

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH HOUSTON D. DAVIS

CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

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TS: Dr. Davis, if we could begin with your background, I know you came from Clarksville, Tennessee, Wilma Rudolph country. I guess not everyone knows who Wilma Rudolph was. She was an Olympic champion in 1960 in the 100 meters and several other events.

HD: She was a Clarksville hero. That's for sure.

TS: A Clarksville hero who went to Tennessee State where you got your master's. Your education was in Tennessee at the University of Memphis for your bachelor's degree in 1995, your master's from Tennessee State in 1997, and your doctorate from Vanderbilt in 2001 in education and . . .

HD: Education and human development.

TS: All that's public record, of course, but why don't you talk about your educational background, some mentors along the way, and what attracted you to education administration.

HD: Well, it would probably be important to start that having grown up with a mother who was an educator, it was impossible not to say that that shaped my interest in the role of schools and universities and making people's lives better. You are exactly right that I grew up in Clarksville, Tennessee, and all my education was at Tennessee institutions. But in particular I like to say that my years at what was then Memphis State University, now the University of Memphis, probably shaped more of who I am as a professional in establishing the goals I had to not only be able to work in higher education but also to shape what my research interests were going to be to allow me that foundation to begin my career in higher education. That doesn't mean that I came out of a bachelor's degree program ready to do what I do today.

TS: I noticed that you have a political science degree.

HD: I do! I do. That actually led to some of the work I did. The very first job I did out of college was running an office in Nashville, Tennessee, which is the seat of government for the State of Tennessee. I was doing recruitment work for students as well as alumni coordination for the University of Memphis [as Student Relations Counselor, 1995-1997]. But I was taking advantage of an internship there with Governor Don Sundquist's administration in which I had an opportunity as I was beginning my graduate studies to learn about the bridge between public policy and education. That was what introduced me to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission [as Research Associate, 1997-2001]. My second professional role was on their staff as a research and policy analyst for a period of time. So yes that poly sci/public administration background certainly sparked

my interest in where does that bridge among economic development, education, and public policy come together.

TS: So was your focus more on research? You don't seem to have done an abundance of teaching over the years.

HD: Well, a lot of that is a function of finding myself working in governance situations. I never intended after I finished my PhD program to do anything but go teach. I had just started managing the National Educational Needs Index Project. I was fortunate coming right out of a doctoral program to have funded research for five years. I took that Educational Needs Index Project to Austin Peay State University [as Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Assistant Professor, 2001-2005], where they hired me to be on the faculty and play a role helping them with assessment and accreditation work. I was glad to have that first opportunity and fully assumed that I would be there for ten to twenty years. One of the things that they hired me to do was to establish the leadership minor and coordinate all of the course work that is part of their emerging leaders program. That was part of my prime responsibilities. But things happened. I was borrowed again to go back down to Nashville. The Tennessee Board of Regents borrowed me to work on a couple of special projects during a couple of legislative sessions.

TS: And the Tennessee Board of Regents is all the university, colleges, and technical schools other than the University of Tennessee System.

HD: That's correct. Up until this last year they had three boards: Tennessee Board of Regents, the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees, and then there is a coordinating board over all of that, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, an entity that Georgia does not have. We've never had a coordinating board structure because we only have one university board. That's a difference between states.

TS: Maybe you could speak about the plusses and minuses of the different systems. I've always thought that we have a great system in Georgia with just one board. Particularly when we were a junior college and just beginning to be a four-year school, I thought it was nice to be in the same system with the University of Georgia and Georgia Tech and what have you.

HD: I think that it is. I think that Georgia is considered to have one of the strongest governing systems and structures in the country. You're exactly right. Having one board simplifies things. Probably the most important two elements to have in a strong governing structure in Georgia are, first, that the legislature appropriates the money to the Board of Regents in lump sum. That is a very different situation than in most states. In Tennessee you get your money according to whatever your legislative interests work into the appropriations bill.

TS: That is one of the advantages of our system in Georgia is that you cut down on the competition among different schools.

- HD: I won't say that it eliminates it entirely. There's no way to remove "politics"—capital "P" or lowercase "p"—altogether. But yes it allows higher education in Georgia to take that lump sum state appropriation and determine, "how can it best be used?"
- TS: So in Tennessee Austin Peay would be competing against Middle Tennessee State University and what have you?
- HD: And when they do that it matters not what the governing structure thinks in terms of how much money they need. If Austin Peay is more successful through the legislative process to get its line item in the appropriations bill as high as possible, then that's what can happen.
- TS: Which system do you prefer? You've been under the Tennessee system, the Oklahoma system, and the Georgia system.
- HD: The Oklahoma system is almost a hybrid between Tennessee and Georgia. It has a strong state [board of] regents, but it still has management boards for the institutions that bring a little more of a local focus to "what is it the institution needs." Oklahoma probably has the best in terms of trying to find a nice balance between autonomy of the campuses and accountability to the state.
- TS: So if we had that system in Georgia, Kennesaw State would have its own management board?
- HD: Well, if you were to apply the Oklahoma model to Georgia, yes, Kennesaw might have its own governing board. Or the Oklahoma model is maybe Georgia Southern, Kennesaw State, the University of West Georgia, and Valdosta State would have a regional comprehensive board. That's the way things are structured in Oklahoma. But I remember a former senator in Tennessee once told me that, "Governance changes are like rearranging chairs on the deck of the Titanic." He didn't think that it really matters that much. But we are borne out of our own history and our culture, and Georgia's model is Georgia's model. You make the best you can out of that.
- TS: So you went to the Tennessee Board of Regents as Associate Vice Chancellor for two years, and then went to Oklahoma for four years as Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. When you came to Georgia in 2012 the position was as Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer. On the surface that sounds like a parallel move instead of a move up based on the title, but I guess there was a reason why you wanted to come to Georgia. Why don't you talk about what brought you to Georgia?
- HD: Sure. The scope of the work here; the fact that we are a system that's got two major national, and with Georgia Tech, an international research university, and UGA [University of Georgia] is certainly getting there; the idea of being able to work with a system that had those institutions, and the research end all the way through state colleges; the opportunity to have a little more contact with the campuses day to day. That is one thing that absolutely is very much true in Georgia that by having one governing board you've got a lot more contact with the campuses day to day than you are afforded in Oklahoma and Tennessee. So I had some great desire to be more engaged with the campuses, and I fulfilled that. I think moving to a system that has 318,000 students,

roughly 41,000 faculty and staff, moving to a system that had the ability to partner with the states of Texas and New York and California in a number of initiatives—that certainly was attractive as well.

But there were just some personal interests—being able to get back to the Southeast; my folks are in Tennessee; Jenny’s folks are in Mississippi and northern Louisiana—so the opportunity to be back a little bit closer to where the family reunions are . . .

TS: I understand. You came to Georgia right at the time that we were doing a lot of consolidations. I did an interview with Ed [Edwin A.] Rugg last year where he was saying that he thought that the system in Georgia made it possible for us to do more consolidations than other places with one Board of Regents over the whole system.

HD: And with the constitutional authority to do it. Ed may have shared this. By the way, I’m glad you got to talk to Ed. Ed has done an amazing job for the State of Georgia in consolidation activities. Most states to do that have to do it through statute. That means that that idea has to work its way through House and Senate education committees and has to work its way through the legislative process. There are only a handful of states where the governing boards have the authority to do that on their own. As other states have looked to Georgia to understand what we have done in consolidations, what’s been achieved, the mechanics of that, when they get to the point where they realize that we were able to do that within our current governance structure, and they think about what they would have to do in their state, they usually throw up their hands, and they say, “We couldn’t possibly do this then.” The structure, the coordination and control, the elements that Ed mentioned are exactly right.

