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INTERVIEW WITH VOLKER C. FRANKE

CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

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Interview with Volker C. Franke  
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott  
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TS: The interview today is with Volker Franke, the 2015 recipient of the Distinguished Research Award for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Volker, why don't we start by talking about your background, where you grew up and where you went to school? I saw on your vita all your master's and doctoral degrees, but you didn't have an undergraduate on there, so I'm assuming that you got your undergraduate education in Germany, but why don't you talk about it a little bit?

VF: Well, there really was no undergraduate education. I grew up in a small village of about 1,200 people. It's about five miles outside of a larger city that's 40,000 people, which is maybe thirty miles west of Frankfurt. I grew up in a semi-rural setting—lots of farms, cornfields, and vineyards. It's in terms of exports one of the best wine regions in Germany. I went to high school and then from high school went to the university. Germany started implementing bachelor's degrees maybe eight or ten years ago. Beforehand, there was only education at the master's level. It was also more competitive to go to high school. High school actually started in fifth grade, so you would have to have the grades and a teacher recommendation to go to high school. Of all my maybe thirty, thirty-two colleagues and friends in elementary school, only six or seven went on the high school track, and two or three then left after two years. So it's much more competitive early on. It was also thirteen years when I did it, overall schooling. Then you started immediately with the university at a graduate level.

There's a difference in Germany between universities and technical universities and universities of applied science. The universities are traditional humanistic liberal arts universities. Technical universities focus on hard sciences. The medical schools obviously are always separate. Then these universities of applied science offer engineering and architecture; so it's more the higher skilled vocational positions. I decided that I wanted to go to law school. You can go to law school also immediately from high school. I went to the University of Mainz in 1983 and started law school. About six weeks into my first semester I was convinced this is not for me.

I'd always been very interested in politics. I'd been very active in the peace movement in Germany. At the time, in the late 1970s, early 1980s, there were lots of demonstrations—one that the Green Party started. It was lots of environmental issues, and there were nuclear issues in terms of nuclear reactors and what to do with the nuclear waste. There was the NATO two-track decision where the United States decided to place atomic missiles into Germany. I was fairly active in this environmental peace type movement already in the late 1970s and early 1980s in high school. I went to law school, realized it was not for me, sat in a number of sociology and politics lectures, and liked that, and switched after one semester. I then pursued political science, sociology, and international law as my degree programs.

TS: I've got 1990 before you got your, what do you call it, your Magister Artium?

VF: It's an MA.

TS: I've got 1990 so there must be a few years in there where you were doing something other than going to school.

VF: Well, because you have no bachelor's degree, a master's degree will typically take four to five years. But I also needed to interrupt my university career, if you will, to do civil service. At the time we had the draft in Germany.

TS: So you were in the army?

VF: No, I wasn't. I'm a contentious objector. This is written in the Constitution. But at the time they had conscience examinations, so I had to appear before a board and convince them that I really had reasons for not serving in the military.

TS: So it's an oral exam?

VF: Yes.

TS: What kind of reasons did they accept?

VF: Well, there is the religious reason. Those are, if you will, the easiest or the most straightforward. There are philosophical, moral reasons and political reasons, which is what I tried and failed miserably.

TS: They didn't buy the political motive?

VF: Well, I suggested to the board they shouldn't ask me why I wouldn't want to go and kill someone. They should ask those who serve in the military why they would go and kill someone. They didn't like that answer, obviously, but when you're nineteen you think you know. I failed my conscience exam, appealed, and the second examination six months later or thereabouts I passed and started civil service. The law in Germany was that once you have completed four semesters, they cannot draft you out of the university. They have to let you finish. But they drafted me at the beginning of my fourth semester. I had completed four semesters, then did about eighteen months of civil service where I worked as a paramedic. Then I came back to the university. In 1988-1989 I went to Scotland and studied abroad for two terms at the University of Glasgow. Then I returned the spring of 1989 to complete my master's degree. I wrote my thesis, which took about six months. They give you about six months. Then I had oral exams and completed those in the summer of 1990, and then came to North Carolina in '92.

TS: I don't think I saw what your master's thesis was on.

VF: It was on the conception of human rights in the Soviet Union and the effect of *perestroika* and *glasnost* on the conception of human rights.

TS: This is right at the point when the Soviet Union is just about to collapse.

- VF: Exactly—about a year after it collapsed. The interesting thing—you will appreciate this as an historian—my advisor was also an historian and was relatively old, already seventy or older, had worked extensively on the SS System in Nazi Germany, and at a very young age was one of the experts in the trials following World War II.
- TS: The Nuremberg trials and all that?
- VF: Yes. I became interested in this topic when I was in Glasgow. They have a human rights center in Glasgow; so I took classes there. They also had a Sovietology program. They still existed at the time, so I took classes there and became interested. I had spoken with my advisor and he said, “Yes, you can do this as a master’s thesis. For a PhD you would need to be able to speak Russian, but for a master’s thesis it is fine.” I worked on my master’s thesis. The due date was in April. I had come up with the main result, which was, despite all the mirror dressing, for as long as the communist party keeps its monopoly—Article 4 of the Soviet Constitution—there really is no change in the situation of human rights. Then sometime in February, about five or six weeks before the due date for my thesis, they retracted the party monopoly. Frantically, I tried to figure out what to do. I called my advisor, and I said, “What do I do now? This is my argument!” He said, “Well, we can still take your thesis as an historical document and historical analysis.” And I said, “But this is not what I want.” But that’s what you have to do because sometimes events in our field outpace your research. It’s a good story now to tell my students that they should be very careful when they’re really looking at current events and applications.
- TS: Right, that’s the problem with recent history.
- VF: Yes. I had wanted to continue to work on that at Syracuse as well. But then things changed. I was in graduate school, and I became interested in other issues.
- TS: How did you get interested in peace issues and environmental issues? Were there any mentors along the way that influenced you or was it just part of what was in the air at the time?
- VF: Well, I think in part my father. He was somewhat active in the Social Democratic party and came from a working class background. So I grew up a little bit with that, with a lot of conscientious discussions about politics. I remember I was thirteen or fourteen, and I would read the newspaper every morning before I went to school. So I was very interested in that. I had these conversations with my father about it. I became interested in local politics even in high school and served on the council for this little village that I grew up in for just a year. Then I went on to the university and couldn’t do it anymore. But I’d been very interested in politics early on. The other influence: I grew up near a town with 40,000 people five miles away that was also occupied by 20,000 U.S. troops when I was there, and it was one of the first target points for the Soviet nuclear attack. So I grew up feeling occupied.
- TS: So that word “occupied” is used to describe the American presence in Germany as late as the 1970s?

VF: Yes. It felt that way because American soldiers were everywhere. The idea that my hometown could be attacked by nuclear weapons didn't make me feel very good. In addition to that, the impression you had of Americans was skewed in the 1970s because the only Americans, really, that Europeans got to know were soldiers; and then after the start of the all-volunteer force, that was questionable, some of the characters. And then the other Americans were tourists. Well, tourists at that point were very rich and did not really represent America. So that's what I grew up with. Then we followed very closely the 1980 election, and the election of Ronald Reagan had a lot of people scared in Germany and in Europe. The talking about SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative] had a lot of people scared. So this all prompted me to become involved in the peace movement and join demonstrations and so on. Then you started reading and watching movies that were all related. You started reading novels and poetry and so on, and you listened to music from the U.S. from the Vietnam era, and it becomes sort of a formative experience. I think then I started to pursue some of those questions when I went to the university in Germany. I think that's in part why I was interested in human rights issues, but then I returned full circle when I started working on my dissertation to issues of peace building.

TS: Why don't you talk about why you came to the United States, first to North Carolina?

VF: Well, I think there were two main reasons: one, probably a month, six weeks after I had arrived in Glasgow, there was a transforming experience. I realized this is a lot of fun; I would like to be abroad again; I would like to have this experience more and more. The only language at the time that I spoke well enough to study in was English. So I said, "Well, that means United States could be very interesting." I had visited one time before. In addition I met my girlfriend, later wife, who is from North Carolina. When I decided to come to the U.S. for a master's in public administration, I had about nine or ten different universities. It just happened that NC State [North Carolina State University] was the one. Two universities in North Carolina, NC State and Duke, had offered me small assistantships. Duke covered half the tuition. I couldn't cover the rest because even at that time it was very expensive. NC State was significantly cheaper. They covered tuition and gave me a stipend; so that made my decision. I decided to pursue a master's in public administration because that degree did not exist in Germany. There was one administrative program that started up, but it was not a common degree, so I thought, "This is potentially marketable for me. If I return to Germany after two years, maybe I can get something because I have an interesting degree." And honestly I didn't know really what to do with a political science degree. I wanted to get something that was more applied, more skills based; and that seemed to fit the bill very well. So that's why I ended up in North Carolina.

