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INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL R. SILVER

CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INDEXED BY

KATHLEEN HARPER AND THOMAS A. SCOTT

MONDAY, JULY 14, 2014

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Southern Polytechnic State University Series, No.11
Interview with Daniel R. Silver
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Monday, July 14, 2014
Location: Atrium Building, Southern Polytechnic State University

KH: Tell me a little about your background. Where did you grow up?

DS: Well, I grew up in what was once known as Norcross, but is now known as Peachtree Corners. It's in Gwinnett County and borders DeKalb and Fulton. There were legislators that lived around the corner, so it was very influential with some pretty 'up there' people, but it wasn't the richest if you know what I mean. It was full of people that knew who to talk to, so I thought that was helpful. I went to Simpson Elementary School and Pinckneyville Middle School, and then moved to Forsyth and attended South Forsyth High School, because they have a better special education program for my two brothers and me. They [Forsyth County Schools] were able to provide better programs to accommodate our disabilities. Now I'm here at Southern Poly.

KH: What exactly drew you to Southern Poly?

DS: Well, I almost feel like it was more fate, because I originally didn't know much about it. My mom said something about it because I was trying to get into Tech [Georgia Institute of Technology], but when I applied for them, I didn't hear back for six months, after which they sent a letter to me saying, "We ran out of space. Try again in the spring." Luckily, I had also applied to Southern Poly, and they accepted me, literally, in a day and a half. I also got accepted into Georgia Southern. So, I thought that was a coincidence. What's also interesting is that I have been able to get through life with my dyslexia by looking for and identifying patterns. Everything (for me) at Southern Poly was all pattern-related, even my student ID number. When I first came here, everyone thought I was just lying about my student ID number. It contains only three numbers with two of them being repeated more than twice. My email address was just "dsilver." At Tech, my student ID number had no pattern in it and my student email contained numbers with no pattern. Like I said, I almost feel like fate brought me here as if there was a need for me. I have no intention to transfer. I love it here!

KH: What would you say kept you here?

DS: What kept me here was the ability to be up close and personal with the action because we were in that great time of change and growth, while the students here were able to apply input into different things going on. I also think [the fact that] Dr. [Lisa A.] Rossbacher [Current SPSU President] would always be walking around campus and talking to many of the students on their way to class was another reason. You don't usually expect a person high up in the university to say "hey" to you casually. My dad went to Ohio State University and my mom went to a school up in Boston. I don't think they ever had the case where the president would just be walking around and you could easily interact with

them. You could even have a class with her [Dr. Rossbacher] just because she may have wanted to take the class herself. I remember going home and telling my dad, “I just talked to the president the other day. She’s nice.” My dad was like, “What?” [laughter] I think the ability to meet with everyone and get to know them allows you to feel that they do want you to succeed, rather than you are there to make the state look good, which, you know, is somewhat true. I mean, it’s competitive out there.

KH: What did you want to study? What did you want to do with your college education?

DS: Well, I have always had a thing for architecture, but once I got accepted, I was so excited that someone let me into their school! [laughter]. I was looking up and down the screen (to pick a major), and, for some reason, I couldn’t find ‘architecture’. I thought, “Well civil [civil engineering technology] is similar” (there is still some design to it), so I picked civil. I’m glad I did, because the first two years of architecture is drawing, so I don’t know if I would have made it. I’m happy where I am, plus every class I have is a project (you learn the theory and practice), so I feel like I’m more on top now.

KH: I did find the academic path of your Bachelor of Science. [It] said Civil Engineering Technology, as well as specializing in Transportation.

DS: Correct. I wanted to do something in transportation. I’m also trying to get a Survey and Mapping degree. We’ll see how that goes. [laughter]

KH: How long have you been at Southern Poly?

DS: Starting in the fall, it will be the beginning of my sixth year. I had a very hard time with one of the classes, and, oddly enough, the fourth time I took it, (because there were two times I dropped it) everything just clicked. It was like the class was so simple that you didn’t see it, because you were trying to overcomplicate the class. That’s when I decided to pick up the Bachelor’s in Surveying & Mapping as well because it wouldn’t take much longer. I wasn’t going to quit.

KH: Could you tell me a little more about Civil Engineering Technology? What is it?