TS: It was May 2012 when you got to Georgia. Actually, I saw the announcement of it several months before that. The consolidations have got to be at least one of the biggest things that has happened with the Board of Regents in the last four or five years, I would think. It really starts in 2011 when Chancellor [Henry M. “Hank”] Huckaby starts presenting his plan. The first four consolidation announcements had been made before you were officially on the job.

HD: Before I came, yes.

TS: But there have been seven altogether. Let me ask you, how much involved were you in your job at the regents with the consolidations, not only in implementing them but with planning for them?

HD: I was involved very much in the planning for, the study, the consideration of the pros and cons. That was something that the senior staff level was very much involved with. Of course, the regents had to initiate that. They were the ones who had to be willing to take on that question and do it, but once they charged us to put pencil to paper and to consider an option, I was very much involved in that aspect of it. The heavy lift though is once you decide to set that into motion. At the system level and with the campuses—and you guys experienced that here alongside us—KSU and Southern Poly had Operational Working Groups (OWGs), and those Operational Working Groups were mirrored by a team at the system level that was also responsible for those functional areas. You almost

are in parallel. My responsibilities and my executive team—I don't want to represent that I did all the work; they've got a lot of really good people that deserve a lot more credit than I.

But working through faculty issues, working through student system issues, working through the regulatory framework that allows two institutions to become one in the U.S. Department of Education's eyes for financial aid and all other purposes—all those things that were wrapped around the teaching, the instruction, the delivery, and the support infrastructure; to do that—if it touched students, faculty, anything in the classroom or anything in the support infrastructure, we were very much involved and continue to be. Of course, you mentioned seven [consolidations]. As I pivot back toward my former role at the system office for another six weeks or so before I go to Arkansas, we're working with Albany State University and Darton State College. They're the seventh. I'm going back there actually this week to begin my duties for December and January to see where we are and what are the loose threads that are left as those institutions work to be considered by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools here in about a month.

TS: If I could ask about the planning part of what you did, the decision had already been made on the first four and had been announced before you arrived on the scene. Three more took place while you were there. To me, this is about the most secret thing that had ever happened in state government, I guess, the fact that so few people knew about it. The consolidation of Kennesaw and Southern Poly is what I know the most about. It was a total shock to everybody on campus. So, I guess, my question is, who did know ahead of time? Just take our consolidation of Kennesaw and Southern Poly. Who would the chancellor have consulted with? I know from Dan Papp and Ken Harmon that they thought something may be up because of the questions that we were being asked to answer by the Board of Regents. But Dan swears up and down that he didn't know anything until the day before the public announcement. I want to ask you about that too.

HD: Well, I'm not going to speak to what he may feel or do. It is correct that those decisions were held very close to the vest. Quite frankly, as executive vice chancellor or chief academic officer, I don't think that I was in the know as much as you might think. In the end that is a function of the conversations between the chancellor and the board executive committee. So, yes, Dan absolutely is telling the truth. Here is what is always true, though. In I think all seven consolidations your mention of thinking something was up, especially in hindsight, I guarantee you that people immediately said that, "Oh, that's why two months ago we got those questions about X." Or, "that's why four months ago, when so and so from the board system was on the campus they were asking a question about something that they discovered." Once you start piecing it together in hindsight, "Oh, I should have seen those signs."

TS: That's basically what I've heard. Dan would say, "Well, I thought something had to be up if they were asking about parallel programs between Kennesaw and Southern Poly. What programs do you have in common?"

HD: Well, that's been stated publicly. Both institutions' forecasted academic plans had some similar programs on them that they were wanting to pursue and compete against one

another. That absolutely was one of the signs that the two institutions were starting, whether they knew it or not, to come together in terms of their missions.

TS: So you are saying that the chancellor meets with the executive committee of the Board of Regents—the chairman of the board and . . .

HD: Chair and vice chair and other committee chairs.

TS: Who else would have been involved in those decisions? What about state legislators?

HD: When it was appropriate for them to know.

TS: Did anybody ask Earl Ehrhart [representative from Cobb County, member of the House Appropriations Committee, and chair of the Appropriations Higher Education Subcommittee] for instance?

HD: I can't speak to that.

TS: So as far as you know, nobody . . . so this was really [close to the vest]. What about the governor?

HD: When it was appropriate to engage. I can guarantee you that the governor is not surprised in any state by decisions of that magnitude. There's a reason that things are kept pretty quiet up until the time that it's done. It's not talked about widely.

TS: So you're saying that the governor may be told, and eventually the presidents of the institutions were told, and legislators were eventually told, but they weren't involved in making the decision?

HD: Not to my knowledge.

TS: So the chancellor and the board executive committee [made the decision].

HD: Again, that is not unique, because a handful of other states have that, but the Board of Regents in Georgia has the authority to do this.

TS: And I assume that the chancellor knows that he was Governor Nathan Deal's choice to be chancellor, and that is something that maybe they would have talked about in general terms before he became chancellor.

HD: Well, my understanding is that it had been talked about for thirty years. Actually, there are documents going back thirty years ago—that there were reports written that this was something that needed to happen. It's not like it is a new thing or a new idea here. I think that in 2011 the decision was made especially with the downturn in the economy and with the inability of the state to be able to get state funding for higher education back up quickly, being able to take some steps to identify a couple of campuses and say, "You've got some very real needs for faculty positions and for advisors. You've got real budget needs. If we can take two administrations and go to one—you go from two presidents, two sets of VPs, two sets of high-level directors of key functions and go to one, you can pretty quickly find three, three and a half, four, and in bigger campuses

north of five million dollars' worth of salary savings just from those administrators. Take that money and put that to your highest budget needs in terms of getting your faculty/student ratio down or starting new academic programs." That's been the other thing that as other states have come in and looked at what Georgia has done, they have just assumed that the move was made, and then state government benefited from it. It has not been about saving money for saving money's sake. It's been about saving an administrative dollar and putting that back over to the classroom side. Again, when they consider that—they being the other states, they're like, "We don't want to do that if we don't get the money back." But the money has stayed on the campuses to free up administrative dollars for a higher purpose.

TS: The last interview I did with President Papp was last January, and he insisted that we call it redirected funds.

HD: That's right!

TS: But he was saying that he thought it was going to be about five million dollars. Is that still true?

HD: That's probably about right. That was the charge that we gave to President Papp. One of the first steps that all the presidents of the consolidated institutions are given is, "You're going to have a new administrative structure. You're going to have a lot of savings from the administrative structure." The first exercise we want them to do is, "What do you think your new administration is going to look like? And what will the salary savings be?" That becomes the start of the redirected funds to be put toward other purposes.

TS: As I understand it, first of all you had the economy tanked in 2008. But also I think there was a long-range trend everywhere in the country maybe for state legislatures to cut back on how much they were putting into higher education. So tuition became a much bigger part of the budget for colleges and universities, as opposed to state appropriations.

