making a go of it.

I think we follow the trends pretty well. When you hear, or shortly after I came here to work, engineering was the big thing. Everybody was telling everybody they better be an engineer if they wanted to be anything that lasted for about five years and then the trend seemed to flow away then and go into other areas energy and even some of the social sciences and economics, sociology, that kind of thing. People were getting philosophical, like in the '60s and that kind of thing. That's been psychology came into being with a bang and the sociology and the economics, all those kinds of things.

Then it started swinging back again towards the engineering and energy and all of that started coming to the fort and Energy started picking up in engineering and those areas that we're working with. Solar energy and also the irrigation, all of that then begin becoming the thing. The Natural Resources area began to take on a lot more significance and you get a lot more activity in those areas then.

Becky Haglund: Do you think the emphasis on programs here is being influenced by your general job market? Like return on the trends and in the different years?

Lavon Brown: Oh yes. Very much so.

Becky Haglund: What jobs were available at the time?

Lavon Brown: Very much so. And you see program design works along those lines. And another one of the things that they're doing now with graduate education and a part of the area that has become a responsibility as the Graduate Dean is to coordinate and integrate the interdisciplinary programs on campus.

Becky Haglund: They seem to the floor-

Lavon Brown: They're beginning to come to the floor a little bit more. This Cell and Molecular Biology, the Environmental Resources Center, ecology programs, those kinds of things now at the graduate level are beginning to emerge. And we'll be probably a good portion of what the graduate school, graduate dean will be responsible for.
And there's another area and another aspect that the graduate dean is also the Director for International Programs. And that is just in the last few years is becoming a more recognizable unit or area within the university exchange both ways, the foreign students coming here, the kind of training they get the training for American students going to other countries. Particularly the lesser developed countries of the world are getting a lot of attention. There's money to take care of them. And so all of the international aspect and programs, it's just beginning.

There's a new program now that is oriented toward strengthening our faculty on campus to give them more expertise in working with international programs in the lesser developed countries, the world.

So the whole aspect of the graduate school as it was in ’63 and what it is now has changed quite a bit. Mainly because of the establishment, the grad school is established as far as the fundamentals are concerned. So now they're moving into the areas where there needs to do some benchmarking like interdisciplinary and international and of course the coordination with the research. Trying to get some money for the graduate students trying to get it administered according to the regulations and the parameters that they have to work for.

It's changed quite a bit in 17 years.

Becky Haglund: You kind of touched on probably some of the major problems that have occurred. Is there any other things that come to your mind?

Lavon Brown: Problems?

Becky Haglund: Yeah.

Lavon Brown: No, not really. Changes, maybe that's not probably another change that I didn't mention that took place. I'm not sure when, but in the ’63 to ’73 period was making the foreign language requirement for doctoral students in the department requirement as opposed to university requirements. And at that time that seemed to be quite a daring step. The prestigious colleges, universities still held pretty much to the traditional two foreign languages requirement. And there were some areas that hung on for quite awhile, even here and now the trend has gotten away from that pretty much. They're using ancillary skills like computer skills, statistical skills, that kind of thing.

About the only departments that are having a foreign language requirement are the ones where there's a great deal of literature that is still in maybe German or French or something like that where it actually is an advantage to the student to be able to read so that they can access the scientific works that are done in their field.
That seemed to be a very ... happened to be an issue. Is it fairly settled down now?

Yes.

Or is it still?

Hear anything about it anymore. It's just them. As I say, most of them, the programs are designed according to what the students need, but they're going to be doing and there are still some departments that ask for a reading comprehension of foreign language. And I don't know what ... I don't think there are any that required to anymore. Some of them still require one, but the graduate school doesn't even monitor that anymore. The language requirement is strictly departmental and it's left up to them to re-fire, whatever they want to fulfill. Anything like that.

I don't know. I suppose probably support for students is the biggest problem that the graduate school has to face as far as any kind of service to the graduate students are concerned. Was an owner, was another thing too that they start that turned dark to begin your started and it has continued in. That was of course the formation of graduate student council and they managed to get representation on the graduate council so that they have a voting membership. There are two members now in graduate council who have a voting membership and they report in our direct linkage through the graduate council.

The graduate student council can make their input right into the graduate council for issues that that bothered them. They were the main ones who instigated the graduate assistant agreement and got a minimum base salary rate established for graduate students. And they worked on a lot of things. They extended library privileges, then quite successful in getting that done. And they are always very concerned and very active and keep a watchful eye on the university and on the state for matters that have to do particularly with the research and with the financing and the research assistantships, that kind of thing. And have really been I think a pretty good voice. Sometimes we think that maybe the graduate students don't avail themselves of the other graduate student councils.