DS: Right. There is the traditional CE [civil engineering] that everyone knows, then there is the traditional CET. Basically, when Southern Poly got started, they needed more people after the war (WWII) had ended to facilitate more of the work on the inside, and they needed less time for them to learn it. CET takes most of theory out, but not all of it, and any class you do is what you would be expected to do in the workforce. For example, there was a highway design I took, and [the instructor] says, “Here is a road,” and you have to do the whole Georgia Department of Transportation Plan Presentation Guide, which is everything that a person has to submit in order to get that bid. With each class you do, you have that component, so when you get into the workforce, you can just hit the ground running. With CE, you have to know all of the theory; some things may take longer [to learn], so practical training may take longer in the workforce. I chose CET because I have a more balance-dominated brain, and it’s hard for me to go really deep on the left or really deep on the right, so it was just a match made in heaven. And my writing is really good, which is a great thing to have in an engineering field.

KH: Tell me a little bit about your life on campus and within the student body. How have you interacted with on-campus activities?

DS: I have been very involved. Sometimes, I don't even know how I got through things. In freshman year, I lived in Howell Hall, so I always say go live in the residence hall. It is close quarters, but you really do have friends for life. As soon as the fall ended, I got elected to the position of public relations for American Society for Civil Engineers student chapter here. That was really my first thing. I also became an Emerging Leader during my freshman year, and we were the inaugural class. We basically started it, but we helped get the foundation going for those who are in it now. In sophomore year, I did ASCE (American Society for Civil Engineers), and then on top of that, I did a lot more. I don't know how I did it. I also tried to run for SGA [Student Government Association], but, funny enough, I never won. I would always be there to help the [SGA] at large, so everyone always thought I was on SGA. Sophomore year is also when I started Drama Club, because they didn't have one here. I was also an RA [Resident Assistant] on top of all that.

KH: I know you worked quite a bit with Student Media. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

DS: Yes. I actually didn't get involved with *The Sting* (which is the campus newspaper here) until my junior year, and that was after I had gotten help. I had a really rough end of sophomore/junior year, so that helped me to express myself but still be able to get through the class work, which was great. I actually had previous experience with the media when I was appointed to be the Student At Large for the Student Life committee, which helps with looking over all the budgets for the campus. We initially had looked at WGHR [SPSU college radio station], because they were doing great, but *The Sting* was in a rut. We basically had to help *The Sting* get back on their feet. That was my first thing with them. Then I started working with Vicki Nix (the past Editor-in-Chief) and put several articles in, and when Randy [Randy Brown Jr., current Editor-in-Chief for *The Sting*] came around, I helped a lot with the go-between when the merger was going on. I would always relay the important information that needed to be told, through Randy, so I would never be mentioned in the media. That's more of what my role was with the media this past year. I will say that I think I did have a part as far as where *The Sting* is now, because it felt like they were about to close up, but I'm glad they are where they're at today. It's always good to see.

KH: This is out of my own curiosity, but what did you do with Green Hornet Radio?

DS: With Green Hornet Radio, we were just making sure they were providing the best experience for student life. Because they had lost their airwaves when Q100 came in, their media outreach is somewhat difficult since they only have an online basis. Another interesting part is where they have their studio; they own that completely. When they [the school] redid the student center in the 80s, they actually bought out that space. There's a lot of head butting when they have to do work because the student center doesn't own space. I guess you could say the state doesn't own that space. More of it is just making sure that they have the funds needed to be successful.

KH: I found a list of a lot of things you were involved in through your blog.

DS: [laughter] Yes. I've done so much that I forget a lot. There were also a lot of different staff searches. I was on the thing that helped to hire Chris Bruno (Director of Housing and Life). I sometimes scare myself because I feel like I'm in these positions that make me feel powerful, and I don't want to be them because then you just become pompous and that isn't me.

KH: What is the difference between the Bathtub Racing Association and the ASCE Concrete Canoe Team?

DS: That is something that I forgot. I was the past president of [the Bathtub Racing Association] as of last year. The bathtub races started in 1966 and it was just fraternities trying to get beer down the hill back then. A year or two afterwards (I think it was 1968), they said, "Let's race them around." Basically, that's what started these races. They were motorized bathtub chassis from the 1920-era turned into vehicles. They would go around the campus when it was more of a loop before they added in all the additions. When I was helping out with an environmental group with cleaning out Rottenwood Creek on the south end of campus, we found all the tires and oil cans they would throw back there when they were done with the races. It was interesting because there are some stories that I had heard from alumni where they would go so fast that they would hit and fly out. It was somewhat dangerous. I'm happy to say that I was able to get a great connection with C. W. Matthews [Contracting Company—contractor for major Georgia highway and road constructions] and was trying to bring back more of the educational part of it because everything seemed to be more from a mechanical basis. My main concern was, as a civil engineer, the safety of it, and I was able to get a lot of road construction. This year, they really haven't moved forward [with the races] because the people inside the [Bathtub Racing Association] have put it off, which I guess is a good idea since the merger is going on. Hopefully, when I'm an alumnus, I can bring it back, because it does still fit with the mission. They were so much fun. [laughter]. [Concrete Canoe is a competition within the ASCE regional conferences. Students have to make a canoe out of concrete and be the first successfully to navigate it to finish line at competition.]