HD: Back about 2000 or 2001 the Rockefeller Institute [of Government], a policy group out of New York, put forth a report, and forty-nine of the fifty states were projected to have structural deficits in the next fifteen to twenty years of state funding. That was because they estimated that nine out of every ten new state tax dollars were going to go to three purposes. One was K-12 equalization programs. You had the situations where rural schools weren't being funded at the level they should and lawsuits popped up all over the country. There were about thirty states that went through that. The second were correction reforms, again borne out of court cases over minimal levels of conditions in state-run or state-supported prisons. Then the third thing was health care. The Rockefeller Institute wasn't alone in making that forecast. Just the rising costs of health care where, again, nine out of every ten new dollars were already spoken for. So even if you have a good year of tax collections, you are only operating with ten cents on the dollar in terms of discretion. So where are you going to put that? There are a lot of other things that state government has to attend to. At that point you start hearing back in the early 2000s higher education talked about as the balance wheel of state government. It was seen as easy back then to take state appropriations because the institutions could always make it up in tuition. That was a national model of thinking—sort of the

framework of thinking about things. That played out in Georgia, it played out in Oklahoma, and it played out in Tennessee. You look up fifteen years later, and what you've got is you have a lot of students that are priced out of a college education.

TS: I know that you have a strong concern about the cost of education.

HD: Huge! Huge. I would not have come to Georgia if Hank Huckabee had not seen eye to eye that one of the most pressing of issues was whether we were really providing access to lower income/middle income families for a higher education degree. I think that, again, something that attracted me about the Board of Regents in Georgia was this was a system whereby if the board wanted to maintain the state colleges and the state universities with an access-oriented mission, we could do that. If we wanted to make certain that we kept tuition at a level that was lower than that of the research universities and comprehensive universities in the name of access, we could do that. If we wanted to do some things as a system to better leverage technology, better leverage learning management system contracts, leverage things like GALILEO [GeorgiA LLibrary LEarning Online], leverage assets like faculty development centers and activities on one campus being spread to the other twenty-eight campuses, to really be able to stretch that dollar as far as we could, those are things that we do better than a lot of other states and a lot of other systems.

The reason I brought up all that is your mention of my concern for college costs. I certainly understand those decisions that were made from about 2001 or 2002 forward. I'm not faulting the states. But I don't think that we were as strategic as we could be during those years to say, "Yes, we might allow that price tag to go up at this institution. But for this set of institutions that are serving a very special need, that are serving students and families that don't have a lot of disposal income, let's make a different decision about what we are going to do about their escalator costs." I was not in a position to do that back in 2001, but by golly in Oklahoma and Georgia I have been able to. Something I'm very proud of is my record of, when I can, finding ways to save costs for students.

TS: By the way, I forgot to ask you what your dissertation was on.

HD: Oh, do you want to go to sleep? It was exploring governance reforms in multiple states, but particularly in looking at Kentucky.<sup>1</sup> They went through a major higher education reform that broke up the University of Kentucky system and its control of the community college network and set up a new board structure for all of their universities. Governor Paul [E.] Patton successfully led through [the Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997]. At the same time Tennessee was considering governance reform packages, and Governor Sundquist's administration was pursuing that but was not successful. So my dissertation was looking at models of reform and what really drives the adoption and implementation of major policy reforms. You've got historical and cultural variables in that, but you've also got variables like policy champions and the quality of ideas. Economic considerations—was there new money to be able to put to something like

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<sup>1</sup> Houston Daniel Davis, "A Political Model of Higher Education Governance and Policy Reform Adoption" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2001).

incentive grants to move toward something? Or was it done just purely with the muscle of a policy champion getting it done? With my public policy background that's where my passion is.

TS: You were a perfect choice for the Georgia system I think with that background with so many of the states of the South. Back to consolidation, I have a discrepancy in stories. Maybe you were in the meetings that you can straighten it out. Memories fade over time obviously. Lisa Rossbacher says she found out about ten days ahead of time when she got a call from the chancellor to come down to the board. He didn't tell her why. She goes down there. She says she gets there and they chit-chat for about a minute. I don't know whether you were in this meeting or not.

HD: No.

TS: She says they chatted for a minute, and then all of a sudden he comes out and says, "There's going to be a new round of consolidation, and it's going to be Southern Polytechnic and Kennesaw, and the name of the institution will be Kennesaw State, and Dan Papp is going to be the president."

HD: Okay.

TS: Really quickly. She says you've got my support and blah blah blah. She goes back to campus. Jim [James W.] Cooper [SPSU's vice president for university communication and currently KSU's assistant vice president for alumni relations and advancement communications] confirms that she goes back, and he can tell that she is upset. She won't tell him why. He asks her whether it was about consolidation, and she doesn't say yes or no, but he knew. This was ten days ahead of time, but she was going to a conference somewhere out of state, so they weren't going to make the announcement until she got back.

Then Dan Papp says that nobody told him anything until the last day of October, October 31, and the public announcement was November 1 [2013]. He's called down to the Board of Regents. Lisa Rossbacher is there. I asked him who else was in the meeting. He said he thought you were there, but he wasn't sure.

HD: Inaudible.

TS: You don't remember?

HD: I don't remember.

TS: Then you've answered my question. At any rate . . .

HD: Well, there can be meetings at the regents that are about a number of things that involve multiple presidents. That doesn't mean that the chancellor doesn't pull a president or two presidents aside into his office to have a conversation.

TS: Well, they're brought down there, meeting with the chancellor [according to President Papp], and maybe some other folks are there. And that's the first time Dan hears about it, he says. And he said he thought it was the first time Lisa had heard about it too, judging

by her reaction since it was upsetting to her. So it was a revelation to him that Lisa Rossbacher may have known about it a week or so before he did. So I've got two different stories, and they don't quite agree, and I just wondered if you could straighten it out.

HD: Well, I was not in any conversation that the chancellor had with Lisa or Dan about consolidation. That will tell you that that would have been the chancellor talking to Dan and talking to Lisa.

TS: Well, I'm going to stick with my story that she found out about it around ten days ahead of the public announcement.

HD: That could have been the prospect of. You mentioned Jim Cooper asking was it about that. Again, in hindsight, more people knew than knew. That's not a very good Donald Rumsfeld. [Editor's note: the reference is to the former Secretary of Defense who once broke down U.S. intelligence about Iraq into known knowns, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns]. This has been true with all seven [consolidations]. We had the conversation earlier. Most people when it happened—they're like, "I knew that was going to happen." Then when you start asking them, "Well, how did you know?" It's just they picked up little markers. Sometimes it's the worst kept secret.

TS: But they didn't really know.

HD: Well, no, you know . . .

TS: I understand.

HD: Lisa can be right about, "I had a sense of it. I was given a heads-up that it was being considered. And then that it definitely was going to happen—those are two different things. Because I guarantee you it wasn't ten days. Once a decision has been made and then doing it and making that public announcement—that's always very quick because you can't keep that secret very long.

TS: Okay.

HD: So Lisa's story is probably right.

TS: No, it doesn't sound right because she said that meeting was when he told her bluntly that we were going to be consolidated, and she was out as president.

HD: Well, look, that's between the chancellor and Lisa.

TS: Yes. Oral histories are asking people to give what they know first-hand. I thought maybe if you were in the meetings you could give your version of what happened.

HD: I can say that I sure didn't know ten days before it was done.

TS: Her story was that [the ten-day lag] was because she was going to a conference out of state that they wanted to wait until she was back before they announced it. You don't think it happened that way? You would be doubtful that it happened that way?

HD: Look, in the end, I don't think it matters to tell the truth.

TS: No, but historians like to get their facts straight.

