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INTERVIEW WITH DR. JEROME RATCHFORD

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PART I (2011) CONDUCTED BY MIA RICCIO AND SHANTINA STARKS

EDITED BY MIA RICCIO AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

PART II (2015) CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

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MR: First of all, we want to get started with where you are from and where you grew up.

JR: Okay, I always like talking about that. I'm proudly from the state of Kentucky. I'm from Southeastern Kentucky. For some of those who don't know about the state of Kentucky, the Southeastern constitutes the mountainous area where coal mining occurs. My father was a coal miner. He went into the bowels of the mountains and the coal mines to secure coal. My hometown was founded in the 1920s by a major corporation, United States Steel, to obtain coal in order to manufacture steel. It didn't exist before this time, although as children it seemed as if it had existed for thousands of years. Ownership by United States Steel, a prominent Fortune 500 company at that particular time, was a blessing in some instances and a short fall in others. It was a blessing because the standard of living was very, very good. It was a curse because United States Steel owned everything and consequently could control the miners' lives.

My father is from Alabama and my mother Louisiana. They met in Kentucky in a place called Lynch, Kentucky, which is my hometown. Coal mining, though very, very dangerous, was rewarding economically. So, I grew up in a middle class environment for black people at that particular time, and had a good education. I'm a first generation college graduate. My father and my mother instilled the importance of education and the opportunities it could bring. This was a tradition in my hometown. My father did not want me to do what he did, and I was somewhat indulged in terms of having provisions and material things. I didn't have to do what he did. I had some choices and was fortunate enough to go to college. My mother was very influential in me going to college. I really didn't have an orientation toward college. But, wisely, she thought that was what I should do once I graduated from high school.

I graduated from high school when I was really young. I was only 16 years old. I actually started college right upon turning 17. Fortunately, the particular school that I attended was a satellite branch of the University of Kentucky, and most of us started out with some of the same deficiencies, if you will. Our experience constituted the first time that education was desegregated in Southeastern Kentucky. I finished at the University of Kentucky in Lexington with a Baccalaureate degree. Incidentally, that degree was in history and political science, and that's why I'm enjoying talking to you guys. Later, I got a Master's

Degree from Indiana University in Counseling and Guidance. I went to Bowling Green State University in Ohio and got a PhD in Educational Leadership. I've been married for 33 years and proud of that. My wife is from Florida. I have two children and three grandchildren.

SS: We had actually done some research, so we saw that you went to Kentucky, and it was worded kind of funny, so we weren't sure what your major was at Kentucky. But what made you choose those?

JR: Oh, you did? Good question. As a first-generation college student, I knew nothing about majors or credits or any of those things. My first major was just something that I heard about. I really didn't have the skill set or the interest to pursue that particular major. But, fortunately for me, I started taking history and political science courses. I loved history and still do today. I was very good in history. The subject discovered me in a sense. So, once I found out that I enjoyed those courses, the more courses that I took the more interested I became in the area.

As far as counseling and guidance are concerned, I had a mentor who was working on a graduate degree in the area, and I liked what he was doing. I actually got a job as a counselor before I finished my masters. I served as a counselor in what was called an Urban Job Corps Center in Indiana. It was a very, very good experience and definitely my calling. So, to make a long story short, I started serving as a counselor before I got the formal education completed, and I loved it. I did complete my master's while serving as a counselor. The only transition I made was to leave Job Corps and to go into higher education.

I always knew that I would love working in higher education. And, that's basically what I've done. Once I transitioned from Job Corps, I've been in higher education since. I love it. It's not the most lucrative area to work in, but, sometimes, careers aren't about how much money you make. I guess I learned it early because I never deviated from higher education. But I've talked to people who chose careers and professions based upon the money or other extenuating circumstances, and they haven't been happy even though they've made a whole lot more money. I have been happy in higher education. I love working with young people. I love being around young people. And, just to finish the whole story on my career path and choices, I realized later that I wanted one day to be more than a practitioner and to be positioned to influence policy development and decision-making in a higher education setting. That's why I decided to then go back to school and get my doctorate in Educational Leadership. So, what I'm doing now has me coming full circle, in that, I'm in a field that incorporates counseling, working with young people, and leadership in a higher education environment.

SS: So, would you say that the entire time you were in college you were planning for this career, this job?

JR: Not quite as scientific as that. I'm not that type of person. I will say this, and this is maybe my own idea about things. You do want to plan, but there are some things that you can't plan scientifically. A self-discovery process isn't always bad. You know, sometimes things find you. Sometimes you practically find things. Okay? I think you need a little bit of both, because I think you need a little flexibility. The more rigid you are, the more difficult I think it is to deal with obstacles and difficulties. Whereas, if you're a little flexible, I think sometimes you can better adjust. On the other hand, if you don't have a plan, then you don't have a sense of direction either. So, I think you have to find a balance somewhere there.

I'm my case that's what has occurred. I indicated how I got into counseling. I didn't proactively know counseling was the field I was going to pursue. I was a tad more proactive and predictable with the leadership part. At that time, I was a little older as a professional. I understood how organizations worked, particularly higher education. I knew there was a pyramid structure that exists in higher education that exists everywhere. The further up the pyramid the more influential you are in determining and influencing the direction that an organization takes. So, my career path wasn't totally scientific or planned. There was some predictability and some pro-activeness with some aspects of it, and trial and error with others.

MR: So, was there anything in your childhood that influenced you? I know you said you didn't have a clear direction of where you wanted to go when you entered college. But, do you think there was anything in your childhood that influenced you in that?

JR: Absolutely, absolutely! So many things—parents first of all. I had loving, caring, attentive, and fair-minded parents. I've done a lot of reflecting on why I don't have some of the problems from an intercultural perspective that some people have. I have said recently to some people, and this is not bragging, but I didn't have to unlearn as many things as the average person has to unlearn about relationships, particularly intercultural relationships. And, that's because my parents were open and receptive to all people. Okay? And they did that in a context and time when prejudging and hating would have been somewhat justified. But, that wasn't the case with them. I often think about a disabled person in my hometown who frequently would walk a good distance to come and visit my mother. I think she suffered with cerebral palsy. I think about it now. At that time I didn't know what it was, but it was very noticeable. And, I remember how easy it was for us to relate, that she was my mother's friend. I remember not understanding when kids would ask, "What is she doing in your house? What's wrong with her?" So, this is how my parents related to those who were different. They made no exceptions!!! My parents were very, very instrumental in the development of my temperament and career choices.

The church and the segregated school I attended were instrumental as well. My school was very self-empowering. It was very complimentary of us, so I didn't

suffer with any negative self-concept or anything of that sort. But, obviously, there were differences in terms of resources, when you compare segregated schools with white ones. To whatever extent I needed change from what was occurring in the school or some additional outlet, the church was able to provide. I'm a believer, also, that as you present yourself and as you live your life and presumably live it in a positive kind of manner, that the law of attraction brings good people to you. Throughout my life I've had good people to be drawn into my experiences.

I will mention one person that was really instrumental. I was in, I guess, my first year of college, and I did very, very well. Our college was a new institution, an extension of the University of Kentucky, in a kind of remote area. After the first year a lot of the kids were on probation and a lot of kids got dismissed. I wasn't one of them. But my father got ill and there was a question about whether or not I would be able to return. A former teacher of mine, a high school teacher, Mrs. Sarah Hatch, found out that there was a possibility that I may not return to college because of finances. She came to my home and sat down with my mother and father and said that whatever money they needed for me to stay in school, she would provide. And she provided it. So, with this frame of reference I am compelled to help other people in my life. So, it's been a clarion call for me to always be there for other people to the extent that I could be. You get a chance to do that a lot in higher education when you're dealing with younger people.

MR: When you graduated, and maybe when you were doing your PhD, what were you doing before you came to Kennesaw?

JR: Okay, I was a full time academician. I was teaching at a small school in Jefferson City, Missouri. The school was called Lincoln University. I taught graduate level courses there, courses that enabled graduates in the school system to become principals or to become master teachers. So, that's what I did before coming here to KSU.

MR: When did you get to KSU?