KH: I can tell you that Kennesaw [State University] doesn't have anything like that.

DS: Well that's the thing. When Jimmy Carter was governor, he came to the bathtub races. I think there are some pictures of him sitting in the bathtubs, just hanging out. I don't know where they are; I think they are in the Archives [SPSU Library Archives] somewhere.

KH: When did you first hear about the consolidation?

DS: It was weird. My uncle has an internal medicine practice with two locations, and I was at the Woodstock location. I'm working and scanning in medical files for the patients that come in (because it's all electronic now), and all of a sudden, I hear the head nurse and the others ask, "Did you hear the news?" and I replied, "What?" They told me, "They're merging Southern Poly with Kennesaw." All of a sudden, my phone started blowing up with people asking if I knew any details (because every time something big happens, everyone calls me, and it can be hard to get work done). As I was telling Shelley [C.] Nickel downtown [former associate vice chancellor for Planning and Implementation], it seemed to be the same as a grieving process. At first, there was shock. Then everyone

was in denial. That same day [as the initial announcement], I had written a letter and posted it on Facebook saying, “Whatever happens, happens and I think that we should all work together.” That night, we were all meeting at the Globe outside of A [Building A: Joe Mack Wilson Student Center], and I had suggested to Austin Clayton, who was the SGA president at the time, to create an ad hoc committee just for this. I was on that, and that’s also where I think a schism started to happen as far as those who felt passionate about it. Sometimes their words were a little bit harsh. I do apologize for those people who may have been frustrated. This campus really brought them more out of their shell, and I can understand where they are coming from. Basically there were two groups trying to run things, trying to communicate, and that’s always a thing with engineering: trying to make sure you communicate everything effectively and with due diligence to make sure no one gets angry (unfortunately, the media just loves to get ratings). It was me, Randy (from *The Sting*), Austin Clayton, and Eric Cooney, and we met a couple of times.

I also got on the phone with my brother, who has somewhat more insight on the political sides of things, and I have some good friends who worked with a couple of influential people downtown. We were initially thinking about doing an injunction (filing a lawsuit against everything), but after talking with my brother, I suggested that it probably wouldn’t be the best idea since we didn’t want to anger the Board of Regents, even though they’re the decision makers. It’s not really them who put it to themselves to recommend; it’s the chancellor [Henry M. (Hank) Huckaby]. Looking back at some things, it’s funny how the governor wanted to not fund as much education as has been done previously. Speaking of the chancellor, when I met with him in December, it was more of a hard decision on his behalf. I went downtown to the Board of Regents office several times and spoke with different people. It was a pretty interesting time. After speaking with the chancellor and understanding where they come from, I was able to report back the students on campus. I think that made everyone more at ease. I never know if I should take the responsibility and say that I helped or I did something, but coming back and telling everyone what I had gotten from the meetings probably eased some of the tension. I think we’re in a better place now.

KH: I have noticed that you eased both sides in the merger through social media. On your Facebook, you had a SPSU/KSU traditions document and you would have people from both schools submit certain traditions from their respective schools.

DS: Yes. I represented the Southern Poly students, and then there was Josh Pate who represented the Kennesaw side. Unfortunately, he was under extenuating circumstances, so I was helping out more [on the Kennesaw side] for him because there are a lot of you guys. I feel like it’s important to get equal sides because I’m a person that doesn’t care for bias. If you have a story to tell me, I want to know the facts. I am not going to take it and throw it another way. It was cool to go down there [to Kennesaw] and meet with Eric Johnson, who is the new SGA president (and who I think is a great choice to have), and my friend’s brother, who is now the Secretary (Matthew Prater). It was really interesting to see how it was done over there. Plus, I think going over there and helping out helps to better see their insight, and that way you can put the two together. I believe there is always a middle ground. You just have to know how to say what to say to get where you need to be.