TS: Okay. So you're in North Carolina for a couple of years, I guess. In 1992 you get the MPA and then what did you do with it? Did you go straight to a PhD program from there?

VF: Well, I had wanted to work in an international organization. So in the summer of 1991 I had an internship with the United Nations headquarters with the UN development program in New York. It really frustrated me. I actually had an interesting project, but I saw how many meetings were conducted and how little was getting done at the meetings. So I said, "This is not where I wanted to be."

- TS: Sounds like the committee meetings at Kennesaw State [laughter].
- VF: Yes, some of them, absolutely. The MPA program at NC State is a program that is very much focused on state and local government, and I couldn't really see myself as a city manager in some town in North Carolina. That didn't fit me at all. In addition, one of my mentors at NC State came to me and said he had received a research grant that would allow him to get a course release. He wanted to find someone to teach a course for him and asked if I would be interested in teaching a course. I said, "Yes, absolutely!" And then I said, "What course is it?" That was the wrong order of questions. He said, "Well, it's a research methods course." The first course I ever taught was an undergraduate research methods course. It took me a long while, as always is the case with new courses, to prep it. I taught it, and as I was teaching it, I really enjoyed the interaction with the students. When I went to law school in Germany, I had also wanted to be a high school teacher, but at that time projections indicated that there were no jobs. That's one that you can predict fairly well. So I said, "Maybe I won't do that." But I had always had some interest in teaching.
- TS: And this is the first course you ever taught!
- VF: The first university course I ever taught. In four weeks or five weeks in I said, "That's it! This is what I want to do. Let me look for a PhD program, and then I can stay a little bit longer in the U.S." I applied to five or six PhD programs and ended up at the Maxwell School in Syracuse.
- TS: The Maxwell School is pretty prestigious, isn't it?
- VF: Yes—and applied. A lot of the programs are very applied, so they allowed me to combine the interest and issues with an application to the field.
- TS: Right. So you go to the cold country at that point, Syracuse University.
- VF: Yes.
- TS: It may not be that very different from the part of Germany you were in.
- VF: It's colder. Colder and more snow, yes. That didn't bother me at first. It starts bothering you in April when there is still black snow on the ground.
- TS: Right. But you stayed there for several years and got both a master's and a PhD.
- VF: The master's was on the way. A lot of PhD programs, after two years of course work, give you a master's degree if you are pursuing a PhD in case you can't finish.
- TS: Oh I see, so they just hand them out.
- VF: Exactly. So there's nothing I did for it.
- TS: I was wondering why, when you already had two master's degrees, you needed to get a third master's.
- VF: It just happened.

TS: So you're enrolled in the PhD program.

VF: Yes, immediately. Yes, I pursued that.

TS: So in 1997 you get your PhD. What was your dissertation? That's what became your first book, wasn't it?

VF: Correct. Yes. The dissertation was on the effects of military socialization at the United State Military Academy at West Point on attitudes toward peace building and peace keeping. That's why somehow it came full circle for me, given my past experience and interest, even in high school, in peace and conflict, and my experience [in Germany] with the U.S. military. When I looked for topics and I started to become interested again in the U.S. military, I went down to West Point. When you do a dissertation, lots of things are fortuitous, and they steer you into a particular direction. I had wanted to do a dissertation and research on the effects of social identity on attitudes and behavior. In order to do that, I needed a group with a strong identity, a formed identity that's tangible. When I thought the military would be good, I also learned that one of my colleague's students, two year prior to me, had completed his coursework and then went to West Point to teach. For three years that was his assignment while he was finishing his PhD. After three years at West Point, he would get a battalion command and go back into the field. That's normal for the military when they send folks to civilian universities to get PhDs.

So I contacted him. Let me tell you, the interest in the military was sparked when I read a newspaper article. I like stories. I start most of my academic writing with stories. Most of my articles have quotes before the article even starts, introductory quotes that I leave alone, just standing there. They reflect what is coming. That has now become my style. I talk to my PhD students. I will at some point ask them, "Tell me the story of your dissertation." If they can tell a story, then they can also make their topic tangible to anybody else. So I read this story of this one private who refused to be deployed. I believe it was to the former Yugoslavia, to Bosnia, because he had not sworn an oath to the United Nations. He had sworn an oath to the United States. I had seen a number of those articles and stories, and I thought that's interesting. This is now becoming in the early 1990s more of the bread and butter work of the U.S. military. In fact, I, as one demonstrating against the U.S. military, saw a purpose for the military in peace building and peacekeeping. So I thought, that's very interesting. Well, I mentioned that story to my friend at West Point, and he said, "Come on down." It was wonderful. I drove down four hours, and he had set up six or seven meetings for me with the Office of Institutional Research, with his dean.

TS: Oh, you had a gatekeeper who got you in there.

VF: Yes. I talked to people, and I was surprised on two ends—as most graduate students are—that people actually working in the field found the topic interesting. That was good. And they also thought I was on to something there, and they thought they wanted to support me and help me to see if I could do this at West Point. The idea then was that West Point graduates, the future military leaders—I wanted to see if their attitudes when

they graduated were promoting peace operations since, most likely, they would be in the field, more likely in peace operations rather than in conflict.

TS: It had slipped my mind that that was very big during the Clinton administration with problems in Bosnia and all of that.

VF: Yes, starting with Somalia and then Bosnia, then Haiti, then Kosovo. The 1990s were actually a series of peace operations that the United States was involved in. Clinton's slogan, if you will, was democratic engagement and enlargement—peace operations leading to a democratic regimes leading to more peace.

TS: What did you find out?

VF: I started collecting my data, I think, in 1995. At that time I did an analysis of the West Point curriculum and the history of West Point. The official curriculum did not include peace operations at that time. Even though some professors told me, "Well, I'm teaching it in my class." I said, "Well, that's fine, but what I'm looking at is, like, a class catalogue." That to me is the institutionally sanctioned curriculum. What you do in classes, that's always up to the professor. So I can't look at that. They didn't do it there. I found that the cadets developed a warriorism scale. They became more warrioristic. I have to say the design was a cross-sectional design instead of a longitudinal design. So we're assuming, comparing freshman to seniors . . .

TS: Oh, you're not tracking them all the way through their career? You've got one group that's just entering and another group that's exiting.

VF: Exactly, and you compare their attitudes. Longitudinal would be the better, the more reliable way.

TS: But you don't want to spend four years doing it.

VF: But you don't want to spend five years on the PhD dissertation. So then you do the short cut as the cross-section.

TS: So as they're going into the military academy, they're more militaristic than when they came out?

VF: The opposite.

TS: Oh, okay.

VF: They became more warrioristic while they were there. They became less patriotic, which is sort of baffling.

TS: Less patriotic?

VF: Less patriotic. They became less supportive of global institutions. That was another scale that I had. They became a little bit more, but not significantly more supportive of peace operations.

