

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH DEAN C. RICHARD COLE, AIA, NCARB

CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

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Kennesaw State University Oral History Project  
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Interview with Dean C. Richard Cole, AIA, NCARB<sup>1</sup>  
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott  
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TS: C. Richard Cole is the dean of the College of Architecture and Construction Management at Kennesaw State University. Dean Cole, let's start with your educational background. I know that you went to Georgia Tech for bachelor of science in architecture and master of architecture degrees. What attracted you to the field of architecture?

RC: That's a good question. I was not that kid at six, seven, eight, nine years old that you read about that says, "I always wanted to be an architect." I was not that kid. I'm not even sure I knew exactly what architecture was. But I wanted to live in Atlanta, and at the time being in college was a little better than being in Vietnam.

TS: What year was that?

RC: I entered in 1970. So I was the person who ... you hear jokes about this, but this really happened with me ... I looked through the Georgia Tech catalog, and the first thing that I remember seeing was aerospace. I thought, "I don't know what that is, but that sounds hard." The next thing was architecture. I thought, "Well, how hard could that be?" So I thought I could do that. I did, and still didn't know anything about it. Back then we were on the quarter system. I got through a quarter, maybe two quarters, and at some point, I took my first architectural history course. I'm in this huge auditorium with these big overhead projectors. The lights go down, and I start to see these images. I'd never thought about this: People made up buildings out of their heads. I thought, "Wow, that's amazing!" I was hooked after that. I thought, "This is incredible that these are the largest handmade objects in the world." I just couldn't get enough. But I'm not going to kid anyone. I was not that person that always knew I wanted to be an architect.

TS: And your background—you grew up in Georgia?

RC: I did. I grew up in a little town just outside of Rome, Georgia. I wasn't born in Georgia. I was born in South Carolina, near Greenville, the little town of Simpsonville. But I grew up in the public school system and went off to Georgia Tech.

TS: Why Georgia Tech?

RC: This is kind of weird too. I wish I had profound answers for these things, but in the 1960s I was a college football fan. I played high school football. On an old black and white TV with the little round picture tube, I saw Georgia Tech play the University of

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<sup>1</sup> American Institute of Architects, National Council of Architectural Registration Boards

Alabama—or maybe I saw highlights of it. I thought, “Wow, here is this little nerdy engineering school that’s actually going toe-to-toe with this big, giant school. They did really well in that game and upset Alabama.

TS: Was that still Bobby Dodd [Robert Lee Dodd] back then?

RC: Yes, Bobby Dodd [head football coach at Georgia Tech, 1945-1966]. I thought, “Well, that part is kind of cool.” Then I began to learn something about the reputation of the school, and I thought, “Well, it seems like a pretty good school.” I didn’t make an official visit like kids do nowadays. I just got in my car and drove down there and walked around. I remember walking in a couple of dorm rooms. Nothing was locked back then. I thought they were classrooms. I thought that was stupid. What a dumb way to do a classroom? I was just a total idiot about it.

TS: So you’re obviously the first generation in your family to go to college?

RC: That’s right, absolutely. My son went to Georgia Tech. Actually, he’s still enrolled in Georgia Tech. He’s trying to get his GPA up a little bit because he wants to go to law school. My wife Lori and I were married twenty-one years before our first kid came along, and we have a daughter at UGA [University of Georgia].

TS: Wow, so you had two after waiting twenty-one years?

RC: That’s right, and they’re still on the payroll. We’re looking forward to them being off the payroll someday [laughs].

TS: I bet. Were there any mentors at Georgia Tech that stand out?

RC: There were. One gentleman who has passed now was Dale [Alden] Durfee [1943-2006]. He was a youngster when I started Tech. He was there because Georgia Tech had decided to make a move into a more design-oriented architecture program, and he had won either the Paris Prize or the Van Alen Award. I can’t remember which, but he was a big winner in an international competition when he was in school. Anyway, Georgia Tech hired him. He was really, really hard! I mean, he was *so* difficult as an instructor! I think I had him maybe five quarters. I just couldn’t escape him. He was so hard on me, but I had an attitude of, “You’re just going to have to kill me because I’m going to keep getting up every time.” I don’t know. I want to think that maybe I got a little respect for that. I’m not sure, but he meant a lot to me. You had to really prove yourself. He was very, very demanding, but I came to love him. I hated him at first [laughs].