KH: Are there any traditions that really stuck out?

DS: For SPSU, there is Goat Night, and I'm now the Vice President of the Interfraternity Council for Community Relations, so my big job will be that. [Goat Night] started because when we used to be a part of Georgia Tech, there was little camaraderie with the faculty and staff, and it was created to create a better relationship, and they called it Goat Day. It was a whole day of field activities. Eventually, it moved into Goat Night. That's something I think can be implemented into Kennesaw, because I don't believe they have anything in the fall for Greeks. The bathtubs [races] are something that's big over here. That's big, but it needs to come back. It would bring a lot of alumni and better alumni support.

KH: Oh yes.

DS: They also have Geek Week here. There was a lot of due diligence looking into that in the committee I was on, especially the seals and things like that. I hope they can fix the seal to reflect both, because I do believe, if it wasn't for President [Blake R.] Van Leer [president of Georgia Tech, 1944-56], none of this in Cobb County would be reality.

KH: Have you done any other, I guess, merge projects similar to this?

DS: I was on the Community Engagement Working Group. I wasn't on the inside; I was more on the outside. I was able to help submit stuff for them as well. I was more of the person who was able to go downtown and meet with different officials and talk to Austin Clayton and help provide some insight (as far as politics goes). One of my friends that I grew up with had a father who was the former Secretary of State (and he's now a lobbyist), so I got some insight from him. Unfortunately, he couldn't really help because it would be a conflict of interest, but he did provide some general (but non-conflict of interest) advice (that's probably the best way to put it because there was nothing illegal there) to help me as far as to see what was best. I feel that was always important. I'm not sure I answered that question.

KH: I think you did. I'm winding down here, and then we can switch over to Dr. Scott with any questions he has for you. What advice would you give future SPSU/KSU students?

DS: I will say that there is SGA (Student Government Association). I ran for SGA twice and never won. That doesn't mean you can't do anything to help those people in those positions. To be honest, a lot of leadership positions that have that kind of bling (that's a really weird word to say) just have that title. Sometimes, you are tied up in the politics of things, so it's always important that you can reach out to these people to help facilitate their agendas because: A) it can always get things accomplished, and B) it doesn't hurt their integrity, even though it's for the better to go forward, (which the short side is sometimes the bad side). Don't be afraid to ask questions. People would say, "Oh you're never going to be able to meet with the chancellor," and I said, "I'm going to meet with the chancellor." So, I went both days down to the Board of Regents meeting [on November 12-13, 2013] (because they had it over two days). Regent [William H.] NeSmith Jr. [chair of the Board of Regents] (whom I greatly appreciate) literally pulled Chancellor [Hank] Huckaby over to me, so I was able to initially talk with him and that's

when I was able to set that meeting up. Just don't be afraid to talk to these big people. They're just like us. Sometimes, they like to talk to us. [laughter]

KH: Dr. Scott, did you have any questions?

TS: I do, if you don't mind. First of all, is it Randy Brown?

DS: Randy Brown, Jr. is his full name.

TS: Is he the one who did the commencement speech?

DS: Yes, he did.

TS: And he was involved with the communications when you were talking about *The Sting*?

DS: Yes, he and I worked very closely together. What was great about it was that he was Editor-in-Chief and he knew it was important not to show any of his personal opinions. Basically, I fed him everything that came from [both sides of the merger] (sometimes the opinions of both sides), sometimes there were facts, so he would lay those out. That's what helped me get some stuff straight out to different parties involved.

TS: To read the campus newspaper?

DS: Well yes. We did a lot more with online because it's a monthly thing.

TS: Oh I see. The paper only comes out once a month?

DS: Yes, because of small population and we haven't gotten to the point where *The Sentinel* has (full ad-base). We don't have the money to do that, so a lot of stuff we did was through their Facebook and online (readthesting.com).

TS: Let me see if I can get the timeline straight. Now, November 1st: the announcement comes about noon. You're at your uncle's medical practice when all of a sudden, everybody starts calling you.

DS: Yes. [laughter]

TS: Now, who is everybody?

DS: People I lived on the hall with freshman year. My fraternity brothers. I probably got about twelve to twenty phone calls and text messages from different people (twelve contacts from text messages) about the issue. I did meet with one of the council members of SGA, and we started to talk about stuff too.

TS: Who was that?

DS: Her name is Danica Roberts.

TS: So you talked to her?