JR: I got here in 1988. I've been here a long time [chuckles]. I've said that quite a lot the last 2 or 3 years. I've been here 23 years, which makes me sort of a senior member of the administration here at Kennesaw. I had my experience with teaching, and I liked it a lot, but my foundation and my tradition had really been in college student personnel work and administration. So, when my wife and I decided to return to Atlanta, they had a position that was a real, real good fit for me here at Kennesaw. I came here actually working with minority students. At that time, most of the minority students were black students. So, for all intents and purposes, I worked with black students, but also international students as well. I'll never forget how many black students were here and the percentage they constituted. There was like 270 black students that were here in 1988, slightly over 3 percent. Now, that population is nearing about 15 percent of an overwhelming population of 23,400 plus students.

Upon coming here and for about two years I served in that capacity. Then, I was asked by the vice president at that particular time, if I would head a department that they wanted to create. That department was called Student Development. I don't know that you guys know anything about it, but it was a uniquely formed department in that all of the populations that were presumed to need specialized attention were grouped under that department. When I say all of the populations, I'm talking about adult learners, students over the age of 25, international students, minority students, and disabled students as well. And VKSU (Volunteer Kennesaw State) was placed under that department as well. It was unique because most colleges have some type of outreach to those different populations, but very few did it under one rubric, under one department. So, that department I started and served as the chair for probably over 16 years. Subsequently, I became the dean of students and later vice president.

I had to build that department, and from a diversity and inclusion perspective it became one of the most influential departments on campus, because of the range of students we served. And nothing was done exclusively within that department. Meaning that the center for adult learners did not exclude students who were younger from participating. Or, if you were not a minority student, you could still participate in all services. To do otherwise would be counterproductive and ridiculous. So everything was open to anyone. While you have to engage in specialized programming in order to serve traditionally neglected populations, you can most of the time do it in an inclusive way. You want to promote learning of the experiences of these neglected populations.

SS: So, you would say that the hierarchy would be Student Success, and then Student Development is up under Student Success?

JR: That's right. That's exactly right. Student Development is one of nine departments under the Division of Student Success. I don't know if you guys know anything about registered student organizations (RSOs). They are served under the Department of Student Life. Are you guys in the student center much? Do you know the Carmichael Student Center?

SS: I go to Chick-Fil-A and the bookstore. [laughs]

JR: Okay, on the second floor of the new [1999] addition, on the other side from the dining area, is a department called Student Life. Everything on the new side is under this division. All of those organizations are on the top floor. I don't know whether you know about International Global Society, Student Government Association, KAB, etc. I'm looking at you guys and you're thinking, "I don't know anything about those groups" (laughs).

MR: No, the only thing I know is the Greek Life had their cubicles up there

JR: That's all under Student Success. And, some other departments as well: Career Services, the whole recreation center, residential life, counseling and testing, and

Center for Student Leadership as well. Also judiciary when problems emerge with students. So, it's a large division.

MR: So you said that they wanted you to head up the department. Was that when it was first created?

JR: Yes, I was the first. It started with me assuming the leadership.

MR: Is there any one program that you feel most connected to, or you feel you're proudest of?

JR: Yes, I have to be honest. And this is not a bias on my part, but Student Development is very close to my heart and all of the programming that has emerged. There's so many programs that have emerged from the unit that I could actually think of one for each of the populations served. Like, for example, international students. They have an international feast that's a part of international week, where they expose students and faculty and staff to various cuisines from their respective countries. The turnout is amazing!!! We just had that not too long ago. Students love it, and everybody loves it. So, that stands out for me in their perspective.

With adult learners, there are quite a few programs as well. When I first got here non-traditional students (over 25) were in a majority, but still systemically we were more a traditional campus. For example, student government and the group that planned activities thought of things that young people wanted to do, not what somebody 35 or 40 wanted to do. I remember they would show movies, and they would always be contemporary movies, which doesn't always relate well to older students. So adult learners were able to convince the young people, why not create a series that highlighted Disney movies and would relate to parents and kids. Consequently, they started a "Disney Day" that became a whole day of activities that allowed older students to bring their kids out to it. So, that emerged from the adult perspective.

Then on the minority side, instead of Black History month they would do a series of events throughout the spring term that again are open and beneficial, to anybody. Two years ago, you might have to help me with the young man's name, but they brought a person that was very popular with young people. They bring people here that we might not otherwise see is my point. So, I liked their programs as well.

Then disabled students. Just one of the things that stands out with me is the bold decision they made a few years ago. Instead of continuing to call their student organization "disabled," they changed it to ABLE, meaning that because one has a disability doesn't mean that one is limited and unable to do what you might call normal things. So, I thought it was more than symbolism, but practical and functional for them to begin to call themselves, boldly, "ABLE." So, quite a few things associated with Student Development affect me.

- SS: So, do you think that Kennesaw is rare in how it includes everyone, like it's all-inclusive for minorities, nontraditional, traditional?
- JR: I think that the Student Development Department is rare and absolutely unique and noteworthy as an example of what can be done. You have to have what Student Development does. It is true whether you're talking about women or about any group that is presumed to be out of the mainstream. You've got to have advocacy. You have to have someone that will provide the leadership and the management to enable whatever you desire from a goal-oriented, inclusive perspective to occur. You can't just leave it to chance. That's what Student Development does. It does not leave that kind of advocacy to chance.
- SS: Because this is the first time I've heard about this. I came from another school. This is actually my second semester at KSU. We didn't have a program like that, or if we did it wasn't out.
- JR: Yes, so I'm going to encourage you guys to visit, not just Student Development, but also get connected to some of the organizations. We have over 250 registered organizations here on campus. Those organizations range from religious organizations, if you're interested in that to Greek organizations to organizations that relate to professions. For example, there is a student organization for education majors. There is a philosophy club that it is absolutely outstanding. The sky's the limit. We have over 250. But, I often say this to our students, "If, by chance we still don't have anything that you're interested in, all you have to do is find 14 other students like you that are interested in that organization, and we can bring that into fruition." It's that simple, and we give you funding to help you do some things with that organization.
- MR: How do think that over time the Student Success and all of the departments that fall under it have evolved?
- JR: Very, very well. I think they've evolved very successfully. Thanks to the leadership of my predecessor, Nancy S. King, and also her predecessor, Paul A. Benson. I don't think it. I know it!!! Things have evolved unbelievably. And, when I say evolved, we're talking here about the ability to be able to serve students in terms of their multifaceted needs and their multifaceted interests. We are very, very successful, and we're on the threshold of even doing more things, like building a new recreation center. If approval takes place next month, we'll start construction shortly thereafter to build an outstanding recreation center. That's one of the things that our students have said to us that they want. We just opened up the Owl's Nest that allows any student who is interested in club sports, intramurals, and just fun recreational things to have access to outstanding fields and so forth. We're talking about football as a possible option. There are prospects for a new student center. We opened up the Commons and we're looking at another dining facility as well. So, I think things have evolved unbelievably.

Now, the thing that I often times measure progress by is inclusion. Meaning how welcoming, how inviting, how engaging are we to all constituent groups? I can say to you that when I got here that wasn't the case. I would give us probably a D- on that particular point when I got here. And, I'm not saying that I'm the catalyst for it. I'm just saying that's what the culture constituted. But I think starting Student Development and some subsequently other things have moved us closer to becoming more inclusive for all. So, I'd give us strong marks in terms of progress in this regard.

SS: So, you think that the social and recreational side of college is very important and is as important as the academic side?

JR: I certainly do. I've been on both sides, but I've spent more time on what they call the co-curricular side of things. You notice they still use curriculum when they talk about outside of the classroom and that is intentional. Curriculum is something that you employ to enable an outcome, typically a learning or developmental outcome, to occur. There are more opportunities outside of the classroom that constitute teachable opportunities. And, so, we call it co-curricular. Yes, it's very, very important, because in truth, students spend more time outside of the classroom than they do in the classroom. So, you can see that as a down time, as a dumb-down time [chuckles] where nothing happens, nothing can happen, and nothing will happen. But I think if you do that you're going to short change the educational experience.