TS: So you got your bachelor’s in 1974?

RC: In 1974. It was a situation then when architecture schools in the United States were making a transition to what’s called a four plus two program—four years for a bachelor of science degree in architecture, and then a two year master’s degree as opposed to what we have here at KSU, which is a five year bachelor of architecture. I had gone four

years. Then just by circumstance, I signed up to go two years of graduate school. But the fifth year of my education was pretty much the fifth year that they had before. So I petitioned for the four-year degree, and of course my master's was six years. I think I actually qualified for the four, five, and six, but I didn't petition for the fifth year. Somebody said, "What's the point?"

TS: So when did you finish the master's?

RC: Well, that would have been two years later, in 1976.

TS: Was there a specialization, like history of architecture?

RC: No. They had specializations or you could be a generalist, and that's what I did.

TS: You were a generalist?

RC: Yes. I just took the general track. Having a PhD in architecture back then was a rarity. I don't think I knew anybody that had one. Then and now, it's still considered a terminal degree. But we have a lot of faculty here now that have a PhD in architecture, and that's a good thing.

TS: What about the architecture faculty at Georgia Tech? Did they mainly have master's degrees or PhDs?

RC: It's hard to say. I don't know about "mainly." They were no higher, if you will, than a master's. My memory is that a lot of them had bachelor's degrees, but they were involved in practice and awarding winning practices.

TS: So they were teaching with a bachelor's degree plus experience?

RC: Yes. And then some had master's degrees. I can't really say what the breakdown was. I'm not sure I ever really even knew. It was a different world back then. So much was different. Now, I respect students who actually challenge faculty and administrators, and want their money's worth. I get that. I appreciate that. Way back when I was in school, and probably same for you, you didn't question very much. You just pretty much took whatever was given to you.

TS: Right, right. Although it was a questioning age that you were going through [in the late 1960s and early 1970s], in some ways.

RC: That's true.

TS: You had mentioned, when you did your commencement address in the fall of 2016, that you were an old hippie. Were you just being funny or were you really an old hippie?

RC: Well, I still think of myself that way.

TS: You're still an old hippie?

RC: Yes, I guess so. I don't know. I don't think of myself as being old. I mean, I know that I am obviously. I see it.

TS: But you still think of yourself as a hippie?

RC: I think I do.

TS: You cut your hair somewhere along the line.

RC: But it wasn't unusual [to be a hippie] back then.

TS: No, right.

RC: I tried to get in four years of education before I thought, "Well, inevitably you're going to go to Vietnam," because everybody did.

TS: But then the draft was over by the time you got through.

RC: Yes, then the draft ended. But I went to all the presentations by the different services, and, weirdly, the army guy goes, "We don't make you cut your hair." That's what he said. And I said, "Okay, that's great."

TS: Did you believe that?

RC: And the first of drill, he says, "Cut that hair, young man."

TS: Oh, you went into ...

RC: I went into the Army ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps]. The first day: "Cut that hair." He used more colorful language than that.

TS: I bet. What year was that?

RC: That would have been 1970, because I was trying to get through [school]. I thought, "Well, if I go into ROTC, then I will get four years of education at least before I do duty."

TS: But they wanted you to cut your hair.

RC: Yes. He said, "We don't make you cut your hair if you join the Army ROTC." So I said, "Okay, that's the one I'll do." And first day, "Cut that hair young man." I said, "But you said ...." I won't tell you what he said, but I got my hair cut.

TS: I guess so. So you had long hair. Did you have a beard?

RC: From time to time I did, but I didn't stand out. I mean, everybody looked that way.

TS: Right, by that time, sure.

RC: So I guess we thought we were hippies, but we were conformists probably.

TS: In the commencement speech, the advice that you gave to students was not to get caught up in the pursuit of material things in their careers. Is that something that came out of this period for you, or is it something that you had always believed? How did that come about?