DS: Yes. She said, "We shouldn't have different campaigns going." That's what moved us.

TS: Students wanted to speak with one voice?

DS: Yes. When things happen on this campus, everyone has something to say. And sometimes it is very hard to do that because you have different voices coming from different directions, but no one knows which one is the most important, which one is the most correct, which one is the most valid, and which one is the most understood. That's what is difficult at times when you're trying to get an initiative done. There's a lot more leaders than followers on this campus. We all know leaders are just terrible followers at times. *[laughter]* I think you always have to think of the alpha/beta standpoint, because when some things are hard and you're in that position, sometimes you have to kick back and maybe let your VP do a few things just to get it out of his system.

TS: You immediately saw the benefits as well as the losses?

DS: Yes. I originally posted a letter I had written. I will usually, when I have something to say, write a letter and post it somewhere. If you are so against something and it's going to go through (because I had planned out four politically scientific standpoints, four different outcomes that could happen. Oddly enough, the fourth one, the one I least wanted, happened. During the meeting, the Chamber of Commerce had made a letter endorsing the merger, in which one of the Board of Regents members read to the public. I feel a lot of the business members in the Cobb Chamber of Commerce *[are not]* engineering firms. I do believe it was planted to help *[the merger]* get through. Obviously, that is more of my opinion there, and not a fact because I don't know. The first option was that it was okay and they would postpone it to think about it. The second option I had was that they would approve it with contingencies to change a few things. The third option was to coldly reject it. The fourth option was that there would be a letter planted in the meeting from one of the Regent's members to read, and that would sway everyone's votes to approve. In that case, everyone voted "Aye," and it was interesting to see.

TS: Now when you talk about the Cobb Chamber of Commerce, did you ever meet with them?

DS: I had spoken a lot with Kathleen Hall, a retired math professor emerita. She and I would talk a lot on the phone about stuff and she was at the Chamber. I never had the chance to get there. I didn't have much time because I had classes, but I did have the chance to speak for about an hour or two with the PE (Professional Engineer) on the Board of Regents, C. Dean Alford, and I spoke with Chairman NeSmith for about forty-five minutes because he had to do a few things in Athens at his company. For some reason, I was the only one who really had the opportunity to speak with them. Maybe it was because I am a board member for a non-profit downtown called New Atlanta Inc., which is trying to reduce the poverty cycle by enhancing economic development (which is a really good idea). For those meetings, somehow you just become so exhausted because your brain is always thinking about what's best, and it makes you tired. I feel bad that it was all in two days, not because you have to do work, but because at the end of the day, you just want to go to sleep. *[laughter]*

TS: When exactly did you have these conversations with the two regents?

DS: I had talked with them the Monday and Tuesday before the meetings took place.

TS: And this was eleven or twelve days after the announcement?

DS: Yes.

TS: So it was a couple of days before [the vote on consolidation] then?

DS: It was after I submitted the petition downtown.

TS: Where does the petition come from?

DS: Inside the policy of the Board of Regents, there is a certain amount of time you have to put something on the agenda. After it's mailed out, you have to send a petition downtown for them to add it in with the approval. From a political science standpoint, I think it was a brilliant idea to publicize it for November 1st, because you couldn't add anything to the agenda at that point because it had already been mailed out. I believe they did it on a Wednesday. It was on their board (a board on the wall). What you had to do was send a petition down to the Board of Regents office to the secretary of the board, who would then submit it to the chancellor, who would then approve of the petition. They would then send it to the Regents members.

TS: The petition is to have the chance to speak?

DS: Correct. I can bring it up on my phone really quick.

TS: And who sent the petition?

DS: I sent it. I typed it up and sent it down to the chancellor's email, which the secretary gets and then spreads it out to them.

TS: When you say you sent it, did you send it as an individual or as a representative of somebody?

DS: On behalf of the school (with Austin Clayton's permission).

TS: On behalf of the institution?

DS: Yes. It was interesting because there was another group who was also involved, but split off and doing a whole different thing, who sent one in too, and theirs got denied. I told them I was going to send it to them when I went downtown that one day. They told me theirs was denied, but mine was accepted, and that's how I knew that they were looking for mine.

TS: So the ones that were totally negative about [the merger], their petition gets rejected?

DS: Correct.

TS: And the more moderate faction got accepted?

DS: Yes.

TS: Did you sign the petition? Well, since it is a petition, I guess a lot of people signed it?

DS: It was more to request a petition. You have to send a letter of intent to petition.