- TS: More supportive? How can they become more warrioristic and more supportive of peace operations at the same time?
- VF: Well, that's interesting. I did a follow up study in 1998. There I saw that they supported peace operations more. In 1995 I didn't find that. In 1998 the curriculum also talked about peace operations. What I learned from a number of people was that some of the suggestions I made in my dissertation research were implemented at West Point to change their curriculum.
- TS: Okay. I guess it shouldn't come as a shock that there could be a lag between changes in society and changes in curriculum.
- VF: Sure, even here [at KSU], the class catalogue is put on the web or finished two years prior. Then, if you want to change the curriculum, West Point says, here, you need to go to a committee.
- TS: So what's causing them to become less patriotic while they're at the military academy?
- VF: It was a surprising finding. I thought so too. I thought, "Wow, how do I explain this?" And obviously there is no right explanation. You can only surmise by looking at other literature. How I explained it was that other than a military academy, West Point is also a college, and what we find typically in colleges is students become less patriotic, maybe more interested in the world, more liberal.
- TS: Okay, so the liberal arts education is changing them.
- VF: Yes, I attributed some of that to the liberal arts curriculum, but that's then one of those findings, and an explanation that you then add the caveat that future research should look into this. But that was the best I could do in terms of trying to explain it, and that to me made a lot of sense.
- TS: Is it a big change or just a very subtle change in the patriotism?
- VF: I don't recall the exact figures, but it's a 5.0 point scale, Tom, and they come in with a 4.6.
- TS: Very patriotic.
- VF: And they graduate with a 3.9. So it doesn't make them unpatriotic. Statistically it's a significant change. Is it really a change in what they are? No, probably not.
- TS: Wow. That's interesting. It'd be interesting to looking into who is teaching their history classes at West Point, who's teaching their English classes, political science.
- VF: Yes. It's a good mix of military officers and civilians. They have tenure for civilian professors, and then the military professors—some administrators stay longer, but typically it's a three-year deployment for teaching.
- TS: I still don't quite understand how they can become more warrioristic and still more supportive of peace efforts.

VF: Well . . .

TS: I mean, warrioristic makes it sound like they're stereotypically gung-ho, let's go out and conquer the world.

VF: Well, I saw a shift in that. I did actually an analysis, not just comparing freshman and seniors. I also looked at sophomores and juniors to see if there is a progression. The biggest jump was between sophomore and junior year. Then, you say, "Why is that?" Well, between sophomore and junior year, at least at that time, they had a six- or eight-week long field training, and this was all about war fighting skills. So not surprisingly those juniors were more warrioristic. That's what they were trained for. West Point cadets are trained to defend the nation, but West Point cadets are also very smart. They need to understand what's going on in the world. They're taught that. So they may understand that there's a need for peace operations, but they are also warrioristic.

When you look at what we consider peace operations, it's sort of an umbrella term. There's peacekeeping, which the United States hardly does any more. We do peace enforcement. In the same mission you shift from peacekeeping to using deadly force, and that's what the United States is doing now when you look at Afghanistan and Iraq. It's a peace enforcement operation. Even though the Kosovo operation, where no boots were on the ground, is a peace enforcement operation, where now you actually need soldiers and officers who can switch between a peacekeeping mentality and a war fighting mentality. So supporting both is what you would like to see.

TS: Okay. So you do this for your dissertation and you continue to work on that. What about mentors at Syracuse that helped you? Is there anybody that stands out that maybe pointed you in a particular direction or became a model for what you wanted to do?

VF: Yes, definitely. Two people, I think. One, my dissertation advisor Gavan Duffy, who got me very interested in social identity issues, who talked to me about the military as a potential group to look at, and whom I have a very close personal relationship with. I see him still at conferences; we have e-mail contact even years later. What I think I took from him more than the research aspect is his mentoring of students. We would be at conferences together, and he would take me to dinners, and he would introduce me to colleagues and take me around the book exhibits. I do this with my doctoral students as well. I found this incredibly important. It's the most important thing we can do at the PhD level that we not only teach the students to do research but also to become academic professionals. In that respect you certainly are a model. Every time I go to International Studies Association conferences—the big one for international relations—now I have my own PhD students coming. We always have dinner with my advisor.

The second person is Sean C. O'Keefe. He came to Syracuse I think in 1995 or '96. He is a Syracuse graduate with an MPA [in 1978]. He then became comptroller for the Department of Defense [in 1989] and Secretary of the Navy in the first Bush administration [1992-1993]. He came to Syracuse to lead an executive education program on national security studies. The national securities program has been around for probably forty years or more. It was housed at Harvard for about twenty years, and it trains at the highest level of the military and civilian DOD [Department of Defense]

officials, meaning that the lowest level course that we ran was full colonels. We have courses with one and two star generals; we have courses with three star generals as participants. Harvard ran this program for about twenty years, and in about 1994, whenever the bid was up—and this was a typical DOD project; you have the project for one year plus four option years, so it's basically five years—but every year DOD renews the contract. So this five-year project came open. Syracuse University's Maxwell School, in conjunction with the School of International Studies at Johns Hopkins, submitted a proposal. The lead on the Maxwell side was Sean O'Keefe. The lead on the Johns Hopkins side was Paul Wolfowitz. What distinguished the proposal from the Harvard proposal was the use of case studies.

TS: I wanted to ask you about that.

VF: They developed a lot of teaching cases; not the regular historical cases, but teaching cases, cases that present dilemmas and put students or participants in the role of decision makers and make them feel the dilemma. So Sean O'Keefe comes to Syracuse. There was nobody that I had for my dissertation who had military experience or was working on civil/military issues. Sean O'Keefe comes, and [the Maxwell School] has a reception for him to introduce him. He had an endowed chair [the Louis A. Bantle Chair of Business and Government Policy]. I go to this reception, and I talk with him. I said, "You know, I'm doing my dissertation at West Point. I would like to see if you have time and I can tell you a little bit more." He graciously agreed; we met; we then met a few more times; we started talking. I said, "Well, I'm looking for funding in the summer." He said, "Why don't you write a case study with me. I need to write this case study." So "Okay, what's a case study?" (laughter) So he explained that to me. We wrote a case study together on the technology reinvestment project in '97, I think.

TS: Technology reinvestment?

VF: Yes. It's basically a Clinton administration initiative that brought together universities, industry, and government to look at projects that would benefit everybody—so basically to dual use technology, technology that has a military purpose, but also a civilian purpose. Two examples that you're familiar with: one is the BART [Bay Area Rapid Transit] System in San Francisco, funded at least the start of it, and the other one is the GPS. That's a dual-use technology that was funded.

TS: And that was military funded, the GPS?

VF: Yes. So I wrote this case study with him. I finished my dissertation in 1997, and Sean asked me if I wanted to stay on. I was looking for jobs, but I hadn't gotten anything. So he asked me to stay on, and I had maybe a post-doc, if you will, where I helped with this national securities studies program, developing case studies with other authors and myself, helping to run these eight-week long seminars with colonels. We did simulation exercises, spent three or four days.

TS: So these are primarily teaching tools.

VF: Yes.

TS: But it's just not a matter of collecting documents. You all are writing a situation that would cause debate over what's the proper course of action given this dilemma?

VF: Correct. And oftentimes those are true dilemmas. You tell a story. A case is a story. You tell a story and you interweave protagonists and antagonists. You don't make an argument. I've run case programs now for almost twenty years. You have academics who have published fifteen books who cannot write a case because they want to tell you what the argument is.

TS: Oh, what the answer is.

VF: Think about a more journalistic article. You read this, and you see a dilemma. The writer doesn't tell you what to think or how to view it. That's what a case study is. So we did this. I stayed on for a year. [Before this time], I had a job interview, and it was a position that I felt in my stomach, not right. I came back from the interview and talked with Sean, and he said, "How did it go?" I said, "Well, it went very well." "Oh, congratulations." I said, "No, I can't do this. I don't want the job. I don't know what to do now." He looked at me and said, "Well, that's fine, we'll find something for you." So that's when he created this position. When we moved to Washington, D.C. in 1998—Syracuse University has a center—and he said, "You can do that position from D.C. as well as from Syracuse." So I've learned how to do events; I've learned how to network just by observing, just by watching him.

Then when the second Bush administration came into government, Sean O'Keefe left Syracuse again and became the deputy director for the Office of Management and Budget [January-December 2001] and then NASA administrator [from December 2001 to February 2005]. When Columbia exploded, Sean O'Keefe was NASA administrator. I had done two symposia here at KSU, and for the first one I had Sean O'Keefe invited. He had agreed to come down as keynote speaker, but cancelled on me the day before because he had another commitment he couldn't get out of. So it was very unfortunate. So, yes, I would say those two certainly have mentored.

TS: So you stayed an extra year at Syracuse. Then you go to Washington, D.C. for that extra year. You stayed one extra year in Syracuse?

VF: Yes, I stayed an extra year at Syracuse.

TS: So in '98 you go to Washington.

VF: In '98 I go to Washington.

TS: And you're still . . .

VF: I'm still employed by Syracuse University. I'm now becoming director of the case program and developing cases and simulations.

TS: And these cases are being developed for a workshop for the military that they're contracting with Syracuse?