RC: I think I've always believed it, but I haven't always acted accordingly. I've gone through phases where I pretty much accumulated stuff, but I guess in the last decade it's fair to say that I've been a lot more rigorous as to fewer and fewer possessions in my life. I mentioned in my commencement address that there's a book that I like very much. It's essentially about pairing down all your possessions to one hundred things. And so I made a list and tried to do that the best I could. Because it seems to me, and I have thought this since I was a young man, that you get so much stuff, and before you know it you spend all of your time looking after your stuff. So I just basically don't want things, and I don't have very much. But I'm happy with that. I just don't want it.

TS: So your attitude toward possessions may have been there all along, but it has been applied mainly in the last ten years and not something that came out of the Sixties?

RC: Yes, last ten or fifteen years, something like that, I think. I think it is easier to do that, too, as you get to the age where maybe you have less responsibility towards the family than you had. You still take care of everybody, but you can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

TS: It's the time of life to downsize; is that what you're saying?

RC: Yes, I think so. My wife and I, sometimes people tease us how we don't want to own anything. We'll lease everything we can because I don't like ownership.

TS: Did you get married while you were in college?

RC: I did, my senior year of college.

TS: Did Lori go to Georgia Tech?

RC: No, she went to Berry College first, and then she transferred to Georgia State University. When I was in school, she worked at the Georgia Tech library. She did the ... what did they used to call it? ... the PHT, put hubby through.

TS: Did you do a master's thesis?

- RC: When I was going through, you had a choice. You could do a written thesis, or you could do a design thesis. I did the design thesis because it seemed to me that the folks who did the written thesis had to keep revising, revising, and revising. They would extend their career in school. With the design thesis, it was like a jury, and you either made it or you didn't. So I rolled the dice.
- TS: What kind of design did you do?
- RC: It was a university in Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, a big master plan and some building design.
- TS: Did anybody use it?
- RC: No, no, not at all.
- TS: You were saying before the interview started that you were actually teaching here by 1982, but you became a full-time faculty member in 1987. What were you doing in the years between your graduation in 1976 and full-time teaching at Southern College of Technology in 1987?
- RC: Well, when I graduated in 1976, I went as a hired gun in an architecture firm. I was working for Wise, Simpson & Aiken. They were one of the oldest architectural firms in the city of Atlanta. So I worked there, and then got interested in teaching—at least wanted to give it a try, teaching part-time. So I taught out here at Southern Tech, as we called it back then, and I first taught in 1982.
- TS: What were you teaching?
- RC: The first course I taught was architectural history, and then I taught some technical things. It was all interesting to me. I enjoyed it. So in 1987 I accepted a full-time tenure track position, but I had legal obligations to my architectural firm by that time. So for two years, I actually had two jobs. I was an assistant professor at Southern Tech, and I was an officer in an architectural firm in Buckhead. It took me about two years to get myself out of that situation.
- TS: So you had signed a contract with the architectural firm?
- RC: It wasn't exactly a contract, but I had part of the debt of the firm. So it was not so easy just to walk away from it.
- TS: So you were invested in the firm?
- RC: Yes, yes. And so my partners there, it wasn't just, "Have a good time, and we appreciate working with you these years, so good luck in academia." It was more, "Well, we have some obligations here, together, as a partnership."
- TS: So is this an offshoot of Wise, Simpson & Aiken?

RC: Yes, it became the firm of Simpson and Associates, one of the partners.

TS: So you had money to lose if the firm went under, I'm guessing?

RC: Yes, and I had clients. All those things had to be serviced before I could completely bow out.

TS: What did the folks at Southern Tech at that time think about that?

RC: Well, Southern Tech was a different place than some other schools, Georgia Tech for example, in that Southern Tech really expected their faculty to have a professional career as well, to do professional projects, to do consultations, that kind of thing. So they looked on kindly. As long as I did my job here, having those outside interests at that time was certainly not frowned on. And so that's one thing I really liked about Southern Tech. They appreciated that practice.

