



TURFA Oral History Project

During Towson University's sesquicentennial celebration in 2017, there was a concerted effort to review and celebrate the university's growth and development. There were banners, the dedication of historical walkways, special art exhibits, university and college lecture series, alumni reunions, and numerous articles in the university and local press. The single missing element was a link to the past from the faculty perspective.

It was during these celebrations that it dawned on the TURFA Executive Committee that the institutional history of any university comes from three potential sources: (1) students, (2) faculty (3) administration. Students are by nature ephemeral, spending 4-6 years at the institution. Their institutional knowledge is limited to a brief snapshot in time corresponding with the period of their enrollment. Administrators have a somewhat longer association with the institution but, to achieve upward mobility, frequently serve the university for less than a decade before moving on. As a consequence, administrators perceive the institution from a uniquely different perspective than do students or faculty. In the final analysis, it is the faculty that has the longest, most intimate perspective of the institution, frequently spending 20, 30 and in some cases more than 50 years in residence. In essence, they live "change over time". As members of the TURFA Executive Committee conversed with the University Archivists, we were surprised to discover that the faculty voice was the least well documented aspect of the institution's history.

It was in response to this void that the Executive Committee came to realize that collectively our membership possessed a treasure trove of institutional memory, and that we had an obligation to commit as much of that memory as possible to the public record.

Thus, the TURFA Oral History Project was born. The plan is to select a representative cross-section of retired faculty from each of the university's six colleges and to have them discuss their life and career with a designated TURFA interviewer. As they are completed, the videos will be accessioned into the University Archives located on the Fifth floor of The Albert Cook Library preserving for posterity, the faculty perspective of the institution's evolution.