VF: Yes. We put them online, and any military institution could use them free of charge because they were contracted out, basically, through a grant, but civilian universities could also use them. We had a fee structure. You may be familiar with this. The case studies that we developed and that I'm working on now are modeled after the Harvard Business School case model. You google that and you find what those case studies are.

TS: So this would be called applied research? Applied scholarship?

VF: Yes. I've done a number of purely case studies, but I've had the research for private security contractors, and that research led to three articles and a case study. So you're doing the same research. You're just presenting it differently. So you can kill two birds with one stone. I have taught a national security studies course where there was no exam and there was no paper. I had seven case studies, I think, and films and novels and all this is considered a case study. The students had to write three-page reaction papers. I gave them exactly what I wanted, and then I did a large bioterrorism exercise at the end. Students loved it because it's a different class; it's a different way of teaching. It doesn't have then regurgitating information in an exam. It has them apply what they learn. It was a lot of fun. Now here I'm teaching case writing to the PhD students. I teach it in workshops around the world. So it's what I do. This is one of my biggest passions for teaching and for research.

TS: Right. Well, it's interesting that for a conscientious objector you've spent so much time working with the military.

VF: Yes, you should know your enemy.

TS: Is that it?

VF: Well, I have to say. The first time I went down to West Point, I was very unsure of myself and very unsure of my topic. People started liking the topic, and I had for the first time exposure to military professionals with a strategic vision. Now I'm talking to colonels, and colonels have a different outlook from GIs—from what I was used to when I grew up. So I was very impressed with what I saw; I was impressed with the colonels, the professors, because they were very thoughtful even though they were in uniform. My friend had a get-together. I stayed overnight with him, and he had a get-together in the evening where he invited students—West Point cadets—and I talked to all of them. I was incredibly impressed with them and their social skills. They come up, and they talk. They're eighteen, nineteen, twenty, but they can carry on a very thoughtful conversation—different from a lot of undergraduates. So I was very impressed with what I saw, and I said, "Yes, I can see this; this is a terrific university; it is a terrific environment. I can see a purpose for the military in these peace operations."

That's why I said my research had come full circle, and that's what I tell my students. "Ideally, I would like your dissertation to be about you." They need to be able to identify with their topic. A number of colleagues will say, "Well, they just need to finish." That's correct; that's another way of looking at it; but those are not the students I want to advise. I want to advise and work with students who bring their experience to their dissertation. I tell them, "I would like for you to be the only person who can write this

dissertation. You're spending five years; you're not spending five years just to get a degree."

TS: Take us from 1998 when you're directing the case studies in Washington, D.C. for Syracuse to 2007 is when you came here?

VF: To '09.

TS: To 2009 you came here. So we've got a gap of about a decade. Why don't you fill in the gaps for us?

VF: Well, when I was living in D.C. in '98 and '99 I continued to apply for positions. I had a couple of job offers and decided to take the one at McDaniel College—at the time called Western Maryland College until it changed the name in 2002.

TS: What kind of college is it?

VF: It's a private liberal arts college with about 1700 students. It is about thirty miles northwest of Baltimore and maybe twenty-five miles due south of Gettysburg. It is in a town called Westminster with about 17,000 or 18,000 people. I thought that would be the best job because I had a good feeling when I was there for the interview. Also my wife at the time was working at the government accountability office in D.C., and we thought . . .

TS: Oh, you moved to D.C. because she had a job.

VF: That's why we moved to Washington, and now we decided we can split the difference. We moved to the northern part of Washington, D.C., to Rockville, and it was an hour-long commute for me. It took her maybe forty-five minutes to get to her work. That's what we did for a while; that's why I took this position. I was very happy with it. It was a wonderful first job. It allowed me to develop new classes, to teach and work with undergraduate students.

TS: I guess you taught everything if it was that small a school.

VF: When I started, we had a department of three people, and I was the person responsible for all of international relations. We had a theorist, we had an American government person, we had a comparativist, and I was the IR person. Everybody taught an introduction to political science because that's a recruiter course for new majors; and we wanted everybody to teach it. Then I taught international relations theory, I taught international law and organizations, I taught foreign policy, I taught national security policy, I taught research methods, I taught modern political theory, and I taught a course that I had developed—Politics in Action—that had a community engagement or I guess we call this now experiential learning component. So there was a whole range of courses that I developed and taught while I was there.

TS: You stayed busy.

VF: Very busy. Thank goodness it was a three and three teaching load. We had about 120 majors roughly. Each course was about thirty, so it was manageable.

TS: What's your teaching load here?

VF: The normal teaching load is three and two for graduate faculty, but we have now in the PhD program a one-course release for anybody who is advising dissertations.

TS: I would hope so.

VF: So my teaching load right now is a two and two, three and one actually. I like to teach more in one semester, so I have time to travel and do research in the other semester.

TS: That's still a pretty heavy teaching load for a PhD program.

VF: It still is pretty heavy. I'm trying to get an additional course release for the spring because I've graduated a couple of PhD students. Normally, maybe colleagues are asked to be on two or three dissertations as advisors. I'm advising currently eight. It's becoming overwhelming.

TS: That's more than a course.

VF: Exactly. I think it would help me and it would help the students if I had a release.

TS: Sure, absolutely. You kept up your scholarship; you were still doing some research while you were at McDaniel College.

VF: Yes. Also, this was interesting. I had a conversation with Sean O'Keefe, and I said, "I got a job." "Congratulations." I said I really like what I do with this case program, and he said, "Well, why don't you stay on? How much time do you need for the cases?" I said, "Well, about fifteen or twenty hours." So he decided to pay me, and I stayed on until 2006 as case director. So for that program I developed over forty case studies and simulations. I did that.

TS: That was basically your scholarship while you were teaching at McDaniel?

VF: Yes, I also published articles and continued my research. It was very difficult, Tom, because when I came to McDaniel, a number of the more senior faculty that had been there a long time frowned upon research because they thought, "This takes you out of the classroom." They even frowned upon the fact that people would not live in the town—that you would commute for an hour.

TS: Oh, well, yes. We went through all this in the early days at Kennesaw.

VF: I would imagine you would remember these kinds of conversations.

TS: Absolutely.

VF: So it became clear to me after about two or three years, as much as I liked working with the students and as nice as McDaniel College is, basically, I would be doing the same thing for the next thirty years, and I would have colleagues who didn't do research. It was very difficult for me to relate to people about research, so I started looking for other opportunities where I could do more research.

TS: I've got you there from August '99 to July 2004, and then you go into consulting?

VF: No, I actually was at McDaniel College from '99 to 2009. I got tenured. In July 2004 I started as an associate professor.

TS: Oh right, through July 2009.

VF: The case studies and simulations I enjoyed doing so much that I started a company with a colleague to develop case studies and simulations.

TS: Oh, okay, principal of Two-Stone [LLC]. What did Two-Stone mean?

VF: It's interesting. I was looking at my son, who was maybe seven months or so and playing with balls. He couldn't juggle the balls, and I can't remember exactly what I did with him. My wife looked at me and said, "Leave him alone; he's not an Einstein yet." So because we were two people, I said, "Well, we translate this from the German, *ein stein* [one stone]. We'll call it Two-Stone because we're two people. Then we had a nice little story about that on the website. We received a nice contract with the Department of Energy.

TS: Oh, and you're still doing that, aren't you?

VF: No, not really. We started this in 2005, and in 2006 I moved to Germany. At that point I couldn't do anything else with Two-Stone.

TS: Oh, you take a leave of absence from McDaniel for two years.

VF: Yes.

TS: And you become senior fellow at the Bonn International Center for Conversion [BICC].

VF: Well, I actually went there and became director of research, so I directed the research at this peace research institute, which was very interesting because it was the first time really I wasn't in an applied field. They did lots of training—not just research, but they also did lots of training and reintegration of ex-combatants in Sudan to civil society—small arms training, educating people about small arms in conflict regions. This is something we overlook oftentimes. That was extremely interesting for me to see . . .

TS: Training them in small arms for . . .?

VF: Well, the safety to train them about, understand about gun cultures in different societies, to . . .

TS: Oh, not how to shoot the gun?

VF: No, train them how to maybe even live without guns or how to use guns responsibly. That was extremely interesting. It expanded my research focus.

TS: What does the name mean, by the way? Bonn International Center for Conversion.