TS: So they're not expecting any scholarship out of you, and I guess limited service, except for what you're doing out in the community.

RC: Well, there was an expectation of scholarship and service, but limited compared to nowadays.

TS: Right. So you were teaching your classes, and then going to work in Buckhead?

RC: That's right, but I was one of the bosses in the firm in Buckhead, so I could come and go pretty much as I wanted to. The thing that was difficult was travel because if I had clients that were out of town, that was always very complicated. I've had situations where I would get off an airplane and drive out to Southern Tech, teach a course, and drive back, get on an airplane, go somewhere else. So it was complicated, very messy, for a couple of years, but I was young and had energy. I couldn't do that now, certainly.

TS: Well, that was a good supplement to your salary at Southern Tech anyway.

RC: And that's a good thing too because I remember the day I got my first check at Southern Tech as a tenure track, assistant prof. Nothing back then was direct deposit. So there's a check in my mailbox. We had these little cubbies. I take that thing out, and, no kidding, I go walking up the hall and open it, and I look at that check, and I think, "How am I going to explain this to my wife?" This was like half the salary I was making in the private world. So when I took the job at Southern Tech, the chair back then said, "Oh, you'll be able to make up that difference so easy because we encourage practice. So don't worry about that."

TS: And you believed that too?

RC: I believed that too [laughs]. It only took me twenty years to get back to the same salary.



- TS: Oh my goodness. So maybe the follow-up question to that is what was the appeal of teaching at Southern Tech as opposed to making all that money in private practice?
- RC: Well, that's a good question. That's a very, very good question. I didn't go into it lightly. But when you're in private practice as an architect, to me anyway, it was not quite what I thought it would be when I was in school. I thought every job would be really interesting, and every client would be, and it'd be a glamorous thing.
- TS: You thought you would be doing creative designs?
- RC: Right. Then, as you get more into management, you're directing projects, but you don't have your hands around the kinds of things that you really like doing. You're trying to do billing and collect money, and you're always out trying to get work. So I thought, "If I teach, then I'll be able to do these sort of boutique kind of jobs that I want. I'll just go after those kinds of jobs." I found those were hard to get too [laughs].
- TS: I bet.
- RC: But I don't regret it. It was certainly less income than private practice, but it's enough.
- TS: And I guess, what attracted you here was that it was here in the Atlanta area.
- RC: I had never been out to Southern Tech. I lived in Buckhead, and I got a call from the department chair. I didn't know who he was at the time. His name was [William S.] Dub Newman. I didn't know him, but he said someone at Southern Tech had recommended that he call me about teaching part time. This would have been 1982. I said, "Yes, that sounds good. I'd be interested in that. Let me come out and talk to you." I got off the phone with him, and I told my wife. "I'm going to go out there in the next couple days and talk to him." She said, "Good, good, good. Where is it?" And I said, "I don't know. I didn't ask." So I had to look it up. Back then, you had to look in the Yellow Pages, I guess. But I drove out here, and I still remember the day that I first came out here. I just thought this was the greatest campus. It had, and still has, the perimeter road [around campus], and there's no automobile traffic inside.
- I thought, "This is really nice." The people were just really wonderful. I hesitantly told the chair, when he was doing the interview, "Look, I still want to continue to practice." I thought he would say, "Oh, no, you can't do that." And he's like, "Sure, that's what we want you to do. That's why we contacted you, because you have a relatively successful practice." So I thought, "Okay, this should work out."
- TS: So everybody on the faculty was doing private projects? I know Jim Fausett [retired architecture professor James Gantt Fausett] was doing a lot of things. He would've been here back then.