I happen to believe that there are certain outcomes that we accomplish just by having students involved. But there are other outcomes that we accomplish purposefully and intentionally. The latter occurs when students join organizations. They learn leadership skills; they learn how to manage budgets and people; they learn a lot of things that are taught in classes. But they learn these skills through experience. They actually are doing it. Most learning is driven by motivation. Guess what? When you're doing something you like doing, you don't suffer from a lack of motivation. So that's the reason why the out-of-class experience is so beneficial and important. It is critically important to a student's well being for an institution to place value on what happens outside of the classroom. And, a lot does happen outside of the classroom.

MR: So, outside of a student coming and saying that they're interested in something that maybe Kennesaw doesn't provide, how do you gauge what Kennesaw students need as far as different programs or clubs?

JR: Right, well we depend a lot on the communication process. It is better to hear students tell us for themselves what they are interested in. Sometimes we do that formally through focus groups and surveys. But as student-personnel practitioners interact with students, hopefully they are discerning of what they indicate they want. We also look at best practices that are occurring at other schools and we emulate those things. Of course, other institutions emulate the things that we do as well. So it's not stealing. The best way to understand

students is from rapport building, having a positive relationship with students where you have bilateral or two-way communications. You listen and learn what they say to you.

MR: I'm sorry we keep jumping around

JR: No, that's good. I'm enjoying this, no problem

MR: Going back to international students, did maybe the "Year Of..." program stem out of that?

JR: It didn't stem from Student Development. That's an academic program, but it's one wherein we work very closely with the academic side. The "Year Of..." is intended to highlight a particular country or region and to offer continuing learning opportunities that are closely linked to academic outcomes. So we work very closely with them. Now the "Year Of..." is one of multiple programs that we offer here, some which are on the Student Success side of the fence, that enable us to give our students, our faculty and staff what we call a global perspective. I don't want to get too academic here, but as a college, one of the things that you have to do is get accredited by a professional organization. If you're not accredited by that organization, you're not legitimized to offer a diploma to anybody. What they do is make sure that there are certain standards that are common for colleges and universities that you meet.

Part of what that accrediting group does, and we call it SACS for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, is to ask, "What will be our initiative in the next ten years to enhance the Quality of Education (QEP) on our campus?" So every school has to come up with something, not just an idea, that they are going to institutionalize and implement for the next ten years. KSU decided almost ten years ago that we were going to offer a global education to our students, faculty, and staff. So our QEP, Quality Enhancement Plan, is Global Learning for Engaged Citizenship.

MR: So, that decision, do you think, influenced the International Students Association at all? Do you think it brought more people in?

JR: I don't know, because the association was created before that. But what it has done is enable us to be like-minded in terms of the types of experiences and engagements we want out students, faculty, and staff to have. Those experiences and engagements would help prepare them for a society that is much broader than Cobb County, than Kennesaw, than Atlanta, and even the United States. It is internationally based. So, on the academic side, they have exchange programs where we send American students abroad. We also have study abroad programs where American students can go as groups typically to different areas of the world.

You've asked me about the school and its progress since I've been here. One of the things that we've added that comes under this unit is a Global Learning fee.

Our students pay about \$14.00 a semester, and what that does is enable any student, and particularly those who otherwise could not consider going abroad to study for financial reasons, to get a scholarship. If I've got my numbers right, a student can get from \$250.00 to \$2,000.00, based on the length and type of study abroad. That fee just increased the number of students that are studying in China. Right now we have a group of students in China that are part of the global society. We also helped our musical ensemble students to go to China to perform a few months ago. The sky's the limit. I could name Africa and other places that we send students to as well. So, we're doing a lot of things from a global perspective.

MR: I was going to ask, since KSU became a university, is that when we started accepting international students? When did that start, and how has it expanded?

JR: No, that didn't start with us becoming a university. When I came here there weren't a lot of international students, but there was a core group here. Right now we have over 130 international countries represented on campus and close to a couple thousand international students. When I got here in 1988, there was a substantive group of students on the campus—not as large as they are now, but they were here on the campus then. What's interesting about their presence on campus is that we don't recruit international students, not really, and we definitely didn't recruit them in the old days. In other words, unlike you guys, Americans, where we have admissions counselors going out to the high schools, historically, we weren't going out and recruiting international students. It was word of mouth that brought international students to Kennesaw State. That's attributable to, actually, the Cobb County area. For a long time Cobb County has been a very prosperous area. It's a place where people want to live. So, when certain internationals would come here and get their degree, they would invite relatives and friends to do the same. It was strictly word of mouth that got them here. We're doing a little bit more now in recruiting them. We've always recruited international athletes. Then if they had a special talent, we recruited them as well. We do have a person that works in admissions with international students, but we still are not doing a lot of things from a recruitment perspective. We don't have to because for the most part they are coming on their own.

MR: So, if we could just talk about the Adult Learning center for a little while. How has that developed and changed? I know nontraditional students have always been a part of Kennesaw just because of the nature of where it's located.

JR: That's changed dramatically as well. Some high points have been the formulation of a registered student organization that a part of its mission is to serve adult learners. It's called ALSO—Adult Learning Student Organization. They do a lot of planning. The Lifelong Learning Center is in Student Development. I remember when we opened that facility. I happened to be over there today. It's just amazing the services the center provides to those students. It's comforting. It's a place where they can go and be around like-minded students. Technological

services are there. They are exposed to programming announcements and other information as well.

Our adult learners have always been appreciated at this school. What was missing was systemic inclusion and outreach that would reasonably assure that they had a good chance of succeeding once they got here. You'd be surprised how frightened an adult learner is when he or she returns to school after a significant layoff. Just think about it yourself. I can almost guarantee you that it doesn't matter how smart they were when they first started or how successful they've become professionally. When they return, if they've been off for about five or ten years, they're going to come back with apprehensions. The programming in that area, including the Lifelong Learning Center, helps to mitigate some of those fears. First of all the program and center make it all right to be afraid. Most others, like you, are afraid as well. Thus, it's more normal than it is abnormal. And I think that's welcoming to adult learners. The progress has been unbelievable. Statistically, the adult learner population really hasn't declined. Not if you compare the population at given points over time. Now, if you do a comparison to traditional age students, what has happened is that more traditional age students are now coming to Kennesaw and at a much higher rate than adult learners. So, as adult learners have diminished as a percentage of the overall population, they haven't diminished when compared to where they were before. The point is that we have a large number of adult learners still here.

MR: In Dr. [Daniel S.] Papp's interview, he said that we were trying to hold onto the adult learners while we were trying to add traditional students and residents. What do you think is going to be done to maintain that? Just keeping programs like this?

JR: Right. Just keeping programs and being welcoming to these students. I want to go back and tell you what I think Dr. Papp is saying, and I'll add a little more to your question. The reason why Dr. Papp made his statement is because the benefits of having adult learners and traditional age students study together are unbelievable. The average person might think that there might be an alienation factor there; it isn't. What happens is that they learn from each other. I see it with Student Government Association in working with adult learners. I rarely hear a traditional age student not marvel at and acknowledge what they learn from being around an adult learner. And vice versa, because I've also heard adult learners talk about how beneficial it is to be around younger learners. We've learned to live together. Where rather than look at the exceptionality, we value the benefits.

If I'm a traditional age student and I need examples or some modeling, how you look when you go to class, how devoted you are to your studies, how you interact with your professor, I don't have to look far. You've got an adult learner right there. If I'm an adult learner and I want to understand what it means to take risks, to feel comfortable about one's self, what it means to laugh, I have models right there for me to look at. Rather than what appears to be negative differences, we

tend to see the merits associated with having the diversity here. So, that's why I believe Dr. Papp said we want to strive to keep them both here. At this point, the only fear that I see, with adult learners, could be if policies are changed, not here, but elsewhere, where their performances on admissions tests and things like that would say you can't start here at Kennesaw, you've got to go to another school. I could see that being a pitfall that could really hurt us. But, as far as our setting, it's about continuing to do the things that we do well and grow accordingly.

MR: Talking about all of these things individually is making me think, do you have any events that bring all of them together, or at least some of them together, so different interests are being brought together and there is interacting on campus instead of just passing each other on campus?