HD: I know this. I know that Lisa and I know that Dan are really special people that I think a lot of. So I wouldn't question either of them. That was a very stressful time period. That's a lot to ask of individuals to take on a project. You know as a historian you're dealing with the core identities of an institution when you're asking them to come together.

TS: Well, let me ask you one question that you may or may not want to answer. That is that one of the criticisms of the consolidation has been that nobody was consulted ahead of time. To me it is astounding that neither president was at least asked for their opinion on the consolidation before it took place.

HD: I can't speak to whether or not they were [consulted].

TS: If we assume that they weren't, do you think that was [a good idea]? What's your opinion on [whether they should have been consulted]?

HD: My opinion is if there had been too much talking about it, it wouldn't have gotten done.

TS: Okay.

HD: Just knowing human nature if there had been too much discussion of any of the seven [consolidations], especially in open forums, open public ways . . .

TS: So they couldn't have been consulted.

HD: Well, let me ask you this. Do you think that anybody would want to do it?

TS: No.

HD: See, there you go. That just answered the question. Unless you've got [a situation where] 50 percent would want to do it, and 50 percent would want not to do it . . .

TS: I think from our perspective on the Kennesaw campus, it's been fabulous to have the engineering school and the architecture school added to Kennesaw State University. So we might have been happy with it. But I know from the interviews I've done that nobody wanted it to happen on the Southern Poly campus.

HD: Well, there were plenty of reasons to bring the institutions together knowing what we knew about bottom lines, knowing that Southern Poly was looking at wanting to establish a lot of the same programs that KSU had. For survivability they knew that they needed to have those programs to be a healthy institution as they looked to the future. And then I would say that just look at this fall. The [Southern Polytechnic] College of Engineering [and Engineering Technology] was up about a third in terms of enrollment.

TS: A third?

HD: Yes, and [Department of] Construction Management was up over 40 percent in terms of majors. The growth that has occurred down there by flying the Kennesaw State flag, if you will, over those programs has been tremendous, and it has set up those departments. I will say this. I said it three years ago [when the consolidation was approved by the Board of Regents], the potential of what the new KSU could do then has been borne out after just three years. If we fast-forward a decade or so from now, this institution is on its way to being a truly comprehensive university. To me, I've described it during the time I've been here, the Southeast's next truly innovative, exciting comprehensive university—a university that I think will be a destination school where folks from out of state will want to come—and a lot of that is bringing what is already well known—the Coles College of Business and the Southern Polytechnic College of Engineering, which is well-respected as well—bringing those assets together where there are interdisciplinary possibilities—those are calling cards for the programs where you are going to get students from out of state that will be willing to pay the out-of-state tuition because what they see here is something that has got a lot of promise.

TS: We just merged those two programs didn't we?

HD: We did. It was a Master of Science in Engineering Management, the first program of its kind in the state and, more important, something that the Atlanta metro area has been calling for for years. There was never the positioning of programs together like this. I've joked it was peanut butter and chocolate coming together. Once you put Coles [College of Business] and what that can do with executive management business administration training together with the incredible faculty we've got at the Southern Poly College of Engineering, you can create a really distinctive program. It's showing how interdisciplinary work comes together with two colleges within our university. I think the same thing is going to happen with the online Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity [approved by the Board of Regents on February 14, 2017]. It's not one college that has that. That's not just computer science coding or information business intelligence. It's public policy. It's as much humanities/social sciences because you get to the geopolitical aspects of it. It's going to take four or five colleges of Kennesaw State University to be able to create the Institute for Cybersecurity Workforce Development. Again, that's a strength that we've got now that we've got this broad range of programs.

TS: Hank Huckaby now has only about a month left before he retires as chancellor. What do you think his legacy has been?

HD: Oh, goodness! Absolutely, the story of the consolidations; you are exactly right—that because it is so prominent and so public. But behind the scenes what he has done to just insist upon programs like last-dollar scholarships, needs-based financial aid, creating a culture on the campuses where the presidents are focuses on thinking about the impact of fees. Quietly over the last two cycles the number of new fee requests from the campuses has been cut by about two-thirds to almost the point where institutions know they don't need to bring forth any new fees. What they need to do is if they are needing that \$11.00 per student, they need to find some other place within the university where they can make a cut to create that source of funds. He has not made waves about that, not shot fireworks off to draw attention to it. Just very quietly that's been an expectation that he has had for the presidents during his time.

Supporting things like Affordable Learning Georgia, the initiative to really take GALILEO and harvest its potential. That's a system that for twenty years has really leveraged our ability to buy on contract; it has leveraged our ability to work not only with our twenty-nine universities but across K-12, across state government, across the health care sector to be able to share in resources. We've crossed state lines in terms of partnerships. What that initiative is doing to now provide avenues for faculty to consider the wealth of high-quality materials that are out there in the open-source world. It's not to replace textbooks at all. It's just to offer alternatives. As I've told folks, if I was teaching a basic policy class—policy organizations—I would expect everybody to read John [W.] Kindon's book on policy alternatives [*Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Pearson 2002)]. To me it's one of the best books to really frame up how we make decisions in organizations. I don't want my students to not have that textbook. But I probably would also have them buy a couple of books where we would just use a couple of chapters out of those books. So if I could find replacement materials for those resources by doing searches in the open source, then I've just found a way to keep my No. 1 textbook but make sure the students aren't paying for the other two. So things like that—he has encouraged thinking about innovation. To date that program has saved over \$35 million.

TS: Could you explain Affordable Learning Georgia?

HD: It is a state textbook initiative, but it's not really about textbooks. It's about course redesign.

TS: I found out about it last year. I edited a book of documents in Georgia history for the University of Georgia Press [*Cornerstones of Georgia History*]. They sent me a royalty check because they had put it in Affordable Learning Georgia. I don't understand it exactly. Is it income-based to determine who can get these books or can any student access them?

HD: Anybody. For instance, eight of our colleges and universities' math departments came together. What started it was at the math advisory group they realized that their college algebra textbook that was most commonly used was now \$220.00.

TS: Oh, my goodness!

HD: They stepped back and said—well they had no idea. I've never known any faculty—other than I guess the faculty member who was the author of the textbook—that wanted students to be gouged for the price of textbooks. So those math faculty said, "You know what? If we can find alternatives to this, let's see what we can do." They've come together, and they identified the four most common courses across those eight universities and colleges. They're working with Rice University and the OpenStax Project. They've taken all four of those math textbooks. College algebra was the high. They were averaging around \$180.00 a textbook across those four courses. They now have it if the students want a printed textbook, \$35.00, or they can have a free online version. If you talk about the magnitude of those eight colleges and universities making that decision—the students, when they settle up their accounts right before the semester starts, for a lot of families that's the last dollar they've got. They show up for the first

class meeting, and they find out, “Oh, I’ve got another \$270.00 of textbooks, well, I’m just not going to buy this.” Well, that doesn’t promote quality teaching and learning at all. So Affordable Learning Georgia is looking to not do anything by force, but just create the conditions where faculty can [find affordable materials]. Quite frankly, all you do is go to the searchable federated database. You put in the ISBN number for the textbook that you have been using, and it will call up every open-source textbook or every open-source learning object that’s related to that textbook. You can do it for any book that you might use in any course.

TS: Are students using that extensively now?

HD: Yes. Another thing that faculty are doing is they might not necessarily use Affordable Learning Georgia to replace a textbook, but what they might do is they tell the students, “If you need additional materials related to this, if you are having difficulty, here are four or five things that are available through the open-source tools that are directly related to our textbook, and I would endorse you using A, B, and C in that list.”