- RC: Jim Fausett was here. Although we didn't know each other, I think Jim Fausett was in graduate school at Georgia Tech when I was in undergraduate school. We didn't really cross paths, didn't know him back then, but I think our times there coincided.
- TS: It could have been. He started here in 1971.
- RC: I think he finished with thirty-two years of service here [retired in 2003]. I still see Jim really often, a very dear friend of mine.
- TS: I was trying to imagine what it was like in 1982. Southern Tech gained its independence from Georgia Tech just in 1980. So it was, I guess, just getting started with a new administrative structure.
- RC: That's right. I do remember this about 1982. Our previous affiliation with Georgia Tech worked this way: the dean of Georgia Tech's College of Engineering became the first dean of Southern Tech.
- TS: He was, yes, [Walter O.] Carlson. [Editor's note: Carlson had been acting dean of Georgia Tech's College of Engineering. He served as dean of Southern Tech from the time the college gained senior-college status in 1970 until it won its independence from Georgia Tech in 1980. During this decade Southern Tech was under the direct supervision of Georgia Tech's College of Engineering].
- RC: Yes. What I remember when I started part time in 1982 was there were these orange Georgia Tech stickers on everything out here. I mean, every piece of equipment had Georgia Tech on it. Over the years, those got replaced. I thought that was kind of odd.
- TS: I know that there was a sense that Southern Tech didn't get proper funding while they had to go through Georgia Tech for everything they wanted.
- RC: That was my sense of it. As you know, by my first affiliation in 1982 and certainly by 1987, it was a case of, "Georgia Tech is behind us now." But, as I understand it, there were a lot of faculty and students in the Southern Tech community who wanted to keep the affiliation with Georgia Tech. I mean, that affiliation had a certain ...
- TS: Prestige?
- RC: Prestige to it. But in the end, it didn't work out that way.
- TS: Right. I was trying to figure things out the other day. I know you got a School of Architecture in [September] 1989, but if you go back to 1985 I think there was an administrative reorganization where Southern Tech created three schools: Arts and Sciences, Engineering Technology, and Management. Where did architecture fit?
- RC: I know there was that re-organization in 1985. [President] Lisa [A.] Rossbacher re-organized again. We were the School of Architecture, Construction Management, and

Civil Engineering Technology, if I remember correctly [from 2001 to 2011, when Civil Engineering Technology moved to the School of Engineering]. I'm not sure exactly what [the re-organization of 1985] meant to us practically, although we began to run into a difficulty in architecture in that the Georgia legislature, back in the mid-80s and preceding that, said if you did not have an accredited degree in architecture, there was still a path to licensure, but it was very, very complicated. It [required a bachelor's degree and a seven-year internship] before you sat for a qualifying exam. Well, the state wanted to do away with that system and go with a more modern system of just simply requiring an accredited degree to begin this path.

TS: Accredited by whom?

RC: By the National Architectural Accrediting Board, it's called NAAB.

TS: So degrees from Southern Tech were not accredited?

RC: They were not. They were accredited by ABET [Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology], but that's an engineering or STEM accrediting agency. We weren't accredited by the National Architectural Accrediting Board. Architectural engineering technology was not accredited.

TS: Oh, I see. Was that something that was pretty unique to this campus?

RC: It was unique. There were some other outstanding programs at the time, and I think these are still in place. Notre Dame has an outstanding program. One of the Arizona schools—I'm not sure if it's Arizona State or University of Arizona. We were always in competition with those schools for some of the higher rankings. We had a very, very good AET program, architectural engineering technology. But the state was beginning to make rumblings about, "We're going to do away with that program as a path to licensure, even through the complicated qualifying system." So we began to consider, how do we move towards a true bachelor of architecture program? It took a lot of lobbying and a lot of work on behalf of faculty and the supporting architectural community that really wanted Southern Tech graduates to have accredited degrees. To make a long story somewhat shorter, in the 1993-94 academic year, we became a candidate school for NAAB accreditation. And that's just the protocol. You first become a candidate school for professional accreditation, and then you take the next step if you are successful with your candidacy to get your first accreditation. Our first professional accreditation was 1995.

TS: I should have read my interview with Jim Fausett because he talks at length about earning NAAB accreditation.

RC: A funny story about that—when we were going through the candidacy and we had to set up all these displays and prove ourselves with the design work we were doing with our students, and provide all the documentation, we were very careful to document all that on VHS video tape. So we filmed everything. We were so proud of ourselves. Then I

won't say whom, but one faculty person took the tape home and recorded an episode of *The Simpsons* on top of it, so we lost all that.