JR: That's the concept of Student Development. That's what I was trying to say. In most schools you're going to find adult learners served in one department, minority students in another, and you might have disabled served in another. At KSU they are respectively served in one area. I'll say it to you this way. When I was a department head over there, and it's true today, I could sit in Student Development and I could see diversity every minute of the day as students walk in. Disabled students coming in to take tests, adult learners coming in for the services in their center, likewise with international and minority students. Student Development allows us to do that. An offshoot of them being in the same area is that their respective organizations are in a position to do collaboration. And, they do a lot of collaboration. Whereas if they were separate, I think it might diminish the extent to which they collaborated.

But now in terms of us having any kind of any notable event that brings us all together, we don't have anything like that. We do have a diversity office. We have a chief diversity officer, which is a cabinet level position. Dr. Papp wisely put that in place. That person does planning that would be similar to what you are questioning to build bridges and understanding amongst units. I don't know of any one event that occurs, but we do bring speakers here that we think will either galvanize or certainly highlight diversity. Galvanize meaning talk about the importance of diversity in general, or they will highlight a particular aspect. It could be a gay-lesbian-bisexual impetus or it could be disabled, or it could be a conservative or liberal kind of perspective.

SS: They probably all come together too, because I'm pretty sure with everything being in that one center, it's not just an adult learner who is a part of the adult learner organization. It could be a multicultural adult who is part of more than one, so you're not limited.

JR: Absolutely, you're right. Just think about it. Your point is well taken. What if you are international, but you're also older, and let's say hypothetically you're disabled. You would mesh with a number of groups. They do have a program over there in Student Development called the Odyssey Peer Mentoring Program. It's a program that allows an experienced student to help a first-time entering

- student to become acclimated. And, within that program, a first-time student can choose how he or she wants to be mentored. If I am an international student who is an adult learner who has a disability, what's my primary affinity? What is the primary group that I feel close to? And, that person will find someone of that persuasion to mentor them. So you do have that kind of mesh.
- MR: Is there anything else, besides Student Development and Student Success, that you're involved with?
- JR: Sure, quite a few things. Just in general?
- SS: I guess what we're asking is that is Student Success your only focus?
- JR: Oh, what are my hobbies? If you look around this room, it's not coincidental that you'll see a number of things that equate with jazz. I love music and I love the arts, period. And, so, listening, attending performances, attending concerts, doing a lot of things associated with the arts, particularly music, is a pastime of mine. I'm also an avid sports person. I like sports. Don't get a chance to attend enough events, but I love sports. I love social context in general, mostly with friends and through church affiliations and so forth. Whenever I have a chance to have social engagement with people, I typically am off doing that sort of thing. What else? I spend a lot of time with my wife, of course. That's a big part of my life as well. We have a dog, and that dog is almost like a child to us. And family, being able to talk to family, being able to accommodate family is a big part of my life as well.
- MR: So I guess just in closing, you've pretty much covered all of our questions, but do you have any future goals or programs? What would you like to see happen with Student Development and Student Success?
- JR: Two things easily come to mind for me, and they are sort of academic, but I'll be real brief in discussing them. I was telling you a lot about what we do. What we also need to do is to validate that we're effective in doing those things. They call that assessment. So, we are going to be doing more things from the assessment perspective. Now, I don't mean to say that we can't already prove effectiveness. However, we want to do it more predictably, consistently, and strategically. We're trying to hire somebody right now to do assessment for this division. The other thing is equally in the fire, but it may not materialize anytime soon. We need to have someone in University Advancement to help us raise funds that aren't driven by tuition or what the state provides. These are what some people call unrestricted monies, in a sense. We hope to have someone that could go out there and look for these monies. So, what we envision is being less dependent upon what happens at the state level, and less dependent on tuition, but also have some more fluidity in terms of how we can use the money toward meeting the needs of our students.
- MR: I don't know if this is proper, but what would you use the money for? Obviously, continuing the programs that are here.

JR: Now, this is real idealistic somewhat, but facilities are really critical for us. I would love to have an auditorium, maybe a 500-seat auditorium that our students could utilize for some of the programming that they want to do. We would benefit from having a new student center or perhaps an addition to the current student center that included an auditorium, more meeting space, and more accommodations for the units in this division. That would be delightful! And, you do depend upon outside funding for student centers. You can't use state money or tuition money to build a facility like that. It has to come from another means. Our biggest need is for more facilities.

MR: All right, well I think probably we've taken enough of your time.

JR: Oh, I've really enjoyed it.

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
KSU Oral History Series, No. 130
Interview with Dr. Jerome Ratchford
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
Thursday, 22 January 2015
Location: Dr. Ratchford's office, KSU

TS: Jerome, why don't we begin by talking about how you became Vice President for Student Success? I think it was probably about 2008 or 2009 that Nancy [S.] King retired, and it was somewhere in there, is that correct?

JR: Yes. The way I approximate the period, I know in June of 2015 I will have been in this position for seven years.

TS: Seven years, so back to 2008 then.

JR: Yes, I think 2008.

TS: So about June of 2008?

JR: Yes. Here's the way things evolved. Again, I may not have these years totally precise, but I served as the director of the Student Development Department for probably about eighteen years, if I remember correctly. I believe it was January 2007 that I was asked by Dr. King to assume the responsibilities of the dean of students' office. I served in that capacity about a year and a half. So it seems as if it was June of 2008.

TS: That would be seven years ago.

JR: So, I was in the position of dean of students from January of 2007 to approximately June of 2008 at which time I then assumed the responsibilities of the vice president for student success. That's why it will be seven years in June of 2015.

TS: So from January 2007 to June 2008 Nancy was still the vice president for Student Success and Enrollment Services, and you were dean of students?

JR: Exactly, for that year.

TS: We used to have a dean of student affairs, and then Nancy became the first vice president of student success. Under the vice president, had we had a dean of students before?

JR: Yes. [Charles E.] Charlie Bowen was the first person to serve in that capacity. Charlie was asked—and this is more information than you need—to return to the academic arena and manage the leadership department in education [Department of Educational Leadership]. So that's how the dean position opened. It was called dean of students, and he was the first and only dean of students prior to my assuming that responsibility.

TS: And that's the time they were having lots of problems over there.

JR: That's exactly right. So, Dr. King asked me to assume the duties of the dean of students commencing January of 2007, and I stayed in that position for a year and a half approximately.

TS: Okay, so they didn't do a national search or anything?

JR: No, there was no national search.

TS: She knew she was going to retire, I guess.

JR: Well, her husband became ill while I was serving in that capacity. So, it was in that context that she kind of suddenly decided that she would retire to spend time with her husband. So, I was asked to serve on an interim basis as the vice president in June of 2008. I was asked to serve as the interim vice president.

TS: How long were you interim?

JR: I was interim for approximately two years, maybe, and then Dr. Papp promoted me to the position on a full-time basis.

TS: Was that a national search?

JR: It was not a national search.

TS: So he just appointed you?

JR: He appointed me.

TS: Okay, great. When she was vice president, enrollment services were originally under her leadership. When did that split apart?

JR: You're right, it was student success and enrollment services. I'm approximating this, Tom. We were combined for at least two years under my leadership at which time, to be progressive and emulate what was happening at other institutions that we would benchmark, enrollment services moved to the academic side. We didn't have too many vice presidents of student affairs or student success also managing enrollment services at that particular time.

TS: I think it was always pretty unique here, wasn't it?

JR: It was, it was. Dr. Papp decided to rightfully move enrollment services to the academic side.

TS: Right. Well, you had enough on your plate anyway.