TS: Now you are saying, what is Hank Huckaby’s role in all this? Did he initiate this, or did he buy into it? Who started it?

HD: Well, I mean, I’m not . . . I started it.

TS: You started it?

HD: But I could not have done that without Hank’s support for that particular initiative and being willing to help find the funding to establish the pilot for that and to lay the groundwork and support. He appreciated GALILEO’s [potential]. It was a different role for GALILEO to think of itself in the textbook space. But very quickly the librarians and the policy champions saw that it was a network that could be used. So you asked me about the legacy of Hank. Most people don’t even know about those sorts of things. That’s what he has quietly been doing behind the scenes. He has quietly been behind the scenes—every president, when they’re putting forth their pay plans for the year, if they’ve got any money to be put toward salary readjustments, he has insisted that they make certain that the lowest paid people on the campuses get bumps to get them to an affordable living wage—that sort of level. Those are things that no one gives him credit for because he doesn’t toot his horn.

TS: It’s quite a legacy for you too to come up with something like Affordable Learning Georgia. When I first heard about it last year—you know I’m not teaching anymore—I only heard about it when UGA Press said they were recommending my book for it. I thought then, “This is a fabulous idea!”

HD: That’s one of the things I brought from Oklahoma. It started as Affordable Learning Oklahoma. We were about ten months into it when I accepted the job in Georgia. Their project is still going. It’s not having \$35 million worth of impact, but it still is making a difference.

TS: That definitely does make a difference. Well, let me ask you, because I know we don't have all day today, I wish we could continue this for twenty-five hours maybe, but let me ask you, when did you first know about the problems on our campus?

HD: I assume you mean audit problems.

TS: Yes.

HD: Well, that audit review had been underway for months. I mean, it was a year or so prior to it all being public. There are audit investigations going on on all twenty-nine campuses at any time. So I knew the issues, especially dining services, were being looked into from a long ways out. Any of the issues related to the foundation and the president's pay, something like that, I found out about that about the time you guys did—probably a couple of weeks prior. Although the dining audit problems [I knew] from about a year ago that this was really starting to uncover some real issues.

TS: Does it start with whistle-blowers or does it start with routine audits?

HD: Both. There were elements of that that came through routine audits, but there were also whistle-blowers. I don't think that the genesis of the dining audits was the whistle-blowers.

TS: Was not the whistle-blowers?

HD: Was not the whistle-blowers. It certainly accelerated attention to it from a wide audience.

TS: The genesis is the audits?

HD: Well, no, the problems being uncovered in dining services, you would have to get John [M.] Fuchko III [chief audit officer and associate vice chancellor of internal audit, Board of Regents, University System of Georgia] or some of his team in to answer the questions about the specifics of what triggered [the audit], where were the red flags that [helped them] decide to do the audit of dining services.

TS: I guess maybe part of my question is, I always thought that our administrators here were auditing everything under the sun locally. How did they miss this?

HD: [Sigh, pause] That's a very good question. I'll say that for the record. I think that maybe sometimes you see what you want to see. I think that sometimes you hope that, "Surely it's not that bad," or, "Surely that person wouldn't do this. I've trusted them with other things." If they would do that, that calls into question other things you trusted them with. So I think it gets personal pretty quickly, sometimes even in leadership roles. It's speculation because I was not in those shoes. I can say it's why it's very important to have an independent audit division, an independent auditor, that, although they report to the president, they report to the system office. That way you've got a check and balance. I think that certainly there's been a lot of questioning about how could that system have allowed all of this to grow to the level where it got that out of control.

TS: To what degree do you think the consolidation may have taken their minds off things on the Kennesaw campus?

HD: Oh, I think that would just be an easy excuse. I don't buy that excuse. Somebody might put that forward. Certainly consolidations are a distraction, but we've had other consolidations that have been done at other universities that have not had issue arise like this.

TS: To what degree did maybe some people have too many responsibilities in their job description?

HD: Well, we certainly saw the span of control. You saw in my early days of the interim splitting apart the former operations division. The deal with the span of control issues and the coordination of those duties probably contribute to you having entities that were supposed to be checks and balances for one another that were all reporting into the same broad area. It's hard for those entities to play their check and balance roles. Breaking that up was a high priority of mine, and something that I hope will be continued. There was a lot of talking during consolidation about breaking up some of those roles, but it didn't happen. That was actually one of the recommendations of one of the OWGs for that to happen, but it was decided not to pursue that. It was not because of that, but we had a suspicion—when I say we, the folks down at the board that work with consolidation—that this was the right time to do that. Whether it contributed directly or indirectly, it was at least going to be risk mitigation looking to the future.

TS: Okay. When did you find out that you were going to be the interim president?

HD: Wow! I hadn't thought about this. Probably May 24 or May 25. I say that because that was really close to when I started meeting with Dan. I think that I was talked to about would I be willing if the board and the chancellor asked me, would Jenny and I be willing to take on this role. That was very soon after Dan announced his retirement. But there was a good ten-day period or so that I would have to assume that other options were being considered. But I'm one who doesn't borrow trouble. I wasn't going to worry about that.

TS: Let's see. Our announcement [to the KSU family] was on May 26 that you had been appointed as interim. So you found out about a day or two before then?

HD: Well, what I found out was, "Houston, we need you to do this, and we're going to announce it."

TS: Okay [chuckles].

HD: And that is accurate.

TS: May 10 was when Dan Papp sent his announcement to the faculty and staff. So it was about two weeks after that?

HD: Yes.

TS: This happened so suddenly because I remember that he had just delivered his State of the University address not long before that [April 25-26, 2016], and just listening to that

address with his six-step action plan that we had to do next year, it was obvious that he was planning on being here for it. Things happened very, very quickly.

HD: They did; they did.

TS: Were you involved with the decision-making?

HD: I was not. I really was not, and it was probably a blessing especially because of the relationship that Dan and I were going to have to have in the transition. I didn't appreciate it at that time, but the closer that I got to the July 1 start date, it was freeing for me to be asking questions on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> around that time about what do I need to know about what has gone on, what's gone into this, what's Dan been told, and those sorts of things.

TS: You're asking the chancellor?

HD: Asking the chancellor, asking legal, and those folks that were [involved in the audit]. The reason I say that is because I think a lot of Dan Papp; the system and the board think a lot of Dan; the chancellor thinks a lot of Dan.

TS: Still do?

HD: Still do, yes. That all did happen very quickly. It was very unfortunate. It was unfortunate in a lot of levels. Mistakes were clearly made. There was no excuse for them. It was just sloppiness. But Dan and I had to turn out attention to making certain that we kept things going here at KSU. It was nice for me to not have been a part of the decision-making to ask Dan to step down. I was not part of those conversations.

TS: That's what happened? They asked him to step down?

HD: Well, he was asked to retire. He was given the opportunity.

TS: He was given the opportunity to retire?

HD: Yes.

TS: Okay. Talking about his financial package, he used language of "misunderstandings, miscommunications, lack of coordination." Is that accurate?

HD: I would use the same words. Misunderstanding, lack of documentation, lack of coordination, yes, those are fair representations.

TS: So he might have survived one or the other, but not both of the audits?

