

TCOM Memoirs

Gus Ferre'

Mr. Stokes: This is Ray Stokes on the second day of July, 1985, in the oral history section of the TCOM Health Sciences Library. Today I am fortunate to have a good friend of mine, a former boss of mine, too, I might say in our interview. He is, or was, the first Vice President for Medical Affairs at the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine. He is Dr. Gustaff Ferre', and we call him Dr. Gus for short. We will be referring to Dr. Gus Ferre' who is my guest in my office here today. And we are going to try to pick Dr. Ferre's brain for the time that he was the Vice President here at TCOM. Dr. Gus Ferre', administrator, educator, a philosopher, a minister will be setting or was setting the pace. What I'm doing now is really quoting part of a news story that ran in a special edition of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram on the last day of August, 1975, which was about one day before officially TCOM became a part of the North Texas system. So, I will continue here with reading this particular section of the biography of Dr. Ferre'. You will be setting or was at that time setting a pace for the administration for the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine during the coming year as the Vice President for Medical Affairs. Dr. Ferre', Vice President for Academic Affairs at North Texas State University, since 1971, requested a one year leave of absence from his NTSU post to serve as the chief administrative officer at the medical school. "We are fortunate to have such a capable person as Dr. Ferre' who can accept broader responsibilities during this critically important transition for NTSU and TCOM", said C.C. Noland, President of both institutions. Alright, Dr. Ferre', I've given you a quote there about that little profile about you and some of your contemporaries at that time. You, of course, have been in Fort Worth a number of years. You were at TCU in the Philosophy Department before you went to North Texas. But, Dr. Ferre', I am happy to have the opportunity to discuss some of your memoirs as a top administrator at TCOM in 1975 to about 1977 or '78. Would you kindly relate some of the details about the role assigned to you by President Noland when TCOM became identified with ^{NTSU}TCOM, and what was your specific assignment?

Dr. Gus: Ray, there are two dates. One is when North Texas State University unofficially was related to Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Mr. Stokes: That dates back to about 1971, I presume. Start from there then, if you would.

Dr. Gus: Right after the new year of 1972, President Noland, or "Jitter", as we called him came to me and suggested that North Texas State University would be benefitted by having a professional school related to it. He suggested that if we had a medical college that this would help both the medical college and North Texas State University. He proceeded to ask me if we thought that we could identify with Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine, and provide for them certain services as far as North Texas State University was concerned with helping both the image of North Texas State University and the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine. My first reaction was one of surprise. I planned to give full-time to my position as Vice President for Academic Affairs, which took more time than I had, at that time. But, Jitter was rather insistant that we have a professional school related to North Texas State University and he had had some conversations with Professor Silvie and Dr. Luibel that gave some indication that it might be possible for North Texas State University to be of help to Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine in terms of basic health science.

Mr. Stokes: Excuse me for interrupting, but could you clarify Dr. Silvie? Who?

Dr. Gus: Dr. Silvie was Chairman of our Biology Department at North Texas State University and had a tremendous concern for medical education. In fact, the reputation was that no student that he had recommended for medical college had never been turned down.

Mr. Stokes: Is that right? He didn't tell me that. I had an interview with Dr. Silvie recently and he didn't mention that. I'm glad to hear it.

Dr. Gus: He had a fine reputation and tremendous interest in medical education. At that point, it seemed to me a little difficult, but my answer was, as usual to the President, that if the President wanted it then we could do it. But, it wouldn't be easy and it would take a considerable amount of time and we'd have

to be careful as we had too much time allocated to the one or to the other, so that one or the other would suffer by/dual ^{the} relationships. Jitter said, "Well, think about it, and there is a committee going to come up from Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine, and I want you to meet with them, and listen to their proposal and see what you think in terms of our commitment." The ..Dr. Luibel and other members of the committee arrived on campus and talked about North Texas State University being able to supply leadership and basic health science. And said, maybe the student could spend the first year or the first two years up at North Texas State University and then transfer down to Fort Worth for the clinical years. There was a question mark whether they'd be one year, a year and a half, or two years, or depending upon how much basic health science is required at North Texas State University, and how much would be required here, at the college campus of Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine. The question that the administrator asked, of course, is how do you fund it? And, the question was raised as to the funding, and they said they had a hundred thousand dollars for basic health science. This seemed like a small amount for the amount that they were asking us to do. There was some serious question whether we could accomplish it for the amount of money involved in terms of the need for professors and equipment and all the things involved in the basic health science department. They came back later and said they had received word that the State would give them additional funds, and they could give us \$300,000. This wasn't a great deal, either, but we said we would do so, and from that time on our responsibility was to try to set up a basic health science curriculum that would be acceptable to medical education and also acceptable to the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine. It was at this point then that Jitter turned problems over to me and from that day on, for the next five years well I...