JR: I was going to say, and we'll talk about this later, but we did not have a decentralized administrative structure for this division. So, the number that directly reported to the position of vice president was somewhere in the nine to

- eleven range. This was and is a very large division. We'll say some things about that in a few minutes. So, when we had enrollment services, you were talking about a lot of people reporting to a single individual.
- TS: So it was probably about the time you become the permanent vice president that they split apart?
- JR: Possibly about that same time. So, enrollment services under Kim West's leadership was moved under the provost's office. If I remember correctly, Kim was promoted in that regard.
- TS: Right, from registrar to associate vice president for enrollment services.
- JR: Yes, and with that went admissions and financial aid.
- TS: Right. And then I guess that's probably about the time that admissions was moving across the road anyway, isn't it?
- JR: To Town Point?
- TS: Right.
- JR: No, that move had already taken place. However, they still maintained a domicile here on the main campus.
- TS: The registrar, yes, in Kennesaw Hall. I walked through their area to get to your office today.
- JR: Exactly. But the preponderance of that area was at Town Point.
- TS: I was just looking on the website at how many different sections there are in the Division of Student Success. I guess that particularly with the residence halls since 2002 the needs have grown astronomically over here.
- JR: That's right. Just to put perspective to things, as of consolidation the division is now Student Affairs. We went back to the traditional moniker.
- TS: Oh, so it's not Student Success anymore?
- JR: No, as of consolidation, it's now the Division of Student Affairs. And let me give you quickly the rationale for that transition. First let me say why we were called student success. That goes back to 1996. At that time, that particular verbiage didn't equate like it does today with the academic support area. It was a unique concept and we were one of the originators of that concept. We chose this name to enable us to stay focused on the purpose for our division, which was to promote the success of every student. Success being defined as enabling students to achieve whatever personal or professional goals they have for themselves. "Affairs" and "services" place emphasis on the process and not the mission or goal. We should be outcome oriented. So, it was a great, great name for this

division when we didn't have to compete with academic affairs, which occurred later on. So, over the years when you see the term student success, you think about academic support services. You really don't think about student affairs. In recent years the title has warranted explanations although it is a very outstanding title administratively because it keeps you focused in terms of your mission. Your mission is not to implement processes and services. Your mission is to show some kind of outcome—"student success."

TS: So why did we go back?

JR: Well, because of the confusion. As the literature and other impetus leaned toward academic areas, and we were misunderstood as being an academic support unit, it was necessary for us to move back to the traditional term. So, per consolidation, we went back to student affairs.

TS: It had never occurred to me that anybody would think that student success was confined solely to academics.

JR: Well, it is the case now, in the majority of situations. Most inquiries will center of mentoring, tutoring, remediation, and other traditional academic support services. Now, we do some academic support things, but that's not the essence of why we exist. So, yes, you can trust me on this one that in dealing with the average individuals, they would surmise that this division is an academic affairs support/services area.

TS: Why don't we talk about what were the greatest challenges that you faced when you moved into this position?

JR: Well, let me talk about them in the context of successes. Maybe that will help me also talk about challenges. First of all, I do want to give credit to Dr. King for the foundation that I was able to build upon. It was an absolutely outstanding foundation! I think the greatest challenge—and this is one that Dr. King also experienced—is the fact that we had a pretty centralized administrative model where the vice president had a large number of direct reports. Those senior executive leadership responsibilities were not shared with any decentralized entity. They rested with the vice president.

Let me put that into perspective. This division, in terms of financial resources, is the third largest division on campus. Academic Affairs is number one. We are third by virtue of KSU having administratively combined operations with business and finance, and with budget and planning, which is a unique model. Otherwise, we would be second. We combined a lot of things under Randy's leadership [Dr. Randy C. Hinds, vice president for operations, chief information officer, and chief business officer]. We're third, financially. Now when you look at personnel, we are second in terms of personnel. We have obviously less full-time and part-time personnel than academic affairs, but more than operations, business, finance, and budgeting. We have a lot of student employees in Student Life; we have a lot of student employees in our recreational programs and so

forth. We're talking about two hundred plus student employees. So, we are the second largest in regard to personnel.

My point here is to say that this is a large division. The pyramid or organizational structure of our division wherein these senior executive leadership positions were not decentralized in terms of senior executive leadership responsibilities was a serious challenge. I'm thankful to say that, per consolidation, we have begun the process of decentralizing the senior executive leadership of this division. What I mean by decentralizing is this. We will have associate vice presidents that have senior executive leadership responsibilities, per consolidation. This means that an area such as professional development for the division could become one of the responsibilities of an associate vice president. It means that human resource management, performance evaluations, and improving the supervisory skills of managers and administrators within the division could become the responsibility of an associate vice president. Budgeting could become the responsibility of an associate vice president, obviously reporting to the vice president. A new decentralized senior executive leadership structure means that the vice president doesn't have to have hands on involvement with some of these things. Then, of course, we can look at overall realignment of reporting lines. We are not at this point yet only because of my retirement. We will not have as many people reporting directly to the vice president. Some of those people would report to an associate vice president.

TS: How many associate vice presidents do you see?

JR: Two. That's what we proposed. It's very timely to do that because there are some other areas that should report directly to the vice president, which would be possible if you realigned under associate vice presidents. For example, one of the administrative areas that we've been able to institute is a development or advancement person for this division. Let me explain. We can no longer live and prosper dependent only on state funding. We've got to be able to tap other funding sources as well. We need someone working exclusively in conjunction with the university development and advancement office, with this division because the opportunities for fundraising are absolutely outstanding.

TS: We haven't done anything like that to now?

JR: We haven't done anything like that until now. We have had a kind of precarious relationship where advancement would help us, if we were able to "accidentally," if you will, generate some outside money. But, I'm talking about a proactive, systematic initiative. So, the vice president needs someone with that responsibility who's working collaboratively with development in that regard. So, that would be a new reporting line that seemingly is necessary.

TS: So, you think the vice president is going to have a fundraising role?

JR: I would see that as being an appropriate and necessary role for the vice president in conjunction with an advancement/development person, absolutely!!!

- TS: So I guess in the search for a new vice president that's one of the things they're considering?
- JR: I would hope so, yes. Under my watch we were able to institute a planning, management, and assessment process for this division that made us actually unique. We now have a person who oversees planning and assessment for this division (Dr. Jennifer Wells). When I say planning, we needed the various entities in this division to have a strategic plan with certain outcomes. This division is not a division that can function without having planned outcomes. In some instance, our outcomes could be learning outcomes. Sometimes they are developmental outcomes, personal relations outcomes, et cetera, et cetera. But observable outcomes. It's something we should do strategically. So, this office has helped us to create a strategic plan and a planning process that equate planning with management and with assessment, a cyclical relationship. That's an office that has helped us tremendously and reports to the vice president as well. Consolidation has enabled us to look more precisely at who should be reporting directly to the vice president compared to the current model where you have all or most of the directors reporting to the vice president.
- TS: By the way, I guess Ron Koger [former vice president for student and enrollment services] was in your parallel position wasn't he at Southern Poly?
- JR: Yes, but with this qualification. That campus didn't have a vice president for student affairs or student success or student services. Ron was always the vice president for enrollment services. What they did was group the dean of student's office under that vice presidency, and the position was sort of a de facto vice president for student affairs. That's the model they had there.
- TS: So, he's more enrollment, so, that's more like we were before we divided.
- JR: Exactly right. And it's just come full circle. The person who was the dean of students who was a good friend of mine, Barry Birkhead, actually retired before consolidation, so, it was a function that was momentarily fulfilled by different individuals on that campus.
- TS: Oh, that's right. I did an interview with a faculty member over there that had applied for that job the morning before the noon announcement of the consolidation.
- JR: But the dean of students' office was more comparable to the vice president for student success office here.
- TS: Okay. That makes sense. So, reorganization has been a big challenge and a big accomplishment over the last several years.
- JR: Right. Revamping the organization and engaging in strategic plans, management, an assessment were really important. Procuring new funding through an advancement or development office was also important. We also did some things

with our registered student organizations. We needed to better manage the activities of over two hundred to two hundred fifty registered student organizations. One of the things we have put in place is a software program called Owl Life where we can better account for and keep our organizations informed of activities. We can manage calendars and do reports, et cetera. So, that's helped us greatly as well. We can also conduct surveys through that particular software. For example, we helped the athletics department when they wanted to see what the preferences were of students in terms of ticket allocation for football. We were able to use mechanisms through Owl Life to do that. So, it's a miraculous program. It'll tell us more about the involvement of our students in campus life, as well as aid our students in terms of going to a centralized database to understand what's occurring on campus. That happened through us having an assessment officer because that's who built this program. We've also added outreach to new entities on the campus since I've been in this position—veterans being one.

TS: Oh, yes. That's been a tremendous program.