HD: Oh, gosh, I'm not the person to ask that question to. That would just be speculation. I would be doing the same speculation that you are. Here's what is obvious, I think, from a public standpoint. I think the court of public opinion, the way they have looked at all this, there was just so much occurring that the board had to make a change. I think that in my experiences in Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Georgia that was a lot to be occurring around a single university in a short amount of time, and I would characterize it as absolutely

being an outlier in my experience in terms of managing this institution, and I understand why the board felt like change was needed.

TS: Right.

HD: And it does not define his legacy as far as I'm concerned. That's something I told him when I first met with him back in early June. I was going to do my work day to day here for as long as I was interim, making certain that those things didn't define his legacy because he had done an awful lot of good for this university—had done some great things for this university. I took that on as a personal challenge. I told him at that point, I didn't know what form it would take because it was going to be waking up everyday, and when those opportunities presented themselves to make certain, act accordingly.

TS: What do you think his legacy will be?

HD: I don't want to characterize Betty [L. Siegel's] legacy because I didn't really know her personally. I've known her a little bit. But she certainly had a legacy of growth and development. I think he's got a legacy of scope. He's got a legacy of depth. The impact of this university after his ten years of leadership—the reach, the seriousness with which other folks nationally view Kennesaw State is much higher now than when Dan took over. The quality of the institution grew during the time that he was here. Our daughter is a senior at Roswell High School. We went to a session that the counselors put on this last year that if you look back four years ago the number of transcripts that they were sending to Kennesaw State was fourth in order in the state: most to Georgia Southern, then to UGA, then to Georgia Tech, and then to Kennesaw. That was for a local high school here. This last year KSU became No. 1.

TS: Really?

HD: Roswell High School is about the same size as it was ten years ago. It has not grown at all. [The number of transcripts] has grown because kids are taking Kennesaw State more seriously. It is becoming a first-choice institution for a number of students. It is becoming a legitimate second choice for a lot of students whereas if you were to go back six or seven years ago it might have been a third choice. Does that make sense?

TS: Oh, absolutely.

HD: So I tell you that. That doesn't happen without Dan. I mean, Dan would be quick to say that that happened because of a lot of really good leadership from the faculty and everybody here. He would be the first to reflect that. But he took it from not just numbers but to quality—not that ACT, GPA, and all those good things are the be-all-and-end-all. There are a lot of measures of the quality of our incoming class, but you can see it in those measures.

TS: Well, I was trying to be objective in my questioning, but I'm still in mourning over Dan not being here anymore and some other good folks too.

HD: Yes.

TS: So you know you are going to be president on the 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> of May. It's announced on the 26<sup>th</sup>. It becomes official on July 1, but it was June the 3<sup>rd</sup> when we got the memo where several of our key administrators were going to retire or be replaced at the end of the month. So let me just ask you, in this period when Dan is still officially president, but you're here working with him, but you were already making decisions. When did you actually take over, I guess is my question?

HD: Well, July the 1<sup>st</sup> is when I took over, but the chancellor—I cannot remember the date of the letter—provided a letter to Dan in which there is expectation that we would work jointly and that major decisions we would make jointly throughout June. Dan was still the president. Dan's signature was still on checks. Those are the markers of who is the president, but we were working jointly throughout June.

TS: So I guess my question is Dan obviously didn't fire those folks. Did the chancellor tell you to fire them? Did you decide to do so?

HD: Well, I don't know that I would use those words, but I guess it doesn't matter. One of those individuals Dan did let go.

TS: Really?

HD: Yes. The others I was merely letting them know that they were not going to be part of the leadership team going forward to July 1<sup>st</sup> and then putting them on administrative leave through the remainder of the month. That's what actually happened, and Dan was involved in those . . .

TS: He was involved in the decision?

HD: He was made aware of that was the direction that I was heading, and, yes, he was involved there too.

TS: Okay, so you really wanted to have a clean slate with a new leadership team?

HD: Yes.

TS: Okay, that's probably all to say about that then.

HD: It is. It is all that I can say being a personnel matter.

TS: As you got more and more involved, how would you assess the root cause of our problems? Was it incompetence in leadership? Was there a culture on campus of corruption or whatever? How would you describe it?

HD: No, I wouldn't say either of those. Incompetence I absolutely wouldn't say. I mean, these were good, smart people. That's not an issue. And I wouldn't say culture of corruption, although there were elements of that over in the dining services side. But the broader issues, culture would be a word that I would put, but it was the culture of accountability.

TS: Culture of accountability?

HD: I think that one thing that I considered very quickly in June as I began meeting with individuals that were close to the key decision-making apparatuses in this institution was that there was not really a willingness for there to be bad news. There was not really a, “We are going to have a meeting about something that is clearly a problem, and we are going to wrestle it to the ground, and we are going to get it fixed. If it is a problem on Friday, we are going to get it fixed on Monday.” I think that there was more of a culture of ignoring the bad news, and let’s focus on the good news.

I have talked with a lot of people during the time I’ve been here, and very few people fall into the first group. I was looking at attitude toward accountability. The first group was somebody just wanting to make excuses or say, “I wasn’t the problem. I wasn’t the reason that that happened.” Or, “It’s just misunderstood. That was the only thing I could do.” If it became about them, then that told me they didn’t have a good, positive attitude toward accountability. What I needed was, it didn’t matter whether you were directly involved or not, leadership came from, “Here forward, we are all going to be involved in fixing this.” That idea of being able to roll up the sleeves, put on the thinking cap, come to the table, turn cabinet meetings into not Chamber of Commerce sunny day sort of events, but cabinet meetings are meant to deal with problems. Cabinet meetings are, “We’ll walk out with smiles on our faces, but while we are in there, we are going to be taking apart the problem of the day, and we are going to agree on what needs to be fixed.” So it’s attitude toward accountability.

That obviously is pretty heavy criticism of folks. But I can say this. After my five or so months at the helm, I have not done much to get things fixed. It’s been KSU people that have gotten things fixed. It’s been KSU staff, faculty, and students even in some instances on the auxiliary side that have stepped forward and have done the work to get it fixed. One thing that I insisted upon in coming out here was that—and I had seen this in Tennessee and Oklahoma too—when there is a problem in a university, you all of a sudden draft help from a lot of the other universities to come in and get it fixed. Okay? That is a good short-term solution, but what happens when those people go back to their home institutions? That is a short-term fix but long-term cost. What I insisted upon was, “I know that there are great people at KSU. I just need to meet with them. I just need to get a sense about what can they do? Where is that elbow grease that they can bring to the table?” As I turned the page and finished up at the end of October, I was very confident that the things that had gotten fixed by KSU folks were going to remain fixed because it is not like we brought in outside people to do it.

TS: Right. So you feel pretty comfortable with the institution now?

HD: Very much so. I do. I do. I think that something especially with parents, with community members, with faculty, one of the things that was very important to me—and I had a sense that this was true, and this was something that Dan and I talked about—although there were all these problems in the business operations side, were those problems over in the academic side of the house? That was the fear you had. Business operations problems can be done incorrectly in one quarter and fixed by the next quarter. Core academic problems take a decade for an institution that is in a downward spiral that is very hard to pull out of.

TS: Right.

HD: It starts getting into your reputation. It gets into your ability to recruit and retain faculty. It absolutely gets into your ability to recruit students that have choices. Those are real problems. Our academic side of the house is in really good shape. We're talking from June 15-20 forward, I could very confidently go out and there were regular meetings to talk to folks that wanted to know, what was my sense after just a few days of where KSU was and would we pull out of this? I said, "Yes, because the academic side of the house is in great shape." I told folks this. One of the bad traits about higher education is we are so siloed. That's a bad characteristic because we have our silos.