TS: Oh, no.

RC: I would give anything to look back at that and see those preparations that we did. But we were successful, and so then we moved forward. They had a tricky way of looking back at students who were in the candidacy curriculum, and their degrees were accredited then. So since the mid-1990s, we have been an accredited program.

TS: How large was the program before accreditation?

RC: We were huge. AET probably had between four and five hundred students. It was a huge, thundering beast of a program. Then, when we got accreditation, we dropped down to maybe just over one hundred students.

TS: Why was that?

RC: Well, it was a five-year program for one thing, and it was very, very rigorous—not that AET wasn't rigorous. It was a different arena now that we were in. I want to say back then that there were like 119 programs that were accredited in the United States—not schools, but programs. Whether it was Stanford or Southern Tech, we had to meet the same standard as we do now. And so it was very, very difficult for students to do that, and it limited our numbers.

TS: Did students have any trouble getting jobs when the program was unaccredited?

RC: No, not at all. We had a really great placement rate when we were an AET program and when we became an architecture program—just great placement rates until 2009 with the recession. That was a tough time for architects. And I'm talking mainly about architecture. After I became interim dean in 2012, [I began to] know a lot more about construction management, but I didn't know so much about it before then.

TS: So the architectural firms didn't seem to care whether it was an AET or an architectural program?

RC: Well, they began to care somewhere around the mid-1980s. I think that is why the state legislatures wanted more assurances, I suppose is a fair way of putting it, that all architects were qualified. See, the thing with architecture—and it's a joke in the profession, at least we tease about this—architects do a lot more than just design and manage construction and that sort of thing. They're responsible for the health and safety of people. The little joke is doctors can kill folks, but they kill them one at a time.

TS: If a building collapses ...

RC: Yes. Architects can take out eighty thousand at Sanford Stadium.

- TS: Right, right.
- RC: This is where I'd usually do my University of Georgia joke, but I won't. I'll let it go. Since my daughter goes there, I have to be kinder now.
- TS: Oh, okay. Southern Poly gained university status in 1996, the same year that Georgia finally caught up with the rest of the world and started calling the colleges in the University System that acted like universities by the name "university." How did that affect the architectural program here?
- RC: I think it was helpful. It was more of a prestige thing nationally than anything else. We didn't make any substantive changes to anything that I remember. It was sort of bestowed upon us, and we were happy to be called a university.
- TS: Right. I remember at Kennesaw, they told us at the time that we weren't going to have any more money, and it wasn't going to make any difference in what we were expected to do, but we found out in time that it really did make a difference in some ways, in terms of expectation for scholarships and what have you.
- RC: Expectations, that's true. You're right about that.
- TS: I just wondered if that was the case at Southern Polytechnic.
- RC: I don't think that was stated anywhere. But I think it was just natural, in particular with new faculty coming in. With that title change, if you will, there was a sensibility about elevated expectations of scholarship. Yes, I think that's fair.
- TS: That was my sense at Kennesaw too. We were always hiring people that were better prepared than we were when we were hired or that had higher expectations in terms of scholarships.
- RC: Yes, that's probably a good thing overall.
- TS: And then everybody else had to catch up or fall behind.
- RC: Yes. And there's still some of that sort of conflict. I don't think it's really contentious, but I know there are a lot of faculty that have been here a long time for whom teaching was their mission. That's their passion. That's what they're about. Somewhat higher expectations of scholarship were not at all something that they couldn't do. That's not what they signed on for, but they cope well. I think they do well with it.
- TS: I know at Kennesaw we had a number of faculty members that could've gone to a research university, but they wanted to teach. That's why they were here. Did you have that experience on the Southern Polytechnic campus?