JR: I credit Robert J. (Bob) Mattox [associate vice president and director of student success services] and Frank Wills who was the first director of the veteran's resource center for the success of this program. We also did not have outreach to gay/lesbian/bi-sexual/questioning students. So we've added an administrator, Jessica Bull Duvall, and fostered facilities and resources to improve services to this population. That program is expanding beyond words. I credit Nicole A. Phillips, interim director of Student Development, for her leadership in that regard. That program is under Student Development. We also didn't have outreach to women in domestic, violent situations or who felt they were intimidated. So we added a Women's Resource and Interpersonal Violence Prevention Center, headed by Shameka Wilson, again, under Bob Mattox's leadership.

TS: What about our Counseling in Psychological Services? Are they woefully understaffed or do we have enough?

JR: Well, not woefully at this point.

TS: Do we have a growing staff?

JR: We've played catch-up in that area. They do measure staff appropriateness based upon the staff-to-student ratio. To answer your question, it was very, very skewed and high historically. We have allocated more resources to the area in the past few years thanks to the efforts of Dr. Papp and, in some instances, Randy Hines. We have tried to get the ratio to what professional organizations say is appropriate.

TS: About how many counselors do we have?

JR: Well, the ratio we're striving to get to, believe it or not, is one counselor to at least every fifteen hundred students. So, we've made progress, because it was higher than that.

TS: But that's considered standard, one for every fifteen hundred students?

JR: Yes, this is acceptable in terms of being able to speak to the needs of students. The higher the ratio means a longer wait period for students and neglect. So, to answer your question, yes, we started in a deficit capacity, but over the years reduced that ratio and we're continuing to seek to reduce that ratio, especially with Southern Poly coming on board.

TS: With the first-year programs your role is primarily in advisement and counseling and that sort of thing? How does that work?

JR: Yes, we have historically had a really positive relationship with the University College and Academic Affairs in regard to advising undeclared majors. About two years ago the decision was made, under Complete College Georgia, to move that area to the academic side. I'll be honest with you, it was moved because we were doing such an outstanding job. From a system's perspective, the decision was made because we wanted to improve overall advisement of students not only undeclared. That's what we were dealing with was the undeclared in a mandatory advising period for them. So, advisement moved to the academic affairs side about two or three years ago. But, that is only one of the collaborative things we do with the University College. We also, of course, have the Center for Student Leadership.

TS: What exactly does that do?

JR: As a university, we want to proactively, systematically groom students to become leaders and to qualify for Truman scholarships, Goldwater scholarships, Rhodes scholarships, etc. But, not only to receive prominent scholarships. We want our students to leave this university with the skillset and aspiration to become leaders in some capacity. We chose as a university to not leave this to chance. Not to assume that it will happen through chance interactions in the classrooms only and so forth. So, the Center for Student Leadership systematically, proactively, strategically utilizes curriculum, interactions, and programs to develop students who leave the university as leaders. We worked collaboratively with the academic sector and particular the University College, in creating formalized courses, programs, and experiences to develop student leaders. This collaboration has worked magnificently for us, and we have had some really significant accomplishments and successes, particularly in regard to scholarship recipients.

TS: I see them on the KSU website quite frequently!

JR: Yes, we've had tremendous success. So that's the essence of that program. In fact, it's so successful that we are going to duplicate it on the Marietta campus. They don't have such a program there. Historically, we groomed student leaders

within the context of identifiable programs that they qualified for once they were admitted. We looked at grade point averages, and we created programs like Thrive [for first-time, full-time students] and some other types of programs based upon aptitudes. But now we're turning more internally and looking at students already in leadership positions, say with the Student Government Association or the African American Student Alliance. We are now seeking to nurture some of them as well as prospective leaders. We're not just creating programs any longer for exemplary students who come to KSU and then nurturing them over the long haul. We do want to continue to do this, but we are also looking at our base population, the everyday students that are in leadership roles, and interacting and grooming them. I'll just cite this as a case in point of students becoming leaders. I remember in my twenty-six years at KSU, if you interacted with someone, say in the University System of Georgia office or someone downtown, the probability was that they graduated from the University of Georgia, possibly Georgia Tech, or Georgia State. But, you weren't going to find very many, if any, whose origin was from Kennesaw State.

TS: We've got some down there now.

JR: Now we do. Just focusing on the system office—and you may already know this—the chief auditor for the university system, John Fuchko, is a former Student Government Association president. Additionally, he was editor of the *Sentinel*, and obviously a very, very smart young man. The person who is the general counsel for the University System of Georgia is a Kennesaw State University graduate and former Student Government Association president as well, Nels Peterson. Both John and Nels were actively involved in student leadership while matriculating. I could name a few others, some in government, but some in other positions as well. Tom, you and I have history at KSU and have always known that we have a significant number of students who are outstanding. Expanding the Center for Student Leadership focus to formally and systematically groom these students for leadership positions should result in more of our students ultimately functioning in this capacity. And, as we and others interact with representatives in various sectors, more will proudly identify themselves as having graduated from KSU.

TS: Right. Right.

JR: So we're doing some proactive things with student leaders.

TS: By the way, you mentioned the African American Student Alliance a minute ago. I know that's your baby from way back when. I wonder if you have any comments on the controversy over Angela Davis that's riled up the *Marietta Daily Journal* lately. [Editor's note: Dr. Davis was the speaker at the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day at Kennesaw State University on January 18, 2015].

JR: I've been actively involved with that, and I have to respond in a qualified way. We have been trying to give the *Marietta Daily Journal* accurate information.

When I say accurate information, I'll say this. Dr. Davis's visit was not underwritten by tax money or by tuition money. It was underwritten by something called a mandatory student fee and specifically something called a student activity fee.

TS: I haven't read the article but it's on the front page today [January 22, 2015], "KSU: Student Fees Paid 20K Tab for MLK Day Speaker Angela Davis."

JR: Now, with a student activity fee it is important for that fee to be decisioned by students. They should have an active voice in determining how that fee will be spent. Now case law, and I'm talking about when the issue came before the Supreme Court on the question of whether or not a group could regulate how the student activity fees could be allocated, the Court said that a university can collect such a fee from all of its students and must allocate it on a "viewpoint neutral" basis. So, you can't collect the fee and then tell students how to use it. Otherwise, you're in violation of case law and a Supreme Court ruling. So, you are expected to empower students to have a voice in that regard. Now, the way it worked with AASA is that AASA is one of eighteen line-item organizations, and a line item organization is allowed to budget ahead of time for its programming.

TS: AASA being the African American Student Alliance.

JR: Right. The eighteen line-item organizations get a budget ahead of time. They actually function from a budget that is approved ahead of time and they do year-round programming.

TS: So they've got a budget to bring in a speaker for the MLK Day.

JR: Yes. MLK Day constitutes an area of programming that they foster during the year. In obtaining prior approval of their annual budget from SABAC, AASA, like any of the eligible organizations, identifies that they will have a speaker for MLK and the budget for that speaker, but not at that particular point who the speaker will be.

TS: They just tell SABAC that there will be a speaker.

JR: Right. And so that budget was approved by SABAC, Student Activities & Budget Advisory Committee, that is predominately students, but has faculty and staff presence as well. Then that budget is approved by this office. Once that occurs the implementation rests with that particular organization in terms of what speaker they want to bring in (with the university remaining viewpoint neutral), and, right or wrong, Dr. Angela Davis constituted who AASA wanted as its MLK Day speaker.

TS: I think this controversy is largely in the minds of people that don't have a clue how a university operates. I thought on the whole that Jon Gillooly's article [on January 19, 2015] about the speech ["No Justice. No Peace. No Racist Police!"] was pretty objective. He quoted Deane Bonner [Cobb NAACP president] and

Anthony Coleman [Marietta City Council member] and so on. It looked to me that he tried to be fair about citing what she said in her speech.

JR: Right. And you and I know that one constituent group's hero can be another's anti-hero and vice-versa. Dr. Davis is a case in point because you have a Deane Bonner, Anthony Coleman, and many others who responded favorably to Dr. Davis. So, it's a dangerous practice for us as a university to become viewpoint preferred and to make a decision based upon what we think people stand for and what they believe. This is particularly true in regard to use of student activity funds. That's a slippery slope and one that could be counterproductive to people who would want a particular speaker to be on the campus.

TS: Sure. Great. I think part of the complaint in the MDJ is whether we have balance in the speakers that we bring to campus. I don't know why nobody mentioned the Tetley lecture series in business and what-have-you. We probably could have more balance than we do, but we certainly have some conservative speakers that come in.