Mr. Stokes: So you have been identified much longer than it shows on the records?

Dr. Gus: Oh, yes, yes. I was identified from the beginning. And Jitter just said, well the details are up to you and the overall policy ~~is~~ belongs to the President.

Mr. Stokes: So, you weren't new to TCOM on September 1, 1975, when we joined the NTSU family, were you?

Dr. Gus: Oh, no, no. For four years I had met with them, talked with them, and shared with them. And was very well aware of ...

Mr. Stokes: Well, you're bound to have some rich experiences that occurred then in addition to what occurred the one year or two years that you were actually here officially when we became part of the state system.

Dr. Gus: Yeah, I think the more difficult problems were before we became affiliated, leading up to the state affiliation. Our responsibilities were first of all to get funding; second was the faculty; and third was to get full state approval. And behind all of that, of course, was an adequate basic health science program. We never were interested in North Texas State University in doing the clinical years that didn't belong to us and were not our concern. It belonged properly ^{with} / the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine and whatever hospital affiliated with so that we're concerned stayed with the basic health science department. Now, how to get a curriculum that was acceptable to the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine and that was acceptable to the standard that we had in mind ^{in terms} / of correlation between allopathic medicine and osteopathic medicine. We had on our faculty in the Biology Department a professor that I won't name since I didn't ask for permission to name him, but a professor that had been at the University of Texas Medical College and Health Science Center in Galveston, and had taught in that area and was very well acquainted with curriculum and curriculum needs. I met with him a number of times. He was not interested in getting deeply involved, though he later transferred to San Antonio and was with a medical college down there in San Antonio. But, he was an invaluable source of information and of help of putting a curriculum together. Now this is no criticism of the curriculum that they had at Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine. But, it was limited by the limited number of faculty that they had, and the responsibility of the faculty that they had to do many things outside of their field in order to cover a wide range of needs and preparation of the

student. And, so when we began it was our experience talking with Jitter, Pres. Roland, that if we were going to go into this, that us explore first a few years and then we can decide if we want to make a solid commitment, whether we were capable of doing so. And that would depend upon the fact that we want excellence. We said our game aim at North Texas State University has been excellence in everything that we tried to accomplish. And I say that we must also then put the same goal to Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine. And tried to achieve the best osteopathic medical college that they have functioning in the United States or in the world, as far as we were concerned. We didn't hesitate to set a higher goal, and in our thinking it would be helpful to the osteopathic profession and also to the students if they had a little broader curriculum than what we'd noticed when we first looked at the curriculum they had. So, you can understand that this led to a great deal of give and take, in terms of those who protect curriculum and in terms of faculty that you have available to teach in certain areas, and also the quality of students you have that are able to handle the material because now we were, we thought we were upgrading in a sense, because of the greater demands that are made upon them. My first responsibility then was to try to find faculty who would be willing to teach part-time in the basic health science department and which was not yet a department, and therefore, didn't function by itself. It was under the Biology Department.

Mr. Stokes: Right.

Dr. Gus: And you run into the problems that you have with faculty and with their load and with releases and whatever is involved. But, we thought it could be handled and we have to give a great deal of credit to the faculty in the Biochemistry Department and in the Biology Department and in the Chemistry Department who were willing to understand that this was a challenge. And that this was an experiment at first and that we maybe could provide a very valuable service to the people in Texas and to the students who were preparing for osteopathic medicine. There was never any attempt to change osteopathic medicine

to allopathic medicine, but our aim was to produce the best curriculum we could and to secure the most qualified faculty members we could, even though the demands maybe a little high and a little demanding. At first, and then our desire would be to recruit quality of students that would be capable of handling the material that was put to them. So, you can understand that at first it took a certain amount of willingness of the students to go along with what now became a little more demanding of them, a little more restrictive of the freedom that they had and a greater amount of time in basic health sciences and maybe less time, not less time, but postponed the beginning of the time of the clinical experience. Most of them would like to get into the clinical experience as early as possible. And sometimes its a good idea to do so, but since the campuses were separated it meant that they would have to postpone any clinical experience until after the basic health science.