- VF: That's very interesting. I went to conferences, and people would ask me, "What religion is this?"
- TS: What are you converting to?
- VF: Exactly. Well, the center was founded in 1994. The founding of the center goes back to a conference held in Dusseldorf, Germany in '91 or '92. Kofi Annan [secretary-general, United Nations, 1997 to 2006] attended the conference. The German president attended the conference, and the conference was about the peace dividend, what do we do about the peace dividend? Now that the Cold War is over, we've got all the military that we don't need any more. If you recall, at the same time in the United States, Dick Cheney as Secretary of Defense cut the defense budget by 40 percent.
- TS: Right. And this affects the local area because of the consolidations of the aircraft industry.
- VF: Precisely.
- TS: So we get Lockheed Martin.
- VF: The initial purpose of the center was to research how to convert these military structures to civilian usage. So that term [conversion], very unfortunate now, but at the time made sense. That's what they did, and they were very well funded. Like so many NGOs there's a purpose, there's funding, and at some point you complete the project or you need to find other work. They were branching out, doing some research on military weapons exports and on small arms. I had known about the institute for years. I actually contacted them and said, "I have a sabbatical coming up, would you like . . .?"
- TS: Oh, McDaniel had sabbaticals?
- VF: McDaniel had sabbaticals.
- TS: Well they're ahead of us.
- VF: Absolutely. So I had a sabbatical coming up—a typical standard sabbatical, a semester at full pay or a year at half pay. So immediately they said, "Absolutely." Why would they turn down free labor? So I went to Germany. I talked with them. I was all clear. We submitted a project proposal. Then in that summer of 2005 I saw an advertisement for the director of research at the Bonn International Center; so I applied. I had an interview, got the position, went to Germany [director of research, May 2006 to May 2008], and decided to take a leave of absence so everybody can figure it out.
- TS: Right, instead of a sabbatical you took a leave of absence?
- VF: Yes, instead of quitting the job at McDaniel and taking a job in Germany, I needed to see if the family fit in Germany, how was this job, and what is going on. So I said, "A leave of absence is good; two years here is good; and then we can figure it out if we want to stay longer."
- TS: You got a two-year leave of absence? To begin with it was a two-year leave of absence?

VF: Two-year leave of absence.

TS: That's great.

VF: That's wonderful. But the idea was that I would come in, and I would build the peace-building, conflict resolution topic area as a new topic area for this institute because they had to look for different funding sources because the conversion funding was running out. So I went, spent two wonderful years there, and for a variety of personal and professional reasons we decided in 2008 to return. I had asked McDaniel if they would extend my leave of absence for a year, and they said no. Either you come back or you leave here.

TS: They got tired of replacing you with temporary full-time faculty.

VF: Yes, and that's understandable. So we made the decision to return. But it was then also clear to me that I needed to look elsewhere. I want to do something other than just teaching.

TS: So you went back for one year after a two-year leave of absence.

VF: I was looking at several interviews. I had the interview here in 2009. Even though we didn't have a PhD program, my salary the first year was already paid out of the PhD budget. We had money, but we didn't have the program at the time.

TS: Were you hired here to direct the PhD program or were you hired here to teach political science before we had the program? Or is it complicated?

VF: Well, yes, actually it's not that easy. There were two positions that I applied for at Kennesaw State. One was the position of director of the PhD program in international policy management. The other one was a faculty position in international conflict. The director position never got filled because we didn't have a PhD program. The faculty position got filled, and I joined my colleagues in the master's program and taught mainly in the master's program in conflict management. When I talked with Dean Richard Vengroff, he said, "Yes, we want to build this PhD program, so you're the first hire for this program." Then in my first year we had a series of different workshops developing an outline of what it should be, developed a proposal, and the proposal was rejected by the Board of Regents.

TS: Georgia State wasn't happy.

VF: Precisely, because that's what they do. So we actually had to look and see, "Well, what do we do that they don't do?" Conflict management is an area that KSU is established in. The master's program was running for twelve years or ten years at the time. So we said, "Why don't we, instead of policy management, do international conflict management?" We submitted that proposal to the Board of Regents. They approved it on March 10, 2010. I had a conversation the Dean Vengroff and said, "Now we can start." He said, "Well, I think we should wait a year because it is now late in the academic year. We're not going to get students to start in August." I said, "What does it hurt? Let's advertise it; let's see what we get. We have money. We even have money for assistantships, and we have momentum." He said, "Okay, really, we don't have much to lose."

So we advertised this. The deadline was something like June 1 or June 15. Four people to start six weeks later. But we received over fifty applications. Some were really interesting, and so we admitted we had no idea. There was no PhD program at KSU. How many students do you admit? How large a cohort do you want? Well, we want ten students, we can fund ten students. Okay, so how many students do we need to accept in order to retain ten students? These are all questions that we have no history on and no institutional experience with. So we said, “Everybody who is good enough we will admit. We’ll admit some with funding—the best ones—and then we’ll admit some without funding, and we’ll see what happens. We admitted twenty-one students.

TS: Oh, wow. I didn’t realize it was that big.

VF: Of course, we had no idea. We admitted twenty-one students, and, lo and behold, all twenty-one agreed. So now we had a problem on our hands. What do we do with twenty-one students? Only a couple left. We had one student who was actually a full-time employee of KSU and just had a baby, and you can’t work forty hours and have a baby and be in a full time PhD program. Another student was working as an engineer for General Electric and had a lot of international travel and had to leave. But everybody else stayed.

TS: Well, now, as I recall, there were a lot of people from all over the world who signed up for that program.

VF: I think we still have more international students than Americans. It might be balancing out now. Of course, as an international student the only way to come to the United States is if you’re funded. I experienced that myself. You are required, to show for your visa that you have sufficient funds for tuition plus living expenses. Very few international students have \$30,000 or \$35,000, whatever it is now, that they have to show for.

TS: Oh tuition is that now?

VF: No, tuition is about half that, but then you add the standard living expenses for a given area. Then you add international tuition, which is always higher than in-state tuition, and that comes out to be over \$30,000. We’re providing a stipend to our students of \$15,000 and then whatever the tuition for them is, but that’s sufficient.

TS: Where does the stipend come from?

VF: Stipend comes from the program. At this point all the stipends come from the program.

TS: So this is state funding for the programs?

VF: Yes. I don’t know if you recall—this was before I came—that the Board of Regents decided that two additional universities should have PhD programs. Dean Vengorff explained to me that there was a very good chance that KSU, given the very rapid expansion, would be a good fit. They received the money, although this particular program had not been approved. The money was sitting there, so we could fund the students, and in our second year we hired three faculty members with joint appointments.

TS: How many faculty did you have to start with?

VF: I think, when we started, I was the only one funded through the program because my line was there. We had an internal search for the director position. Even if I hadn't received the director position, my faculty funding would have probably come out of the program budget. Fairly early on we had one colleague in political science maybe even before I started who asked for and received a joint appointment. Then we filled it with faculty members. We started the program with the first three classes. That's all we had. Then we developed the next three classes. You asked other people to teach, and you negotiated with the department chair because now that's a class they are not offering for the undergraduates. So it was quite interesting. Then in 2011 we had national and international searches for faculty members and brought in three faculty members. It's now running pretty smoothly. We now know who is teaching. We're always looking for additional people to teach. Now we can give back, so if I go to the department chair, and we say, "We would like this faculty member to teach a class. Oh, by the way, we have these PhD students who can fill that faculty member's undergraduate course." Then it's really a trade-off; it's a bargain. But initially it was really asking for good will. So yes.

TS: You were founding director for about two and a half years, weren't you?

VF: Correct.

TS: Did you get tired of doing it after that time?

VF: Well, there were a number of personal reasons and a number programmatic reasons. Let me preface this, going back to BICC. When I was in Germany, I realized the people coming from universities with master's degrees and interns who are in their master's programs had a lot of theoretical knowledge, but they had no or very few applied skills. Then your people who are trainers, who do these trainings in Liberia and Sudan and Colombia and where ever we did them, had very little research interest or experience. What I've always found interesting is now you're doing this training, and you have access to ex-combatants for a week. Speaking from a research perspective, there is immense data to be collected. But nobody collects it. So we could know a lot more about the conflict and what's going on if we simply talked to them.