TS: So you sent the letter?

DS: Right. After I sent and they approved it, they then called Austin (because he was aware I had sent it down there). I guess they were trying to make sure it was valid.

TS: So they checked with the SGA president?

DS: Right. They had suggested a letter to speak with them. Here it is. The subject line was "Petition to Appear at the Board of Regents," and I sent this on November 7th at about 9:30 that morning.

TS: This was about four or five days before?

DS: Right. It was right after Dr. Papp and Dr. Rossbacher had that session on campus. This is what I wrote: "Honorable Chancellor Huckaby: I would like to petition to appear in front of the Board of Regents. SGA elected affiliates of both Kennesaw State and Southern Polytechnic State would also be present at time of appearance. In meeting with the many hard working staff members at the system office, I can understand that the proposal of any consolidation is not easy, but I do not believe the consolidation of SPSU and KSU will provide the system with the best financial savings. The programs of both institutions may have similar beginnings but the ending learning outcomes are completely different. I have been taking additional time to speak with our district Regents and others, as well. If I was an appointed Regents member who was tasked with the difficult decision to decide where the USG should go next, I would simply vote "no" at the meeting because there are other institutions that should also be looked at again that would provide a much better merge with Kennesaw State University. In conclusion, Honorable Chancellor Huckaby, this letter is to petition to make appearance to speak at the board meeting, November 12th and 13th. Additionally, I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you one on one prior to the meeting to see where you want to see the system heading in the future. Respectfully," and I signed my name here. Then, they responded back (and this is odd, because when I do these things, they usually take a day or two) to me in less than two hours. That's something I don't usually see. I understand that government is trying to do its best, but you don't usually see a petition response come back to you within two hours or so. I thought that was pretty awesome.

TS: What did they say in response?

DS: I am trying to pull that up right now.

TS: Had you already talked to staff people at the Regents before you sent the petition?

DS: Yes. I went down either Tuesday or Wednesday. I was at the USG [University System of Georgia offices] first, and then I also went over to Governor Deal's Constituent Services Office. They didn't really help much, but I understand it wasn't really their area.

TS: It was a Friday when the announcement came?

DS: Yes, it was literally that next week.

TS: So, it was the next Tuesday when you went down to the Regents?

DS: I have everything documented, so I will be able to provide much better detail for you.

TS: Do you remember who you spoke to when you went down there?

DS: I think I first went to the administrative assistant to Dr. [John E.] Brown, who is the Financial [Fiscal Affairs] Vice Chancellor, because I was trying to figure out about the bonds and if that had to do anything with the merger. That's where I got a better understanding. From there, I went to Legal Services inside the USG office, and they gave me a better understanding of how to submit a petition.

TS: Legal Services told you how to petition?

DS: Right, because I think you have to do it legally at least because you have to back yourself up (due to the policies they have written down). From there, I met with the chancellor's secretary, and she had told me she would look for the email as soon as I sent the petition to her. When I sent it to her, she was able to pull it up quickly and send it off to the chancellor.

TS: I don't understand about the bonds. What was that all about?

DS: I know a lot of projects they have done on campus, they do payment bonds.

TS: Sure. All of our building projects.

DS: Correct, but my thinking was "maybe they should pay them off for something." I will say I'm not very knowledgeable in that subject, so I wanted to know if that could be something, instead of merging, that if you could pay these bonds off, that would just fix things. Obviously, it's more complicated than that. *[laughter]*.

TS: So the response comes from the chancellor?

DS: It comes from Burns Newsome, [Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs and] Secretary of the Board.

TS: Burns Newsome?

DS: Yes. He wrote, "Dear Mr. Silver, thank you for your inquiry for the opportunity to address the Board of Regents at its meeting on November 12th. Chairman NeSmith has asked our office to add some time to the board agenda to accommodate a request made by students to address the Board. The Board Office of Student Affairs will be working with the University's Student Government Association, which will determine which students will speak on which matter and for how long. I therefore will respectfully request that [you] direct your inquiry to Mr. Austin Clayton, President of the SPSU SGA to arrange you and your groups' views to appropriately present it. The SPSU Student Government website may be found here. Thank you for your interests in these matters and for your support of this exciting consolidation of these great universities."

TS: “Thank you for your support of the consolidation?” You said the opposite.