Mr. Stokes: Now that condition of the split campus lasted how long, Dr. Ferre'?

Dr. Gus: Up until about '74 and '75, and then when we finally joined together. We still had a split campus, but more and more of it was being moved down to this campus. We were able to buy buildings and renovate them such as the old hotel that they had here and find space in various areas, and faculty members who were recruited from the osteopathic profession; who were willing to come in and teach, and so on, that more and more we were able to move the faculty down to Fort Worth and then not move the students down to Fort Worth. First, and here again, a little of this is rusty because I haven't thought about it for a while.

Mr. Stokes: That's understandable.

Dr. Gus: Those first two or three years is a little hard to move the students down here. We tried to do it by buses and so on, because we didn't want them to lose contact with Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine as being located in Fort Worth and being the mother place, and the place where the basic instruction was going to take place. On the other hand, we couldn't start down here because the faculty was up there and it was a little hard to move the faculty; it was hard enough to get them to teach, never mind try to move them down and spend their

time back and forth. We didn't have the resources to do so. We couldn't pay them for their transportation and various things so that...and still come out anywhere near the budget that we achieved. Against this background we also saw that there was a tremendous need for buildings; a tremendous need for resources for each student in terms of commitment from the state. So what we began doing then was lay the ground work for appealing to the state for letting osteopathic medicine be on a par with allopathic medicine and that they would reimburse, or at least allocate, I guess is the word that I want. Allocate funds for the osteopathic medical college on the same basis that they allocated funds to the medical colleges that were allopathic. Now, this took time. It took many meetings. We met with groups from the coordinating board. We met with groups from the legislative branches. We were fortunate to be appointed to a state committee and a chairman of health needs for the State of Texas for the next ten years. And a report was due in...

Mr. Stokes: Are you still on that?

Dr. Gus: Oh, no. It was from '75 to '85.

Mr. Stokes: Well, you've just been off a short time then.

Dr. Gus: That's right, and that gave us a chance then to have a chance of looking at it. What the needs would be and whether there was a place and need for an osteopathic medical college in the State of Texas. Obviously, we were very fortunate when they thought that there was that need. And the osteopathic medical college was dedicated to what we call family practice and quite often in the rural areas; and that's where the greatest need was in Texas. And since we could identify the greatest need and opportunity to ~~met~~ that need it was...

Mr. Stokes: You might be interested to know that we have about 745 graduates now, and about 70% of them are in family practice - about 30% in various other ~~discipline~~ districts.

Dr. Gus: Very good. Dr. Luibel through all of this of course was a tremendous help. He was a guiding person in terms of our conversations and with the people to meet and so on.

Mr. Stokes: You're referring to one of the founders of the school when you talk about Dr. Luibel.

Dr. Gus: Yes, yes, yes. An osteopathic in the profession. Now, all of this then led up to the date that you mentioned as coming together. By this time then we realized, from '72, '73, and '74, our experiences in those three years saw that what we needed was strong leadership. We needed adequate funding. We needed new buildings that could adequately meet the needs we had hoped for the college of osteopathic medicine. And, as you recall, by this time we had basically a bowling alley and a hotel that we had bought next door.

Mr. Stokes: Right.

Dr. Gus: Now, it was out of this background then that we were appointed to serve in the position of Vice President for Medical Affairs and Vice President for Academic Affairs. But, it was impossible to give the amount of time necessary to the college of osteopathic medicine and serve as Academic Vice President at North Texas State University. So, it was; we then asked for a leave of absence for one year from North Texas State University. Primarily, to do two things. Secure adequate leadership, adequate funding, and then, of course, follow through with what we had started, which was a request to the national funding and state funding for a Med Ed I, as we were to call it, building. That's what was involved in this responsibility and that's why the release from being Vice President for Academic Affairs and my responsibility then first of all, was to secure a person that I could recommend to be the chief officer at Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine, who then would report back to the President of North Texas State University.

Mr. Stokes: Could you relate some experience you may have had in that search?

Dr. Gus: Well, it was our privilege then of attending, or visiting I should say, all of the osteopathic medical colleges in the United States, at that time.

Mr. Stokes: That would have been about six or seven then.