The trainers there who are training eight to ten hours a day can't do it. So I interviewed for a position in Germany, and in preparation for the interview, I developed the idea of an applied PhD program. When we developed the PhD program here, I already had a lot of things conceptualized in my head. I think part of what happened—we could even see it after two and a half years—the program was very much connected with me personally. I think that is wonderful to start something with. At some point, shortly after, it could have become a liability to just look at one person's vision. We needed to expand it a little bit. There were also some off the record issues.

[Two-minute break]

TS: We're picking up again after about a two minute break. So you're still a professor of conflict management. Maybe, I ought to just ask you. I meant to ask it earlier. What was it that attracted you to Kennesaw State in the first place?

VF: I saw the job ad for this director position that never happened, and this is the kind of position I was looking for. I was director of research, and, surprisingly to myself, I actually enjoyed administration to some extent. I saw the position, and building something new, I thought, would be fascinating. So I applied. Then when I received the e-mail for a phone interview, I had to, like most people, say, “Did I apply there? Where is Kennesaw State?” I look it up, and then I realized, “Oh, my old buddy, Tim [Timothy K.] Hedeem, is here.

TS: Oh, you knew Tim?

VF: We were both at Maxwell. We would often hang out in the public graduate bar. We would often, a few times, see each other mountain biking. There were a group of people, so we knew each other, not well, but we knew each other.

TS: I was wondering why I knew the name Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs, and it’s from Tim.

VF: That’s probably why, exactly. So, yes, I had a very good phone interview. I was invited to come down here, and this is what I have done ever since. If people don’t know Kennesaw I say, “Well, bring them here. There’s a lot of energy. There’s a lot of enthusiasm. It’s a new, still fairly new, university. It’s new in spirit, and there’s a can-do attitude.” It’s been subdued the last two or three years. I think consolidation put brakes on a lot of innovation. It’s going to come back.

TS: Brakes on innovation?

VF: Yes. I think there are lots of programs . . .

TS: Because energy is going other ways?

VF: Because we need to figure out this consolidation first, and it absorbed people’s energy, time.

TS: Has that affected conflict management, the consolidation?

VF: I think so, yes. We have the idea . . .

TS: Because everybody’s got to be on committees?

VF: Well, that too, but we had an idea of a school of conflict management. We had this idea when Dean Vengroff was still dean [2006-2012]. The idea was to bring together the PhD program, the master’s program, and the center for conflict management. We were all doing things that are related, but there was no school of conflict management, which is a niche and an area that KSU is known for. It’s making itself more known for, yet if someone says to call conflict management, you can’t. There is no central number. So we thought if we centralize it, build a school of conflict management, we also can situate that entity for fund-raising purposes. This idea is about three or four years old. With consolidation, Dean Robert H. “Robin” Dorff and other people said, “Hold off. We’re not doing anything new. Let’s figure out first this consolidation, how this shakes out and what we’re doing.” So our move to bring together the three programs, if you will, into

one building, the Math and Statistics Building, just this semester is a precursor to what's going to happen. We're consolidating conflict management. So I think that it affected if not directly at least indirectly not what we're doing, but maybe the speed with which we're doing it.

TS: That's interesting to me in part because I'm trying to write a history of the consolidation now.

VF: Good luck with that!

TS: Well, I've got a bunch of interviews with people leaving Southern Poly.

VF: I can imagine. I think that would be good for the university. I think it's going to be good for conflict management. But for new ideas you've got to get the president's ear, and the president's ear was—well, the president was very much focused for this and football.

TS: Blame it on football.

VF: Football is now running, and it is better than we had expected.

TS: The first two games were good.

VF: Exactly.

TS: Well, my question originally was what attracted you here, and you gave a very good answer to that, but that's interesting that maybe we got sidetracked for a couple of years away from creativity when the campus went into consolidation instead of new programs.

VF: Well, I think it went to sleep a little bit, but I think it's going to come back. Not only re-energized, but maybe even more forcefully.

TS: I think we made the case for the PhD program that there wasn't anything else like it in Georgia. How unique is a PhD program in international conflict management anywhere in the country?

VF: Very. At the time when we proposed it to the Board of Regents, there were three other PhD programs in North America. Probably the most well-established is at George Mason. There was one at Nova Southeastern [University] in Florida. And there was one at the University of Manitoba in Canada. Those were the only PhD programs in conflict management. Even the Maxwell School that has a big reputation in conflict resolution only has a master's. You can do conflict resolution, but you would then do it with your PhD in social science like Tim did or political science or sociology. You still get a disciplinary PhD focusing on conflict management. I think there is now a PhD at Notre Dame. The Kroc family has endowed the conflict resolution program at Notre Dame [in Peace Studies]. They also endowed I think a peace studies program at the University of San Diego. It may even be a school of peace studies [Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies]. So there are now more programs coming up, but when I go to conferences of specialists in peace and conflict studies, people are starting to recognize Kennesaw State. "Oh, you're there; oh, they're doing this program; oh, this is very nice and very interesting." When we started, the way I had tried to design it was also very different

from other PhD programs, focusing on applied skills, not just methods and theory. We developed a number of courses that were applied.

TS: Right. Is the goal of the program to turn out academics or to turn out people that are going to go back to their countries and work for government agencies or a combination of both?

VF: Both. Most of our experience when we got our PhD was that the PhD prepares you to be what your professor was, right? The whole idea at Syracuse was a little more advanced, I think, than other universities. When I started, we had a future professoriate project that the Maxwell School received funding for. We went through TA [teaching assistant] training. I received at graduation a certificate of university teaching. While most other people at the time did their PhD and then were thrown in the classroom, we were actually trained to be teachers. What we wanted to do here was we wanted to prepare students for regular academic settings, but to also go to NGOs [non-governmental organizations] or government international organizations and work for them.

I always told students that, “I will accept a program evaluation with a theory chapter as a dissertation”—which is a little bit different. But I’ll say, “If that’s what you want to do, and you’re looking for academic jobs, you’re not going to get them with that [dissertation]. But if you want to do government, they don’t need a 250 or 300 page diatribe on some philosophical, theoretical dilemma. If you can show that you can do independent research by doing a program evaluation, that’s much more useful for marketing purposes, but you need to know where you are.” We still have conversations about this where we might at some point take the program into tracks where we have maybe more an applied track and maybe more of an academic track, if that’s what you want to call it.

TS: Okay. So you’ve continued to do a lot of case studies since you’ve been here. It’s an incredible number. I think it’s like three in a year or so, wasn’t it, that you’ve done recently? I also noticed that you’ve done some scholarship with Robin Dorff. I understand that you may have had something to do with him coming here as the dean.

VF: I have known Robin for more than fifteen years. Robin became one of my outside mentors. It was very interesting. I have known of Robin when I was at NC State because Robin Dorff was at NC State. He was political science, and I was working with him. I was working for Syracuse University developing case studies, and there was a conference. I cornered Robin after a panel—he had already left NC State and was at the Army War College—in an attempt to sell case studies to him. In other words, I said, “I want to talk to you. I’m developing these case studies for the National Security Studies program”—which he was familiar with. “These case studies ought to be used by different DOD entities. You’re at the Army War College. Are you interested?”

So we had a long conversation about this, and one thing led to another. In 2002 Robin had asked me if I wanted to come to the Army War College as a visiting professor. I said, “Absolutely.” We had already worked out the details for me to at that point take a leave of absence. It would have been very easy for me to do. It’s about an hour drive from where we were living at the time. Then he called me and said, “I’m sorry; we can’t hire

you.” I said, “Why not?” “You’re a foreign citizen. After 9/11 we cannot get clearance for any internationals.” Prior to 9/11 they had plenty of internationals on the faculty. After 9/11 the only way to get clearance was to be a citizen and renounce your initial citizenship. I said, “I’m not going to do that.”

So we had this very close working relationship. We would meet at conferences and have dinner together and talk about this. I was telling him about my career and my ideas. A few years later he became one of the outside people to write recommendations for me when I applied for jobs. When I was in Germany I invited him to come to Germany and give a talk. He always likes to go to German. His family is still in Germany. So it’s a good excuse to stop in Cologne and visit them. Then, fast-forward a little bit. I said, “Robin I want to talk to you about a job offer. I have this job offer from Kennesaw State University. What do you think?” He started thinking, and he said, “You know what? Isn’t that where my good friend Dan Papp is president?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Oh, yes, well, if he is president, you can go there.” So fast-forward another couple of years. We’re now in the process of submitting the proposal for the PhD program to the Board of Regents, and I’m talking to Rich Vengroff. He says, “Well, we need to have outside letters of support for the PhD program. Who would you recommend?” I recommended the director of this other PhD program in Manitoba whom I went to graduate school with. I recommended a fellow named Louis Kriesberg who was one of the founders of conflict resolution. He was the first director of the program on analysis and the resolution of conflict at the Maxwell School. Then I recommended Robin Dorff.