There doesn't seem to be bearing large attendance.

It's not that visible. And it's just like most things there, it's set aside for studying, research and all of the things that after all they've come here for and they have struggled but they have done some very good. Probably the claim was filed to the people we've been active in there. I'm sure that experience had some good contacts and some good things come over.

Getting back to the legislative support. Has it been more difficult in the last few years to get the money you need from the legislature? It seems with the ...
when they used to allow research assistants, camp tuition waivers, when they refused to continue that, was that basically because of their reluctance to continue support or what was the reason behind it?

Lavon Brown: Yes, I think it probably both. It's hard to say. I really shouldn't probably say at all because I don't know that much about it, but I think it's probably a combination they are fighting the battle of the dollars and trying to get them placed where they think they do the most good. There does seem to be what appears to us anyway and attitude that graduate education and research is too expensive for the results than it produces. And it takes a concerted effort all of the time on the part of university administrators to just keep pounding at the legislators and the administrators in the CCHE and legislator committee to get them to realize that the benefits that there are, not only to the students, but to the state and to the whole country with the things that they do.

They'll pick on a project to them. That seems petty and forget to make notes of the great discoveries that are made in everything that veterinarian medicine and the engineering, several aspects of engineering and all of the good that all of those programs have produced over the years.

And without the research, they just simply would not be a university. They are very jealous of the money that they budget for the universities and are very frugal with it and everything. But they criticized the research programs and everything, but they really are not all that reluctant to have faculty members salaries paid by research money. Realizing they benefit from the indirect costs are born by all of the research projects. That's all money in the state's pockets, so to speak one way or the other. But, yet they still argue that graduate education is too expensive and can't be supported. I don't know their rationale. They are a hard group to reckon with.

I can remember Dean Bragonier after at a couple of meetings with him when the business about the support for the graduate assistance and graduate research and everything back quite a few years ago. He said he just never felt so totally at a loss for being understood and trying to get his point across or get the information across or to convince a body of people. So as he had run up against for news, talking with the press, the joint budget committee.

Becky Haglund: Is it the graduate dean that's the one who's responsible for dealing with the legislature and the joint budget committee, who is-

Lavon Brown: No. Not ordinarily. It's usually the Vice President, depending on what area it is, if it has to do with legislating, it said Vice President for Budgets and the Academic Vice President, the Graduate Dean not that much. And they use his expertise a lot and in contact with those people. But that is not a part of his responsibility. The [Kisco 00:49:40] Part of that is not part of his responsibility.

Becky Haglund: You mentioned the NCA visits.
Lavon Brown: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Becky Haglund: What basically I want to know is, immediate results that came from the recommendations that the NCA visiting committees made as far as policy on program changes or something is concerned.

Lavon Brown: Let's see it's kind of hard to remember right now. Their recommendation ... There were specific recommendations in some cases or some of the programs not substantial, but maybe you recommendations of some of their policies or procedures or ways they were doing things. Very little in the way of criticism when the whole North Central visitation was completed, the recommendations were quite favorable and of course just the fact of acquiring the mature status designation supposedly immediately meant prestige to our standing amongst the other universities in the United States. Whether or not it did, I don't know that at least it was something that they could say with confidence, but they had the mature status or the North Central and it was a status symbol more than anything else.

I can't recall for sure there were some of the newer programs that were reviewed at the time North Central came that they had to make some changes in their programs before the mature status was there. I think it was a reported thing. I think they went ahead with some mature status, but there was like about a year's period of time when there had to be and other reasons mainly North Central to show you good faith and that they had complied with whatever their requests were. I really don't even remember now what they were, but they were there. It was nothing major.

They did it quieter through you and went through all of the departments and reviewed with them and with the administration, the State Board. And it was quite an experience.

Becky Haglund: On your part of the administration was getting that NCA mature status rating of major goal, is that what they strive for from the ‘63?

Lavon Brown: Yes.

Becky Haglund: Rating until they came in ‘70s?

Lavon Brown: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And they had the preliminary visit actually in ‘62. It was before Dean Bragonier came, just the last year that Dr Horlocher was the dean. So then from that point on, yes, they were then looking toward bringing the programs into line so that when they had the 10-year reviews and they would hopefully have mature status at that time.