Dr. Gus: Yes, and we did it for two reasons. One - we went once with the understanding of certain osteopathic medical colleges in terms of the building

that they had; the equipment that they had, which was primarily to see how they would build differently if they built now. And to see what was the strength of their building and also the weaknesses of the building. We also went to some allopathic colleges. But, our primary concern was the osteopathic medical colleges so that we could see and learn what the strength of their building was and what the weakness was, and hopefully we could build on the strength and kind of minimize the weakness; of course, realizing that we had to adjust it to our own. The second was to see and observe the quality of leadership that they had and to inquire concerning those that might be available to serve as the administrative head of the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine. I took this trip one summer by myself, and spent a considerable amount of time evaluating a number of people who had been recommended. The name that kept surfacing had to do with Dr. Ralph at Michigan State University. The reason for this was that he was serving as Associate Dean and, he had the experience of serving at the mother church if I could say it that way, or... Mr. Stokes: schooling, or...Kirksville.

Dr. Gus: Home, right. At Kirksville. And then he also had the experience of seeing allopathic medicine and osteopathic medicine working side by side.

Mr. Stokes: By his experience in the Air Force?

Dr. Gus: Yes, and no. At Michigan State University. Because there the basic health science was shared by both. And that's what we had in mind was someone who could take the strength of both and not go off on some narrow tangent, but a broad based education in the basic health sciences. Which was what we thought necessary for the clinical years that were to come. I realize full well that you could do it basically in training, but we were concerned with foundation work as an academic institution as at North Texas State University. Now, Ralph Willard, with my conversations with him, meeting with him, was interested in becoming the head of an emerging college of osteopathic medicine. He had a lot of hopes, a lot of dreams. He ...

Mr. Stokes: He used to facetiously say "the Kirksville on the Trinity".

Dr. Gus: Yeah. Ha, ha, ha. Very good. Very good. And in our conversations with him and Margaret we were very much impressed and felt that he would be the one that could lead us into the years ahead. And, so, I didn't bring back a number of names though I did have a number of other names. So, its difficult to say which one would be the best, but that was my responsibility and I was... So, I suggested that maybe he was the one that we should have down here. President Noland was willing to agree with that recommendation and the board then later agreed. So, he became, the first year, sort of Dean of the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine while I acted as Vice President for Medical Affairs. But, he came with the full understanding that after the first year he would be given the chief position and I would be able to go back to North Texas State University; provided that he showed the ^{type of} leadership and quality of leadership, and he could handle the situation here in Fort Worth.

Mr. Stokes: Dr. Gus, in that respect during this transition period there must have been a number of problems and conditions that you encountered, I'm sure. But, could one or more particular problems that did arise during that time that were memorable in your thinking?

Dr. Gus: Well, there were so many problems that arose its hard to identify one..

Mr. Stokes: Well, I can think of one problem that you had. Possibly...

Dr. Gus: Problems with students at times...

Mr. Stokes: Right, right.

Dr. Gus: who were going to run the college of osteopathic medicine, or whether the administration had a right. Whether we were going to change grades of professors on their complaint or whether we were going to stay with academic procedure and insist that they provide the quality of work that was necessary, we felt, to certify them to the state that they were qualified practitioners once they had been graduated from Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Mr. Stokes: I conclude that regardless of the threat you held your guns.

Dr. Gus: There's no question like about that, Ray. I didn't always have the

best reputation for being conciliatory, but I really was very open. Except I felt it was the responsibility of the administration to insist that certain standards be followed and obviously we had problems with faculty and problems with administration. We had problems with fiscal affairs, and we even had problems with the Board of Regents at times.

Mr. Stokes: Ah, oh.

Dr. Gus: But, we were able to work through each of the problems that we had. We had great support and I think that there never was any question mark that we were going to set high goals and that our aim was that we would produce one of the finest osteopathic colleges in the world. That was our aim then; that is their aim now. I believe the foundation was laid in that direction and that gives a great deal of joy as we see the skyline now with the tremendous buildings that we have here at Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Mr. Stokes: Dr. Gus, do you happen to recall some unforgettable moment or moments that you did experience during your tenure here at TCOM? Either, some good or some bad that stand out above any others?

Dr. Gus: Well, there were a lot of great moments. I have a hard time saying that there was some more...

Mr. Stokes: Well, what would be your most top experience compared with your valley of despair experience?