I talked to Robin and I said, “Robin, I wanted to let you know I put your name forward. Would you be willing to do this?” He said, “I’ve got good news and bad news. No! I can’t do a support letter for the program.” I said, “Okay, why?” He said, “Well, that’s the bad news.” The good news is independently he had been asked by the Board of Regents to evaluate the proposal as opposed to support the program. President Papp needed to submit, I imagine, names of evaluators, and I’m sure that Robin was on that list. So I said, “That’s even better. You go forth and evaluate.”

We had a year, maybe a year and a half into the program, and the program was running. Dean Vengroff invited Robin to come back and evaluate the program with another colleague from the University of Connecticut. My idea was to develop a number of one-credit-hour courses that would be taught on a weekend that are skills based. I would bring in international experts to teach these classes because we don’t have the expertise on campus necessarily. I’ve brought in people to teach classes on how to use games in simulations for conflict management. I brought in somebody to do a program on reintegration of ex-combatants, a former colleague who did reintegration training. And I brought in Robin Dorff to teach a one-hour course on strategic decision making.

TS: Oh, he had taught here? I didn’t realize that.

VF: Yes, just that one-credit hour course.

TS: The gaming ought to fit in very well with our consolidation with Southern Poly.

VF: Oh, yes.

TS: Big program.

VF: So I talked with Robin about the academic engagement program at the Army War College. This is the idea that the DOD wants to partner with civilian universities. It started this, and so I submitted a proposal for a symposium. This is the one where I wanted to invite Sean O’Keefe. Robin was then, I guess, the institutional sponsor at the Army War College. We worked on putting this symposium together. We worked on the second symposium in 2012 together, and we published the papers from these symposia as well. That’s our joint scholarship. Then, unfortunately, sequestration put a stop on the symposia. This was one of those one year plus four options contracts, but sequestration stopped all of them. So we couldn’t do the symposia since. Sequestration also—the Army War College still is on the BRAC [Defense Base Closure and Realignment] list.

TS: Oh it is? I didn’t realize that.

VF: Well, they always make it, but they’re always on the BRAC list. When I learned that Rich [Vengroff] was retiring and the position was open, I said, “Robin, the dean’s position is open. You know the dean; you know the university; you know Dan Papp. Why don’t you apply?” He thought about it, and he applied. I think what attracted him was that he knew the university, and this is exactly what I mentioned earlier. You can talk about Kennesaw State until the cows come home with very little effect, but people set foot on campus, and it’s very different. You feel that this is different from other universities. I think he had that feeling. He thoroughly enjoyed working with the PhD students in the class. One, maybe two, PhD students asked for him to serve on their committees. So he got drawn in and really like it and said, “This is a wonderful place, and I want to apply.” Now we have him.

TS: Exactly. One of the main purposes of this interview is to talk about your scholarship because that’s what you got the award in this year. We’ve talked about some of your work early in the interview, but there’s a lot more than we haven’t talked about. I wonder if we could jump into some of the things that you’ve been writing about and some interesting theories? I think it’s really neat about our programs at Kennesaw, whether it’s the Doctor of Business Administration or the PhD program in conflict management, that faculty are doing papers with their students. You have certainly done that. I know you got a recent article with Rebecca LeFebvre, and she did an interesting dissertation that I guess you directed, “Deciding to Fight: A Cross-Cultural Comparative Study of Decision-Making in Conflict Situations.”

VF: Well, let me say a little bit about that. I actually enjoy very much working with students. I have also published with undergraduates at McDaniel, but it’s very difficult to publish with undergraduates because the process from conceptualization to publication of a project takes a year and a half to two years. Undergraduates, by the time they are ready actually to engage in research in my experience are at least usually juniors if not seniors. It is very difficult for them to complete a project while they’re still in college, so I’ve started a number of projects that never went anywhere because the student graduated before we could actually get there. Now I see my role as a PhD faculty member as developing my students into independent researchers. I will continue to do my scholarship, but I have decided to scale down my own scholarship and work more with

students because I think I have shown that I can do independent research. Now I think I want to give back to the students and mentor them. If it's a joint publication, it still needs to be something I am interested in. I am developing a number of new research areas, and I'm doing this on purpose. I'm bringing students into it—forming a number of research clusters; so we develop ideas together. I think that's a very interesting and rewarding process that I just started in the spring of last year.

TS: I notice that you did an article, “Culture Matters: [Individualism vs. Collectivism in Conflict Decision-Making, with Rebecca LeFebvre, *Societies*, 3, 2013, 128-46].” As I understand it, I guess one of the major conclusions was that people coming out of an individualistic culture are a lot more flexible, more compromising, and more willing to come to a solution than people whose identity is all tied up with a group.

VF: Yes, that's true because a group influences more their attitudes and their behaviors. At the same time, it might be more conflictual to the individualists. This research comes out of Becky's dissertation study. The underlying assumption that we always make is individual rationality—everybody makes decisions the same way according to the rational actor model—cost benefit analysis and self-interest. So we wanted to see . . .

TS: But that's not always the case.

VF: That's not always the case. If we compare individualistic cultures like the United States to more collectivist cultures—she used Ghana, so we looked at African culture and we look at China. We predicted there's a difference in how decisions are made because of the collectivist nature or individualist nature of the culture. That's why culture matters. We did find this.

TS: Did you give a questionnaire to people or how did you measure it?

VF: We did this in a quasi-experiment—a scenario that Becky developed for her dissertation. She would ask a number of decision questions. In the labor dispute story, if you are that person in the story, what would you decide? Would you protest? There are dilemmas in the story.

TS: Sounds like a case study then.

VF: Precisely. Becky has taken my case writing course here. In one of my books I published it. It was such a good case that it was worth publishing. So the idea is you give this scenario to students. She went to Ghana and gave it to students, and she gave it to students here in the US at KSU. If the rational actor model is correct, you shouldn't see any differences in the decisions. But we saw differences. Collectivist cultures decide differently. They feel more peer pressure; they feel more group pressure; they're more concerned, I think, with reputation of the peer group. So that affects their thinking and their decision thinking. That's basically her dissertation. She wrote it extremely fast—from zero to finishing in less than three years with a background that has nothing to do with political science or conflict resolution. That's very admirable.

TS: I noticed also that you've done a lot of work with private security contractors that are, I guess, going into war zones. It parallels what you found out when you went to West

Point and found that maybe some of the colonels were more open-minded than you thought. It sounds like you challenged some of the stereotypes about private security contractors.

VF: Yes, I think so. I would really have to talk about this also in terms of the limitations of the research. The assumption is private security contractors, at least the ones that run around with weapons, are like Rambo. They look for adventure; they look for violence; they look for a good time. They are similar to what historically we consider mercenaries. Guns for hire. A lot of the research that has been done on security contractors—and this is now going back about six or seven years ago when I did the research—claims that they fit the stereotype. Yet, I didn't find any research that actually really asked the security contractors. A lot of the research was anecdotal, and obviously a lot of the research was done in such a way that it sells and that you get notoriety with headlines. But that's what you found in the literature. I said, "Let's see if it's actually the case." It's extremely difficult to get access, and I got access only to an alumni organization of former contractors that [took] the survey. I found that about half of them, maybe a little more than half, had military experience, and their attitudes were not that different from American soldiers' attitudes. They were not there primarily to make money.

TS: They weren't?

VF: They were not. They were not there to fight and to think that that's cool and to seek adventure. They were there because they wanted to do some good, and they wanted to support the United States. It is maybe a little simplified now, but I found certainly disconfirming evidence from what most of the books and the headlines were telling us. Now I have to say the caveat is that this was a sample of security contractors who were in police-like functions and most of whom came from the police. I tried to do a larger study, and I could have gotten funding for a larger study, but I did not get the access from the security companies that I needed. The major security companies refused to talk with me. These are the only findings we have on attitudes, as far as I know, about security contractors, but I couldn't do more because I was denied access. If you can't talk to them, you can't talk to them. Active security contractors, at least at the time, were prohibited by their contract with the State Department to talk to anybody about what they were doing. That was very frustrating. I think it was one of the most frustrating experiences, and I spent a good two years on this project. I wanted to extend it. I had an organization that might have funded it, but I couldn't even put a proposal together because I couldn't get the access.