DS: Right, which I believe was just a form of “we really want it to happen,” which I couldn’t really say much for that. I understand what position he’s in. so I responded back, “Dear all, thank you for the prompt response. I have been working very closely with SGA President Clayton and his Vice President Valencia, which is why I met with some of you on Wednesday and sent this email today. They have been added to the carbon copy section of this email. Once again, thanks again for your prompt response. Respectfully,” and I signed. They sent it to me back at 12:54. I sent the email at 9:59, and I get a response back at 12:54.

TS: Pretty good.

DS: It was also CCed to John Millsaps, III [Associate Vice Chancellor of Media and Publications], Steve Wrigley [Executive Vice Chancellor of Administration], and Sabrina Thompson [Executive Assistant to the Chancellor]. From there, I checked with Austin, and he pretty much approved. Even though they said to talk to Austin, I had talked to Mr. NeSmith before and he had pretty much approved, because he had requested that.

TS: The chair of the Board of Regents?

DS: Yes, at that time.

TS: Who was the Vice President of the Student Government Association?

DS: It was Andy Valencia. He and I were RA’s (Resident Assistants) together for a year or two, and if you’re familiar with the personalities, we were both the blue. So we were both the touchy, feely kind of personalities, and we were the only ones on the RA thing like that. He was trying to do as much as he could, which he was awesome because he was also in an internship at the time. I will say the odd thing was, with all this going on, the year before when Kevin White was the SGA President, they had talked about this, too. He had said, “We don’t want this,” and it went away. I always wondered if there was something under the bush that just came up again about this, because they were thinking about it that year prior.

TS: Okay, but you didn’t actually speak to the Board of Regents, right?

DS: Chairman NeSmith asked if I was going to, because he said my writing was really good. I told him that I really did not want to just because my speaking ability is not as good as my writing. It’s compensation. I got the inspiration from Thomas Jefferson, because he couldn’t speak, so he just wrote letters. So, I told him that Austin, Trent Anderson, and possibly two other people would speak. I told him my job was more behind-the-scenes, because I want to make sure everything goes smooth.

TS: Trent Anderson and Austin Clayton were the two that spoke?

DS: And Eric Cooney was the third speaker. He was a communications major, but he was also a part of that other group that was a little bit more negative, from my standpoint, but we felt that that would help bridge that gap somewhat better.

- TS: Did you have anything to do with what they said when they got there?
- DS: I briefed them a little bit about when I went down there. I told them what things to probably look out for, points to bring up. While I was there, I had asked Ms. Nickel about if they looked at merging us back with Tech, and she said no. I just thought that was interesting. I remember reading in that history book that Dr. [Richard] Bennett had written [*Southern Polytechnic State University: A History*] that the [Board of] Regents has always had a history to try to put Southern Poly back with Tech or get rid of it because they didn't see a need for it. It's interesting how we've always been kind of a thorn in the neck.
- TS: Did they give you an explanation of why they chose Kennesaw?
- DS: The official statement that she kept saying to me was, "We felt like it was the best match." That they just work perfectly. They had told me that a lot of people transfer from Southern Poly to Kennesaw, but being a student here, I hear a lot of them say they transfer because there are not many girls here. If I think long-term about that, they are looking for a mate for the future. A lot of times, people meet their significant other in college. They just wanted more girls around them. That's the best way to put it.
[laughter]
- TS: Well, you've got Georgia Highlands on campus.
- DS: That's the interesting thing. Georgia Highlands is a great feeder school. Sometimes, I felt there were a few issues with residents.
- TS: So, the students went down and they made their speeches. They did a fabulous job, from what I understand.
- DS: When I went back the next day, I was in the elevator with some of the staff. They were still talking about how awesome they were speaking. I couldn't help but say, "Yeah." They're still upset about it because she didn't realize I was from the school. Apparently, it must have had some resonance in the people in the office because they were talking about it the next day.
- TS: What was your reaction when the board actually voted?
- DS: Throughout the meeting, it was going pretty well. I believe it was arranged the way it was to make the political motive go through, which is understandable. We went first, and then Dr. Nickel went after. There were a lot of good questions asked by the board, and finally, a regent member brought up the letter from the [Chamber of] Commerce member and read it. I thought, "Crap," because that was the last option I was hoping would never come up, but it did. There were a lot of reservations, and I brought up a lot of good points to Regent NeSmith, but as soon as that letter came through, everyone voted yes. I was upset and a little angry, even though I worked hard in going downtown and I knew that either way, there may be disappointment. I prepared myself pretty well, as far as what to expect, but I was also looking forward and hoping it wouldn't go through. I will say that Southern Poly saved my life because I was so involved that I actually had to check myself into Ridgeview Institute. I was in there for about a week and a half for stress

management. Randy put in his commencement speech, “You’re going to fail,” and I was lucky enough to actually fail personally in the middle of my college experience. I look at things now a little bit brighter because I’m always so hard on myself. Through everything here, I don’t regret anything that we did. I think if we didn’t speak up, there would have been things that happen later that weren’t really looked at. I really don’t think the traditions history would have even been there, had it not been for us going downtown to speak to them.