Dr. Gus: My...I think the greatest joy I had was to see the quality of the incoming students raised. We saw it continually come in with students applying to the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine; better prepared, better ready to the task, and I would say would compare favorably with those that would apply to allopathic colleges/^{as far} is concerned. The greatest joy, of course, is to see the class graduate, and especially the class that I thought were troublemakers. And to see that they matured and learned from their experiences. And that they now are contributing factors.

Mr. Stokes: I think that we've already had about three Presidents of the Alumni Association from that particular class.

Dr. Gus: I believe that they were outstanding people who just wanted so hard to achieve that they were willing to help the administration more than the administration was willing to let them help at that time.

Mr. Stokes: Dr. Gus, you've pretty well answered this question about what particular accomplishment do you feel is accredited to your efforts. And, I think you've probably expanded on that..

Dr. Gus: Well, I'm not sure that I can take credit for any of it, really. The real...

Mr. Stokes: Well, you had a finger in the hand.

Dr. Gus: Well, we did and we were able to get full state support. I guess to spend the amount of time we did with the state legislature and with the Coordinating Board and with the Board of Regents fighting so hard to get the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine; we didn't do it alone. The osteopathic profession, the leadership here, all contributed, and certainly President Noland has to be given a great deal of credit for his willingness to keep battling. But, the details had to be worked out. And the small committee work we had to do, and the grant had to be written and they had to-one line has to be filled in after another line-and all of that little work had to be done. We had a great many people who contributed to doing so. Leadership is the key to any institution and you at least have to get the banners waving and you have to get the enthusiasm aroused, and to see them falling in line, and to see them taking ahold and to see them willing to go to bat for you; and to see the accomplishments. Nothing succeeds like success, they say. And one success after another was encouraging. And, I think that the greatest joy was the first success when we were funded for Med Ed I and we could see the ground broken, and we could lay plans and we had had everyone consulted about the kind of building we ought to have and the kind of space that they wanted, and to see it actually being built, and the dream began to become a reality was really a rewarding sight. Actually, I tried to keep out of their way as much as possible. The more I did so, the better it went.

Mr. Stokes: Well look, Dr. Gus, in this concluding question I want you to refrain now from being taciturn or too modest, but actually, what would you best like to be remembered at TCOM?

Dr. Gus: I think that the willingness to undertake the union with Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine in terms of the basic health sciences when it didn't look like there was a chance in the world to have this thing go. That there was a hundred thousand, three hundred thousand dollars, what can you do with that amount? You had a full university to take care of, you had a tremendous need up at the university; we were just getting ourselves, our feet on the ground, so to speak up there. We had a lot of needs, but then to see that we could take a struggling osteopathic college and be able to provide a service for them that would give an adequate base for their clinical years and then for the people of Texas to have the services of adequate osteopathic practitioners, doctors in the fullest sense of the word, who could qualify to pass the test that the allopaths passed, and yet add something extra to medicine. This was the most important; at the vision; at the beginning point - we had many there who shook their heads and many who were willing to say there was no way we could it, wait until it chose more signs of being able to do it. Now anyone can jump on the bandwagon after you've had a few successes and after you've gotten the thing under way. But, right at the beginning, to be faced with the curriculum needs, the faculty needs, equipment needs, all kinds of needs, student needs, and to be able to put all that together to make some kind of sense. And to be able to work together with two institutions without one swallowing up the other. And to be each able to keep its strong independence and yet, each profiting from the strength of the other. Now, that was what we had hoped to accomplish, and I think that's what at the present time at least we have accomplished. There is no question mark that my responsibility was at the beginning for those first three or four years. After those years then others were able to take off and do far better than what I could have done in later years. But, each one has its place and the key is not to stay so long that you

outware your contribution.

Mr. Stokes: Well, you certainly had a key role in forming what we now call TCOM in its present state. We certainly do thank you, Dr. Ferre', for visiting with us today. I'm happy to renew a friendship that I've had with you down through the years, although I haven't seen much of you in the last ten. But, nevertheless, delighted that you could come down from your home in Denton and be with us here at TCOM and we're very grateful for your coming and being with us today.

Dr. Gus: Thank you, Ray, I appreciate that. And I appreciate the opportunity to have these words. You understand of course that there are some things that can be said that can't properly be said at the present time. And I think we could give a more indepth inside into some of the problems and some of the things that we've had, but I do think that's better to wait until some who are so closely involved with it to have a chance to...look back at the past.

Mr. Stokes: Well, I'll look forward to yours and my lasting until that takes place. Thank you, Dr. Ferre'.