TS: Sure. Why don't you talk about some of the other projects you've been doing with PhD students here?

VF: In terms of their dissertation?

TS: Yes.

VF: Or in terms of their joint research or both.

TS: Both.

- VF: I am actually very open to students' research. I explained this earlier. I am most interested in working with students who bring their own experiences and their own biography to their project. It needs to be a project that I am a little bit familiar with at least part of the literature—but then it's unfortunately too easy to convince me to help the student. That's why I'm sitting here [directing] eight dissertations, and I'm serving on three more dissertation committees as a member, so it's a little much. But the projects range from a student who graduated last year looking at the use of security contractors and the conceptions of security in South Africa. We conducted interview with very high-ranking former members of the South African government.
- TS: I may have met him at one point before I retired. Has he been here that long?
- VF: He was one of the first cohort of students that started in 2010, so I'm sure you met him.
- TS: Yes. He came by my office to talk for some reason.
- VF: I worked with another student—and this may show you what I mean by their biography as part of their research. This was a female student from Romania who served for sixteen to eighteen years in the Romanian military. For part of her training she went, I want to say, for two months to the George C. Marshall [European] Center [for Security Studies] in Garmisch, Germany. It was a center that was established about twenty years ago primarily to develop partnerships with Eastern Europe. The former Soviet Union helped Eastern European militaries democratize. So she went to that. To make a long story short, she left the military, came to the United States, and married an American Air Force colonel. When this program came along, she was actually teaching at KSU in the sociology department.
- TS: What's her name?
- VF: Eliza Markley. She started the PhD program with the first cohort. We started talking about projects, and she saw an article where she wanted to do something on social capital and building social capital among immigrants. We talked, and I said, "Well, that's all fine, Eliza, but you have twenty years of military experience. Why don't you do military?" She thought about it, and a couple of weeks later she brought in an article that talked exactly about that. The argument was that the reason the military in Egypt did not come down and crush the demonstrations in Tahrir Square (this was right after the Arab Spring) was that officers serving in the Egyptian military were trained in American war colleges. I said, "That's social capital for you." She looked at it, and she got excited about this. She did her dissertation at the George Marshall Center to look at how the George Marshall Center builds social capital in the military. That was such a successful dissertation ["Building Social Capital in the Military: A Study at George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies," 2014] that she is now contracted by the Marshall Center to do an evaluation of their whole curriculum, their alumni survey of what the alumni feel and so on. This is equivalent to a full-time job, which she started, I think, in November of last year going to November this year. She has to evaluate the entire program. She has been travelling five or six times to Germany to conduct interviews and so on. Those are the kinds of projects that I'm interested in.

Now I have a student working on forgiveness—why do some people forgive and others not. I have a student working on the effects of digital technology cell phones on our responsibilities to protect others. The idea that genocide is happening somewhere—do decision-makers feel more compelled to respond because there's more pressure by the public through social media, for instance. I am working with one student who is finishing soon who did a photo-voice-project in Clarkston, right down the way, on how refugees integrated into the community through photos. They had to take photos, and then they have to explain the photos and the meaning of the photos in discussions. It was a very interesting project. I just looked last week at a draft of her dissertation, and it's almost completed.

I'm working with a student who is a chief from a village in Ghana who wants to look at land disputes in Ghana. I've visited Ghana once or twice a year for the last five years, and so I feel a very close connection and a passion for the country and land reform and land security. While that is not really my topic, I'm very interested because I have so many contacts in that country. I have another Ghanaian student who is working to examine conceptions of justice as they affect the reintegration process after conflict. He is right now in Liberia, has been for a couple of weeks, and will be there another week or two, to do interviews and collect data on how that reintegration process is working and what people think justice is. So a whole range of projects, right? I personally have an interest in digital technology and conflict. I'm starting that—the one student project I just mentioned. But to me, the smart phone is probably the most important invention for democracy in the last hundred years.

TS: It seems like it recently doesn't it?

VF: Exactly. You read an article, and you're baffled by the outcome. I read an article a couple of years ago in the leading political science journal, *The American Political Science Review*, where a couple of researchers did quantitative analysis of cell phone subscriptions and cell phone penetration and conflict in West Africa. They concluded that cell phones promote conflict.

TS: Promote?

VF: Promote. They saw cell phone subscriptions and level of conflicts going up at the same time. This was published, as I said, by the leading journal in political science. I looked at this, and I said, "How can this be published? This is methodologically so flawed. If you have an increase in subscriptions and an increase in conflict, you may have a correlation, but you cannot prove causation." They were missing a number of other factors. They were looking at controlling factors like gender in terms of subscriptions. They were looking at factors like terrain, so if you live in the rural areas with mountains, you have less signal strength. If you live in an urban area you have a lot more signal strength. So you should see more effect there. But they missed the most important variable when it comes to conflict in Africa, and that is age. Typically, younger societies, younger people, are more conflictual than older people. Africa is young. It has fifty-four countries that are all young societies, particularly post-war societies. I think in Rwanda the average age is under twenty. So if you have a lot of young people, you have more conflict, and they need to look at that.

The other issue is that cell phone penetration doesn't tell you anything because what I know having travelled there many times is the head of the household usually has the subscription, and that's a man. So your gender comparison may be skewed. Similarly, you don't know if the person who subscribes also uses the phone. The kids may use the phone. What are people using cell phones for? Do they call their husband to pick up food from the market? Do they make dates for the evening? Do they talk about political issues? We don't know that, so we had submitted a proposal to the National Science Foundation to do a survey and interviews and ask how do people in developing countries actually use their cell phones. I formed this cluster on digital technology and conflict. I brought some students together. The student who works on responsibility for Tech came in. I've had a couple of exchange students from Germany in the spring who participated.

In our new cohort there's one PhD student in particular who is very interested in government control of social media. So there is an interest now in coming together. Something that is missing still at Kennesaw State University that more established research universities have is a culture of research and a culture of academic exchange. My attempt at clusters is to bring together people who have at least some interest in similar topics to discuss these topics and then hopefully encourage each other, spark ideas, spark discussion, and develop basically an academic culture as part of this program.

TS: Right. Do you see yourself staying at Kennesaw for a career? You seem to be excited about a lot of things that are happening here. But as you just pointed out, we've still got a long way to go in some areas.

VF: Well, we do, but I think the positive on that is that the university provides an environment where you can attempt to do that. I know I'm not answering your question . . .

TS: No, you are.

VF: I have no idea. I don't know what the future holds; nobody does. At this point I think there's a lot of potential here. I know from my experience that I always want to do new things. I want to be stimulated. For as long as I'm in a stimulating environment, I don't see a lot of reason to leave. That explains part of the reason for leaving McDaniel College. I was teaching the same classes. At that time in the early 2000s for me the outlook to do the same thing for thirty years was not too compelling. That's a wonderful institution. I would highly recommend it to students. I think the faculty is wonderful, very caring, very capable, but it just wasn't the right fit. I wanted to go somewhere else, at this point, particularly with a PhD program and the PhD students to keep me on my toes. It's very exciting to work with them. It's very exciting to see them grow. I think that's what I mentioned earlier, Tom. I think I'm shifting a little bit from the researcher who is most interested in output to the mentor. I don't think it matters that much for me whether I published one, two, or three articles a year. I'd rather invest the time in building the potential among students and then publishing with them. The alternative would be I would lock my door and develop my own next research agenda, and I'm not interested in that. Right now I see this as the most exciting and the most fruitful endeavor for the future, at least the near future.

TS: Great. Well, is there anything that you wanted to talk about that we haven't covered yet?

VF: I can't think of what we haven't covered, really. What I would say is as you're transcribing and reading and reflecting, you can send me questions. I'm happy to sit down for another thirty minutes at some point if there's something you want to flesh out. Or after this, if you're thinking about it and you have additional questions, we can meet.

TS: Well, great, thank you very much.

VF: You're most welcome.

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