JR: And to be honest with you, if you just looked at the list of speakers who have spoken at MLK Day for the past thirty years, I daresay that you'll find a pretty diversified group of speakers. I don't think you could label them as being liberal or conservative. The fact that nobody in those thirty-something years, that I know of, has raised the issue about the speakers suggests that there has been some level of satisfaction. So I think you have objectivity there as well.

TS: Well, it is remarkable that anybody still remembers Angela Davis.

JR: It's a surprise.

TS: Well, let's see, there are a lot of different areas that we could be talking about. Maybe, even though you're not called Student Success anymore, would you just focus on some of the successes? For one thing, student retention and graduation rates have increased tremendously during Dr. Papp's presidency. I guess we're at 43 percent now.

JR: That's a six-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time students.

TS: That's a six-year graduation rate, and it was 28 percent when he took over. I'm sure some of this is that we're attracting a different type of student nowadays with the residence halls, but, from your perspective, what is the reason for that remarkable rise?

JR: I think it's for sure twofold. Obviously, what happens in the classroom to include support services, some of which occur through the academic area, and others through this division, have been a contributing factor. But, I selfishly also believe the quality of campus life, the extracurricular part, has been a contributing factor as well. Satisfaction can influence whether or not a student remains at Kennesaw. While we, obviously, have the results of some satisfaction surveys that indicate

that students like being at KSU, I routinely go around campus and randomly ask students, “How happy are you?” And, “How are we treating you?” I have done this for twenty-six years now and the resounding answer is that they love being here because they are treated well. And, they love being here because of the amenities, including what we do from a recreation and sports perspective. I am talking here about recreation and sports where you can actually participate in something, not serve as a spectator. We have an outstanding, nationally recognized, club sports program.

TS: Yes, that’s amazing. We have quite a few club sports don’t we?

JR: A lot of them, some forty-four club sports listed as of May 2014 on the Kennesaw State Club Sports website. We’re talking about participating now. If a club doesn’t exist, all one has to do is get a group of people who are interested, and the Department of Sports and Recreation will help bring that club into fruition. But the point is that club sports and intramurals are an attraction to our students. Then, of course, I’m looking out the window at the \$38 million new, Dr. Betty L. Siegel Student Recreation & Activities Center. What it will offer, including what we have offered historically, will heighten KSU’s attraction to students.

TS: Oh, you’ve got a wonderful view of the new building.

JR: Yes, exactly.

TS: They are doing some landscaping down there now.

JR: Yes. Tom, let me address that this office and I personally were instrumentally involved in the approval of the land acquisition to build the sports park.

TS: Oh, you were involved in the land acquisition?

JR: Yes, absolutely, because funding had to be approved through a student vote and a new student activity fee. So, yes, we were an instrumental part of it.

TS: Oh, that’s right.

JR: The same thing is true with football. If the students had not voted positively and substantially in favor of financially supporting football, we would not have football on this campus.

TS: Because they’re paying for it.

JR: Because they’re paying for it. They pay an athletic fee.

TS: That’s right. I’ve got the KSU Foundation story on acquiring the eighty-eight acres, but that was a big part of it to get a student fee for it.

JR: Absolutely. But, yes, the quality of life helps to retain students: the sports and recreation park, the new sports and recreation arena, the various registered student

organizations that student can participate in, the quality of the residence life experience, the quality of food, etc. These are things that make the difference in terms of the comfort levels of students and their parents. Coming at retention from the side of security and feeling safe, we have a student conduct program and a behavior response team under this division, and in particular in the Dean of Students' office. It's reassuring to parents and to our students that to the extent that we need to hold students accountable when they violate our student code of conduct, we're in a position to respond quickly. Also, maintaining social justice wherein we don't penalize unnecessarily is reassuring to students and, I think, to parents as well.

TS: What are you referring to specifically on student justice?

JR: Well, we have a student code of conduct that articulates expectations of our students. If by chance they violate those expectations, then we have a process where they are held accountable.

TS: But to protect their rights at the same time?

JR: To protect their rights at the same time. We also have a behavioral response initiative.

TS: I was wondering about that. What exactly is that about?

JR: These are different times now for colleges and universities. It is important to be mindful of students who constantly have behavioral problems.

TS: Oh, so this is to try to catch them before they happen?

JR: Yes, to be on notice when there are behavior concerns that seem to be consistent with a given student and to see whether or not interventions with that student could alter that behavior and to do that ahead of time. The behavior response team is a heterogeneous group of representatives on campus. They meet each week to share information from their database about students.

TS: I guess that's even more important with people living on campus.

JR: Living on campus, but in general. You do have to have a close relationship with the academic sector because their eyes and ears are really important. So, yes, we have a behavior response team whose function is to be on top, if you will, of behavioral concerns.

TS: We got an e-mail the other day to report it if we see a problem with a student. Did that come from the behavior response team?

JR: It most likely did. I didn't see it, but it's probable. We actually have training videos for faculty members, and others as well, to help them discern the types of behaviors that perhaps should be reported.

- TS: So it's not enough just to suggest to a student that they come over here for help. A faculty member should contact somebody over here on the staff to intervene?
- JR: Yes, that's not sufficient. Of course, you appreciate any student seeking out counseling services and help. We strongly recommend that, if self-directed, students do that. But we have a broader responsibility in today's culture and that is to be mindful of behavior patterns and to stay updated on those things to see whether or not intervention, if necessary, would be a beneficial thing. So, that's kind of what a behavior response team does.
- TS: It's been a lot of it in the news lately about sexual assaults on campus. I think I saw some statistics the other day that it didn't look like it was much of a problem on our campus. What's your perspective?
- JR: It isn't currently in terms of numbers, but the penalties and the consequences at the federal level, if we were not to improve our abilities to anticipate, become notified, and reckon with possible sexual harassment offenses or sexual misconduct, are really, really great. In other words, the federal government has increased the responsibilities and accountabilities that universities have. It's not sufficient just to be comfortable with your numbers even if they are low. You really want to put in place systems and structures that would be reassuring to students and parents that there is a process by which things can be reported, and that things are going to be dealt with objectively both for a presumed perpetrator and a victim. You've got to put some systems in place and some policies in place ahead of time and operate according to those systems and those policies for you to be in compliance with the federal standards. That's what we've done. The dean of students' office is very much in the forefront in that regard. There are certain responsibilities that any employee of this university has. For example if a student came to a custodian and said, "I was raped," or "I was assaulted," then, because that custodian is a representative of the university, we have in a sense been put on notice.
- TS: They had better report it?
- JR: We want that custodian to report that to us, so that we can then intervene accordingly. There is a heightened accountability and responsibility that exists for universities today under the auspices and expectations of the federal government.
- TS: In addition to the thirty-five hundred students living on campus, it seems like there has been a mushrooming of apartment complexes around campus that cater to students. I know we run the buses to those places. Do you have any sense of just how many students are living right off campus in these residence halls?
- JR: Like you said, I don't know the exact numbers, but a lot.
- TS: As many as are on own campus, do you think?

- JR: Oh, definitely. In fact, I think it exceeds the number living on campus.
- TS: So we've got at least seven thousand students that are living on or very close to campus?
- JR: Right.
- TS: Do we have any responsibility for what goes on in those complexes?
- JR: We do in this sense: part of the reporting of Clery data includes offenses that we are made aware of in the surrounding community and on campus as well, under the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act and the Higher Education Opportunity Act. We also have to act judicially when informed (put on notice) of offenses that occur off campus that involve our students. If we are informed of a sexual misconduct charge at U Club on Frey Road that involves students, then we are accountable judicially with dealing with it.
- TS: And if one place seems to be worse than the other places, have more cases coming out of it, is there any responsibility then?
- JR: Well, the responsibility would be to interact with the owners and management and see what we can do collaboratively to reduce the number of offenses. But, if something happens, and it is a student, let's say, underage drinking, if we become aware of that, our judicial code is applicable to that student. Let me say that, yes, the fact that they don't reside on campus doesn't limit KSU from acting once informed.
- TS: If they're down at U Club, and we hear that they've had a big party and a lot of underage drinking . . .
- JR: If we're put on notice, either through a police report or otherwise, then we can hold that alleged student accountable for non-compliance with our code of conduct. So yes, we can and are responsible to act.
- TS: Has the competition from these private apartment complexes been good or bad for Kennesaw?
- JR: It became bad a few years ago when it seemed like our vacancy numbers were being impacted by the private developers. I won't give the whole history, but there was a period of time when we didn't have a competitor, and we actually had waiting lists. That's most of our history to be honest with you. I'm talking about a few years ago when more private housing emerged that was competitive in rent prices and so forth. There were concerns about our vacancy or occupancy numbers. In the last couple of years, however, there appears to be enough student interest in housing on campus or close to campus where none of us suffer. Our numbers were very, very good last year, and they look pretty good this year. So,

it appears as if we can all eat “out of the same trough” and do well in the process. It’s not as much of a concern now as it was a few years ago.