- RC: I think that's true, and we have people in construction management and architecture who want to continue consulting and practice. Personally, I think that's a good thing. I think that gives us our somewhat unique identity that we're a bit more a hands-on place than some others. I think that's true.
- TS: If you're doing more scholarship, it's going to cut into your work in the field, isn't it, unless you can tie those two together?
- RC: Yes, you've got to tie it together. Now, I think too, there's more appreciation of the scholarship of practice, and so that helps.
- TS: Scholarship of practice? Like scholarship of teaching, this is scholarship of practice?
- RC: Yes, exactly. In construction management and architecture, when you go from standing in the mud to a building being there, it's a pretty amazing learning process. And if you can communicate that to others, that is essentially scholarship—when you can develop knowledge and pass it on. I think universities in general are more sensitive to that now. That is a legitimate form of scholarship. It was professional development for a long time. If you did any kind of practice, that's professional development. But I think there is a little more awareness now that there's scholarship in there too.
- TS: I know that Betty [L.] Siegel at Kennesaw was a big advocate from day one of [Ernest L.] Boyer's model [*Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990)]. A big focus on the Kennesaw campus was not retooling your career by going back and recovering a field that you left behind in graduate school, but to make scholarship of teaching your scholarship.
- RC: I don't know Betty Siegel like all the people on the Kennesaw campus know her, of course. But at Southern Tech before consolidation, and when she was at the height of her powers, it was like in sports. When there's somebody on the other team that you're not supposed to like, but boy you really wish he or she was on your team, that's what she was to Southern Tech. It's like, "Wow, do we stand a chance against that university? I wish we had her." I loved our administration, but I always thought of that sports analogy.
- TS: Well, one of her strong attributes was to spread the message far and wide about her institution.
- RC: Well, that's right. But we were so fortunate at Southern Tech to have great leadership. We had Dr. Stephen [R.] Cheshier, who was fantastic and was just the right person at the right time for us [president, 1980-1997]. Then we had [Daniel S.] Dan Papp, who moved us forward [as interim president, 1997-1998]. And of course Dr. Rossbacher, who was a dear friend of mine, just such a powerful, powerful force on this campus. We were all so proud to have a woman president who was an astronaut [candidate] and Princeton graduate [1983 PhD in Geological and Geophysical Science]. I mean, we were just so lucky to have her, so fortunate.

TS: That leads into the next question I had. There was a huge controversy on this campus in 1997 about Dr. Cheshier before he retired, and also Harris [T.] Travis [vice president for academic affairs] who was already pastor of Zion Baptist, a much beloved pastor there for many years.

RC: I think he still is.

TS: Well, he retired a year ago.

RC: Oh, he did? I saw him maybe a year ago.

TS: But there was a big controversy on campus when Cheshier was president and Dr. Travis was vice president for academic affairs. My question is, it sounds like you were a supporter of Cheshier, but do you have any memories of that controversy, and do you remember what you thought about it at the time?

RC: Well, as I say, he was a friend of mine, and, in fact, I was the architect for his home. So I freely admit that, and it may prejudice my opinion. But I know about the incident. I remember it, and I'll tell you what, by that time I was smart enough as a faculty person to stay away from it. I mean, it was a certain group of people who were very energetic and passionate about what they were doing, and I just thought, "Well, all the facts will come out, and maybe I am naïve, but the survivors who deserve to survive will survive."

TS: We passed over the fact that you had a consulting practice from a couple of years after you became a tenure track faculty member. You didn't have much time to engage in campus politics anyway, I guess, did you?

RC: Not much time, but I have intentionally avoided that, and I think that has had something to do with my longevity. In fact, people often tease me that, "If Cole knows anything about it, then you can rest assured everybody else knows because he's going to be the last one." I like to think that I am pretty impartial about things, and just I want to hear facts. I don't like the rumor mill stuff. I don't know. Maybe that's why I'm an old man sitting here that's still employed.

TS: I've been in communication with Dr. Cheshier lately. We're going to be on a panel together at the Marietta Museum of History on history of higher education in Cobb County coming up a week from Friday.

RC: He's a great guy, yes. There has been a lot of turnover at KSU. So I tease with my colleagues whenever I send out an email to a lot of people. I don't know if it's excessive or not.

TS: We've had a lot the last couple of years.

RC: It seems to me like there's a lot. So I tease. When I have to send out an email to a lot of people, I always blind copy myself just to see if I'm still employed here. If it bounces back ...