TS: Did you actually meet with the chancellor?

DS: I did. After the second day, I was able to get in touch with him for a little bit. At first, he was a little bit defensive, and I understand. He probably thought I was the student that really didn’t want it, but I had said I had some economic ideas that could help work for the Regents (and I did). My other main reason was to meet with him about the merger. He had sent me an email for the 5th of December.

TS: The 5th of December?

DS: Right, because I had said “whenever you are available,” because I know he is a busy man. This was the second day of the Board of Regents meeting, after everything was approved, and Dr. NeSmith was able to pull him out of another meeting with someone else to speak with me real quick (Regent NeSmith had promised me a chance to speak with him). Then, the Chancellor emailed me about a week or two later and we set up a meeting for the 5th of December.

TS: So it’s a done deal by that time?

DS: Right. What’s interesting is that my grandfather was also in the medical profession like my uncle. The practice has been around for over sixty years. He was a very influential lobbyist for the Medical Association of Georgia as a physician. So, a lot of these people in office knew my grandfather. They always say he was a great man, and I believe it because that’s who I look up to, even though he is no longer with us because of Alzheimer’s. Sometimes I wish I could just ask him some questions. I had mentioned his name, and the chancellor (who had been in office for a while) knew of my grandfather. So I believe that helped me meet with the chancellor. I will say that the meeting was pretty productive. (After the meeting, we had photos and I had given a copy to Chancellor Huckaby, Executive Vice Chancellor [Houston] Davis, and Assistant Vice Chancellor Nickel, so there’s a great picture of her talking in the meeting. Dr. Davis asked for an autograph and Dr. Nickel and I thought it was hilarious.) From there, we were talking a lot about where they want to see it go, and I also asked if there were possibly any others in the future; he responded that there may be. I think going forward is more of a long-term thing, but I felt more comfortable leaving there, and thought that everything would be all right. They asked me to definitely get in touch with Austin to get into one of those working groups.

TS: Earlier on, you mentioned President Van Leer. He was the President at Tech at the time when Southern Tech was created. Your point was that he brought the institution into being?

DS: Right, because in one little chapter that Dr. Bennett wrote (in his history book of the school), he said that Van Leer had fought when they were seriously about to close up the school when it was at DeKalb.

TS: Back in the 1950s?

DS: Right. He fought so hard to keep it because he still saw a need for a school like that. Then, it came over to Southern Poly. That's the reason I see there is a Southern Poly, why there is a Kennesaw State, why there are schools outside the Atlanta area and the other areas in South Georgia. I also think he was the first one of our chancellors from the North Georgia area. I do believe there were a lot of political exchanges. In our seal, there are the rivets of Georgia Tech's [seal]. I do hope that could be put into the Kennesaw State [seal], because I do believe we do owe Tech a thank you. Even though we're now separated and the missions are different, Tech helped to bring the schools out here. I don't think they really appreciate now that there are different engineering areas in the state, but it is what it is.

TS: Have you met with Dan Papp at all?

DS: I want to. I really do want to meet with him. I know with Dr. Rossbacher, you could meet with her and talk to her, but I don't know how he is with that.

TS: He's the same.

DS: I would like to see him because I have a lot of cool ideas that I think would help the school that would be beneficial, but I always have the fear of an idea going awry just because of where you're throwing it in the political realm.

TS: That's about all I had to ask.

KH: That's about all I had as well. Thank you for meeting with us today and doing this interview.

DS: It's been a pleasure of mine. I always think it's important to reflect on what you've done, not take it in vain. At least tell people things that happened in the past. Whenever I look for an issue, I always research them very intently, like I did for Goat Night and have done for the history of this school. If you don't know your past, and you don't know where you're going, you can keep things from going the way they should be. I do appreciate you meeting with me, so thank you.

KH: Thank you for giving us a student's perspective as well.

DS: It's an honor of mine and I do appreciate it. Thank you.

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