TS: So the demand is growing for housing, do you think, on and near campus?

JR: Well, yes. Now, there may be a saturation point. The market may have been satisfied. For us, though, we put any new housing projects on the back burner.

TS: Right, we don’t need to build any more. I guess the thrust of my question is whether the word is getting out, and more and more students want to come and live on or near campus?

JR: I believe that most students want to live on or near the campus. I don’t believe the interest level in this regard has changed much. But, the key is enrollment growth. We did go through a period where we were flat. The housing interest to live on or near campus is driven by enrollment. I suspect that private developers are mindful of this fact as well.

TS: Right. By the way, I’ve been going down to Southern Polytechnic State University a number of times during the last year to do some interviews down there, and walking around campus, they’ve got some student housing that looks really nice, but they’ve also got some really old dorms [built originally in the late 1960s] that are depressing to walk through. How is the consolidation going to affect residence life?

JR: This is true. Doing improvements to make the housing more attractive is a challenge that we have. The other variable is that they have a small number of students from Georgia Highlands College who live on the Marietta campus as well. The good thing for them is that their occupancy rate has always been very, very high. They don’t have, first of all, the competition immediately around the campus that we have here. So, it’s our intention to continue to use the facilities and to make whatever kinds of repairs we need. Those are our intentions.

TS: Okay. I guess it was Norton Hall down there that is more than forty years old. In walking through, I had a flashback, I guess, to the time when I was in college where two people shared a tiny room and bathrooms were at the end of the hall. I can see how that would be a challenge to appeal to modern students.

To change the subject, just walking around either campus or going to a graduation, you can see that we’re a lot more diverse than we used to be. Do you want to talk about that a little bit and how that has come about?

JR: Yes. On the Kennesaw campus, fall of 2012 figures, the minority population was 31 percent. [Editor’s note: By fall 2014 the minority population had reached 35.4 percent—19.2 percent non-Hispanic Black, 7.6 percent Hispanic, and 8.6 percent other minority—while the non-Hispanic White population was 61.5 percent, with the remaining 3.1 percent undeclared].

- TS: Wow. And it's pretty high at Southern Poly.
- JR: It's pretty high at Southern Poly as well. I remember when I arrived here twenty-six years ago (1988), the Black student population was very low. [Editor's note: according to 1988-1989 Fact Book for fall quarter 1988, the non-Hispanic White student population was 94.5 percent, Blacks made up 3.2 percent, Hispanics 1.1 percent, Asians/Pacific Islanders 1.0 percent, and American Indian 0.3 percent]. I attribute the growth that has happened racially, and from a disability, international, and sexual orientation perspective, to the establishment of the Student Development Department. This was done by Dr. Nancy King and the former vice president of student affairs, Dr. Paul Benson. As mentioned, I had the pleasure of being the first director of this department and being its leader for eighteen years. Let me add that when you look at retention and graduation data, what happens with minority students equates very, very closely with what happens with majority students. You don't have a significant deviation for minority groups, per retention and graduation, albeit you do have some differences among African American men and women. Still, it compares very favorably with majority numbers.
- TS: So getting more African American men on campus is the challenge?
- JR: And retaining the ones that are here, yes. I support the programs in Student Development, the KSU African American Male Initiative and other things that are helping in that regard. But, yes, graduation and retention data for minority groups are very, very favorable when you do a comparison with majority students. We are aware that the methodology of looking at retention and graduation rates through the prism of first-time, full-time students isn't the best for us. We still have a lot of part-time and transfer students. But it is the game you have to play in. So, obviously, we want to continue to improve the retention and graduation rates for our students in general. But, having said that, thankfully, we don't have a substantial deviation among our minority students that would mean that we have a problem with retention and graduation of all students, but you have an addition problem as it relates to minority students. Our minority programming and successes were acknowledged at the national level as one of the more successful programs and record in the country.
- TS: Are you talking about *Diverse* magazine [*Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*]?
- JR: Yes, *Diverse* magazine.
- TS: Yes, those are tremendous.
- JR: I agree!!! I was looking at the recognition two or three months ago and it is quite an honor. In this division, we have a number of programs that have received national recognition. I mentioned our minority program, but there is also our adult learner and our veterans program, the center for young adult addiction and recovery, our residence life, and international student retention as well.

- TS: I hadn't even thought about that—that we'd have a statistic on that.
- JR: Well, our international student population has quadrupled over time and has a high retention and graduation rate.
- TS: They're motivated.
- JR: Because they're motivated. We never actually recruited international students. They came through word of mouth. For us, we've been able to retain and graduate them in significant numbers. A lot, if not most, of the programming occurs outside of the classroom and through Student Development and the International Student Retention Services headed by Catherine Odera. There's something that we call the Global Village where those students hang out and receive services. And there is an International Student Association that they just love being a member of.
- TS: And I gather you administer the global learning scholarships for people that want to study abroad.
- JR: We do, we do. We administer it in collaboration with the Division of Global Affairs. We don't get into the educational part, what trips and all of that. That's not our domain. Our domain is to set criteria and parameters for how the scholarships are awarded.
- TS: I see, so you don't actually award the scholarships, you . . .
- JR: We set the rules, but here's the way it works. Any student is eligible for that award, and 99 percent if not 100 percent are going to get the award. They apply online. The only contingency is that if they are a financial aid recipient, they have to go through the financial aid office to factor the scholarship into their financial aid. Any student interested is likely to receive support. Now, the support they receive depends on the educational experience they have chosen. The longer the experience the more monies they receive. Then they can get some extra monies if there is a community service activity involved, et cetera, et cetera. So, we do set up the criteria for them to qualify and the procedure, but the procedure is not a decision-making one. So, if they apply, they're going to get the award. It's just a matter of how much they get depending on what trips they are taking.
- TS: That's good. So everybody that goes gets something.
- JR: They get something. The only additional thing we do from the faculty side is to use some of the monies to fund faculty members who go and develop additional study abroad sites. There is a decision-making process in this regard because the money (Global Learning fee) is paid by students. Because of this factor, we enable students to have a voice.

TS: Right. Well, like you said, you've been here since 1988, and been in this position for seven years as of this coming June. What are you proudest of during your tenure here?

JR: A lot of things to be honest with you. I'll start with immediate things. I think continuing the legacy that Dr. King established. When I say continuing, I mean continuing to have this division prosper, expand, and improve in its outreach to students, to include historically neglected populations but also to do things systematically and strategically wherein we can account for our success. That is the thing that I'm most proud of as the vice president. I'm also proud that I played a role in diversifying this campus and have been able to continue to have a voice in that regard, whether as dean of students or vice president. I'm very proud of that. I'm proud of the different innovations and developments that have occurred on the campus relevant to whatever the times and needs demanded whether it was football, a new recreation center, or acquisition of land or whatever. I'm proud in most instances to have been a part of those things. I'm also proud of how I'm seemingly perceived, especially among my colleagues in Student Affairs, but also outside of this division. It seems to suggest that I've been a person of integrity and a person that has tried to be objective and fair. If we had differences on issues, they weren't personal with me. They were differences that related to the issues. That seems to be the message that's transmitted to me, and that's pleasant for me to hear.

TS: It looks like you have some notes in front of you. Did we go over everything?

JR: Well, I think in one way or another we have. These were just some things that I needed to have to clear my mind as we talked about things that have occurred. Great interview too!!! I appreciate the questions.

TS: Great. Thank you.

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