TS: Right.

HD: For the problems that were occurring at KSU it was a blessing.

TS: Get rid of the silos and . . .

HD: Yes, it almost created a [situation] where, "Oh, well, that's fairly isolated because it's a silo.

TS: There is a lot on the public record about Gary Coltek and Randy Shelton. Did any unethical problems extend to any other people beyond them?

HD: I can't speak to that in this setting.

TS: I hadn't heard the names of anybody else mentioned.

HD: No. I'll let the public record speak for itself, what's out there, especially knowing those are personnel matters. I wouldn't want to speak about anybody else over in those areas.

TS: Okay. But they are all in a silo you are saying.

HD: Look, I said this back in the summer, and I can very confidently say it now. What I found here at KSU was business operations and a culture of business operations that absolutely had to have changes made, had to move in the right direction. But they were all things that very quickly could get redressed. In some cases there were staff here that had no earthly idea that they weren't doing their job—a task or responsibility—correctly, and they said, "Well, I don't want to do it incorrectly. What do I need to do?" And we got them aligned maybe with somebody [who could tell them] how does that play out at Georgia State or how does that play out at Georgia Southern? And they said, "Yeah, we can do it that way." So again I go back to that is a great example of someone who has a good, positive attitude toward accountability.

I mean, they take pride in their work; they take pride in their university. They want to do the right thing. So that's why incompetence and corruption—you asked about those words. That to me is getting into the characters of these individuals. With the exception of some of the things in dining services, we're not talking about bad people at all. We're not talking about bad professionals. We're not talking about folks that didn't love their university. This is a big university; it's a comprehensive university; it's a university in a major media market; it's a university that not that long ago was a junior college. All right?

The scope of our operations and the sophistication of our operations had to get to the level of that of a comprehensive university in a major metropolitan area.

TS: Yes, just forty years ago [1976] the Board of Regents made the decision to make Kennesaw a four-year school.

HD: If it is a junior college or a community college that you are running, it's not as complicated as if you are running a major research university, and we sit somewhere between those two things, actually more toward a major research university than toward a junior college. It's complicated. Your quality control mechanisms, your quality assurance mechanisms, things like your audit operations are at just a completely different level when you are the type of university that we want to be here. So this is some of the natural growth and development of the university.

TS: Have you made any changes with regard to the relationship between the university and the KSU Foundation?

HD: Yes. The bylaws have been changed to where the president is a voting member of the foundation and voting member of the executive committee of the foundation. You might think that those were things that were already in place. They were not. We have made it clear that the president is responsible for all of those cooperative organizations. You can't say, "I didn't know because I'm not responsible for it." It doesn't matter whether it is the KSU Foundation, the alumni association, the research foundation, or the athletic association, the president is responsible for those cooperative organizations, period. One thing that we are in the process of instituting—it's an element of what I've done in this transition period for President [Samuel S.] Olens—is continuing to make sure that these quality assurances are locked into place. Every two years every university in the state is supposed to be able to provide documentation that you are meeting the eight core elements of the Board of Regents policy on cooperative organizations. Some of that is to be able to prove that the president has executive control. The president is responsible for distribution of funds from that organization. The president is responsible for the impacts, issues. It's like anything else in life. You can say that you do it, but can you document it? So it's the documentation of those things.

We're getting a good base line in place where that report will really just be an update every two years. Things like that were not really being attended to. So I feel much better, but quite frankly—and I'll be glad to put this on the recording device—the foundation needs to continue—and I say continue because from the summer forward they have I think been more geared toward this—more focusing on their educational role, their support of the educational mission of the institution, and less on real estate. If anything, the criticism of the KSU Foundation over the last decade to fifteen years has been that you can almost step back, and if it didn't have Kennesaw State University attached to it, you wouldn't even know that it had an educational mission because their discussions, their proceedings, their minutes were those focused on real estate. They need to be focused on chairs. They need to be focused on merit- and need-based aid. They need to be focused on capital campaigns. They need to be focused on start-up funds. Those are the things that the other foundations in the state put their efforts toward just as much as they do real estate transactions.

TS: Are we going to have another capital campaign soon?

HD: Yes. Absolutely! I think there was a thought on May 10<sup>th</sup> when Dan announced his retirement that, “There it goes. We’re not going to keep moving toward a capital campaign.” When I showed up here early on June 3<sup>rd</sup> and started to work with Dan, I began immediately signaling that, “No, no, no, we’re not stopping. We’ve got to keep this going.” And I think that Dan was relieved for that, and the leadership of the foundation was relieved as well.

TS: Great, great! Meal plans got a lot of publicity this summer—dealing away with the mandatory meal plans by 2017?

HD: Yes. Another example of what was the university leadership thinking, there was zero defense of requiring all commuter students at KSU to purchase meal plans.

TS: I’ve heard more complaints about that than anything else, I think.

HD: It is again culture of accountability. That is putting the bottom line of dining and auxiliary services and business operations ahead of what’s best for students. Does that make sense?

TS: Yes.

HD: When you step back, someone is a commuter student because they need to live in the area to be able to go to school. You can bet with most of those students that financial challenges have probably put them at the point where their family cannot afford to allow them to go away to school or can’t afford for them to live on campus. So we’re doubling down, and we’re not charging \$427.00 or whatever it was again when they’re having a hard enough time finishing out their bill at the start of the term. Here’s the thing. We were charging the mandatory commuter bill plan, and if you couldn’t pay it, your classes were purged. All right? So how is that student-centered? It’s not. You probably picked up on from the beginning that my message was, “We are going to be student-centered in our decision-making. If this decision doesn’t contribute to creating the quality educational experience that our students need, then we really need to take a step back.” Another example, quietly, I don’t know that anybody even noticed this. I just did it. All around the campus—especially near administrative portions of buildings—there were parking spaces that had \$300.00 fines for any students that parked in those.

TS: Is that like a parking spot for a dean?

HD: Yes, and over around Kennesaw Hall.

TS: Three hundred dollar fines?

HD: Yes, \$300.00 fine if you parked in those spots.

TS: So do the deans still have their special places?

HD: Well, now, they’ve got their parking spots, but the reason we put the fines down to \$50.00 is that’s where Georgia State and Georgia Southern have that fine, and it’s on a

second offense. The reason it was done [set at \$300.00] is because somebody looked around the country and found *a* university that had a \$300.00 fine and used that as their anchor instead of saying, “What do UGA and Tech do?” Tech’s maximum fine is \$50.00. If you are a poor college student, \$50.00 might as well be \$500.00. So things like that, I’m not going to lie, they were just symptoms of the problem. I think we began taking those things apart, and we worked out to be able to eliminate that commuter meal plan after this year instead of the original plan for it to be phased out by 2022. So I’m proud of that.

TS: You’ve talked a little already about the intellectual climate on the KSU campus or what you think about it. Is there anything that you want to add to that?

HD: One thing I have thoroughly enjoyed about my time here is I had met a lot of faculty up here, and I knew most of the deans already, but I got a much deeper appreciation about the talent that’s here. I got a much deeper appreciation of what it has taken to build out these departments and these schools and these colleges. I don’t know. If I had not gotten the job at Arkansas and then going back to my chief academic officer role for some “x” period of time, [I would have taken back] a new found respect [for KSU]. When we moved Kennesaw State up into comprehensive university status back three years ago [August 2013] I can tell you there were other schools in the University System of Georgia that were angry about that.

