Interview with Dr. Ronald J. Chenail

Former Dean of SHSS and Professor of Family Therapy

Ronald J. Chenail first came to Nova Southeastern University in the fall of 1988 as a doctoral candidate, shortly after the founding of the School of Social Sciences in 1987. He was a member of the first cohort of doctoral students in the Marriage and Family Therapy program, having transferred to NSU to continue working with his Dissertation Chair, Dr. Bradford Keeney, who founded the doctoral program in family therapy. At that time, Ron had already finished his doctoral coursework and was completing his dissertation.

Ron held administrative roles from the beginning of his time at NSU, starting as the Director of Research as well as an Instructor in the Institute for Systemic Therapy at what was then called the School of Social Sciences in Nova University. He then became Director of the Institute for Systemic Therapy. From 1991-1999, Ron served as Dean of the School of Social and Systemic Studies. During his tenure both the Masters and PhD programs in Dispute Resolution were established, as was the Department of Dispute Resolution, which later became the Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Although he has held other administrative roles at NSU since his tenure as Dean, Ron has continually held a faculty appointment in SHSS as a Professor of Family Therapy.

Ron recalls that the school was first located off campus, then in the Mailman Hollywood building, followed by a stint in trailers outside the Parker Building. The school then moved to the East Campus before returning to main campus in the Maltz Building, where SHSS now resides. In spite of these changes in locations, Ron observes that one thing has remained constant throughout the 25-year history of SHSS, namely, “the university’s commitment to innovation, where faculty and administrators are supported in curriculum innovations.” Ron notes that the programs offered in SHSS have been “the first of their kind in the region if not anywhere.” As he states, “Throughout its history, SHSS has been focusing on what some people call alternatives, but what I would call creative and new ways of addressing problems. The programs offered at SHSS are not just alternative but programs with their own integrity.” Looking forward, Ron anticipates that we will “continue to seek the school exploring new and emerging problem-solving approaches.”