TS: They felt they should have been elevated too?

HD: Well, they just didn’t think KSU should.

TS: Are you talking about the research universities or other comprehensive and state universities?

HD: Both. There are examples of that from both.

TS: There were certain institutions [in the 1970s] that didn’t want us to ever become a four-year school.

HD: That’s exactly right. So that happens. But at that point I felt like the programmatic mix, the level of master’s and doctoral programs here merited it, and it was clear that KSU was heading toward it. If it couldn’t claim that status [in 2013], it was right on the cusp of being able to do it. So when you go back to what I have learned in my five or so months here it is how right I was. This is a school that is not afraid of that future. There’s some awkwardness too. You have got some faculty here that just want to be teaching faculty with no desire to do the research and scholarly expectations. I told Ken Harmon and I’ve told the deans it’s not a zero-one sort of thing. There can be a hybrid for a decade while the university is continuing. You can have folks that are effectively flagged as research/scholarly for their teaching load assignment, and you have got others that [are in a teaching track].

Georgia Southern has gone through this. You’ve got some faculty at Georgia Southern that all they want to do is just teach, and they’ll teach a four/four load every term if you’ll just leave them alone to do the teaching. And then you’ve got some faculty at Georgia

Southern that absolutely would love to have a two/two with the [research] expectations because they've got thirty more years in the business. They want to build that portfolio. They want to have the opportunities to develop their centers of excellence or research centers. Why can't you allow both ways? So at KSU that's in place. That's probably not what you are looking for.

TS: No, no, that's fine.

HD: This is an even better school than I knew when I started July 1.

TS: I think we've always been in that evolutionary phase.

HD: Yes.

TS: I guess the next thing is becoming a Research 1. I don't know.

HD: Yes, maybe. Here's one thing I wouldn't say. I wouldn't bet on Kennesaw to not do it in twenty years. It's remarkable what we've done in what, fifty-three years now or something like that?

TS: That's right. Kennesaw was chartered on October 9, 1963. The first classes were fifty years ago this fall.

HD: Yes, that's right. If we fit this much growth and development—and it's not just numbers, but it's again scope and quality—in fifty-three years, what can we do in twenty more? It will be interesting. I'm going to be watching. One thing I hope is that Jenny and I remain honorary Owls for a while. We hope we can at least maintain that.

TS: Absolutely! Well, what are you proudest of in your time in Georgia and particularly at Kennesaw?

HD: Well, you know, actually, the time in Georgia as well as Kennesaw is to focus on educational purposes, focus on students, and focus on what really is going to support these students in the classroom. It's why I've been proud to be involved with consolidation, things as high profile as that, and then those things behind the scenes like the need-based scholarship and the Affordable Learning Georgia that maybe not as many people know about my involvement in that. Those things—quite frankly, every \$100.00 that you can save a student, you make a difference.

TS: Absolutely.

HD: You don't have to solve it over night, but if you are just committed to that a little bit at a time, you look up, and you might not have gotten back to 2003 levels of tuition and fees in current dollars, but who knows? Maybe you can set it back five years by finding some savings. So that, and then the other thing is that in Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Georgia I think that I've kept my streak up of being able to do what I need to do professionally and be proud of what I've done. One of the best lessons I ever got was one of my mentors at Memphis, a guy named [Donald K.] Don Carson, a former vice president of student affairs but so much more. He just meant the world to me. I got to have dinner with him

in Memphis a few nights ago. He told me a few things of advice. Some of it is a little too salty for me to put on the recording device.

But one of the things he told me is, “Houston, if you will just conduct your business as a professional as if everything you’re doing is going to be front page above the fold, you will have a stress-free professional life.” I always appreciated that advice. Then you marry that up with I married a woman who, I think, if I were to go home today and tell Jenny, “You know, Jenny, I was put in a compromised position today at work. I was not going to do what I was asked to, and because I said I was not going to do that, they fired me,” Jenny would say, “Okay, whatever!” She wouldn’t care because she would have known that I had done the right thing. It’s incredibly freeing to have that. So I am proud of my time in Georgia—and I certainly have gotten involved with some pretty political stuff here—to be able to conduct myself in a way that I could look myself in the eye in the mirror and feel good about it.

TS: Well, it was announced just a few days ago this month that you are going to be the new president of the University of Central Arkansas. As far as I can tell, they seem to be a university pretty much like Kennesaw State in lots of ways.

HD: They really are. They are in the Little Rock metro area there about the same distance from downtown Little Rock as we are from downtown Atlanta. They are the same sort of level of academic profile, same level of sports competition. There are lots of similarities. Not as big! But, goodness, who is as big as KSU? UCA is about 12,000 students, which to me is big enough to do some things, but still small enough to where it’s personal, where again you can get to know the students. Jenny and I—if there is anything that getting back over here did for us—I mean, we walked through my resume—I never meant to leave Austin Peay, never did, never applied for the job at TBR [Tennessee Board of Regents]. After borrowing me a couple of times, they said, “Oh, yeah, you work here now.” It was that sort of a transition.

TS: Austin Peay was home, I guess.

HD: It was. I didn’t go to school there, but it was nice to be that close to home and friends and the like. But when I left I went to the Tennessee Board of Regents. Then when Oklahoma recruited me when they had their chief academic officer open up, and then when Georgia recruited me and that was a chance to get back to the Southeast, I never thought that I would look up, and it would have been a decade since I had been at Austin Peay. Jenny and I—I would say June 24<sup>th</sup>, and I remember that date because that was the “Star Spangled Spectacular” out on the Campus Green, that night we had such a great time getting to visit with the students that were there performing over at the bandstand, we had such a great time meeting a lot of alums that were there that night. That was three weeks roughly into me being over here working with Dan. I remember going home that night and Jenny saying, “You’re getting the fever again aren’t you?”

And I definitely will say after the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend, after some of my initial meetings with some of the deans, some of the students, and the like, I told Jenny, “You know what? I can tell. However long this lasts, I’m not going to be able to go back to the board.” She said, “No, I know.” We really at that point decided—we didn’t know what in the world

was going to happen with this. We were about as surprised as everybody else where it turned. But when the University of Central Arkansas job came open, and I knew that I was free and clear November 1<sup>st</sup>—at first I told them, “I can’t commit to being in the pool,” because I may need to be here through the spring. We were talking about October 10<sup>th</sup> or something that I was saying that.

TS: If we did a national search?

HD: Well, at that point there were plenty of rumors out there about Sam [Olens]. I said, “If I have to go to at least mid-spring or so at KSU, I don’t need to be in the pool at UCA.” As soon as I found out that Sam was going to start November 1<sup>st</sup>, I called the search firm and said, “Look, I’m obviously available. What can we do to be considered?” So we’re really excited about it. It is a great, great school, great community, Conway has the University of Central Arkansas, Hendrix College, which is a well-known liberal arts private school nationally, and then Central Baptist College, so you’ve got this town that has three colleges in it, and it is a really neat pocket of really intellectual, forward-thinking [people]. Conway is an up-and-coming town. They’ve got a lot of IT firms that have rooted there, being in the Little Rock metropolitan area. We feel really good about it.

TS: I’m sure you will do a great job there.

HD: We hope so.

TS: And I really thank you for all your time this morning.

HD: I’m glad to. Thank you for doing this. I think it is wonderful that we take the time to document things this way. I think it is great!

TS: Thank you.

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