TS: I don't think you have to worry about that. But the president's cabinet has pretty much been depleted from a couple of years ago.

RC: Well, if you look back from the Southern Polytechnic perspective, we had Dr. Rossbacher [president of SPSU, 1998-2014], and she left. Right? Then we had Dr. Papp [president of KSU, 2006-2016, president of the consolidated university, 2015-2016], and he's gone. That's two. And let's not forget Ron [R.] Koger. When I was interim VPAA [vice president for academic affairs], he was interim president [July 2014-January 2015]. So we go Dr. Rossbacher, we have Dr. Koger, and we have Dr. Papp. That's three. And then we have Houston [D.] Davis [interim president, July 1, 2016 to October 31, 2016], that's four. And then we have [Samuel S.] Sam Olens [president, November 1, 2016 to February 15, 2018], right?

TS: Yes.

RC: That's five.

TS: And Ken Harmon [interim president W. Ken Harmon] right now.

RC: So the next president will be number seven.

TS: You've had a lot of change on this campus, I guess, when you count that way.

RC: It has to be some kind of record—in four years seven changes in leadership.

TS: That's a lot of change for sure. You seem to imply that Dr. Papp was a pretty good interim president here in 1997-1998.

RC: He was good, yes. We all liked him. And he brought football, and I like that.

TS: Yes, and he got a football team for Kennesaw State.

RC: That's exactly right. Before he left, I would ask him questions about the triple option. Here was a college president who could tell you the details of it, and I liked that.

TS: He played college football as a freshman at Dartmouth, and then got hurt and went to rugby after that.

RC: Super guy, so smart and easy to talk to.

TS: I'm still in mourning about what happened the last two years on our campus. Do you stay in touch with him?



- RC: Not on any kind of regular basis. I did see him at an event on our campus. It's been two or three months ago, I guess.
- TS: Oh, he came out here?
- RC: Yes. There was a dance event at our auditorium, and he happened to be in the audience. That was the last time I saw him. That had to be three months ago, I guess, something like that.
- TS: Do you remember the search for President Rossbacher? I understand that faculty was not involved at all.
- RC: I really don't. I was on the committee for her inauguration ceremony. I had this really important job of making sure all the college presidents from around the country were lined up. That's what I did [laughs]. But I enjoyed that experience, and that was a great event. It was really, really a big deal. It's the first time I had been involved in any of that kind of thing, and I was on the planning committee.
- TS: How long did it take people to warm up to her being here? Was it immediately, or did it take a while?
- RC: My memory is that there weren't any real rough spots. The first big policy thing that I remember—now I'm sure she did a lot more that I just wasn't privy to—but she instituted what I believe was called the strong dean model. That was a reorganization of the deans' powers on the campus, and I think that brought us more into contemporary times. There was more responsibility for financial situations, that sort of thing. I remember that. I was very, very impressed with her leadership and her leadership style.
- TS: Let's talk about your teaching for a little while. You mentioned the first course you taught here was architectural history. I know you taught a course on Atlanta architecture for quite a while. Could you talk about your teaching?
- RC: Yes. Going way back now to the AET days, I taught, believe it or not, seventeen different courses. Now that tells me we probably had too many courses.
- TS: A lot of preparations.
- RC: I'm sure I wasn't qualified to teach seventeen courses, but I think we were a little shorthanded. When we became an accredited program, my areas of teaching were studio instruction, teaching studio. And I was the thesis teacher here until we got too big for it to be one teacher in there. Then there was architectural design, which we call studio. Way back when I was in college, we called it lab, but it's called studio now. And I taught professional practice and the Atlanta architectural history. Another elective course that I taught was tall building design. Occasionally, I might do something else, but those were my usual courses.

- TS: How did the tall buildings course come about? Were you designing tall buildings?
- RC: Well, I had been involved in that, but nothing that was on a scale that would be nationally recognized or anything like that. I was just really fascinated with tall buildings because they are still essentially hand-built objects, and that's amazing to me—that kind of coordination and execution of doing those immense works. It's an architectural type too that had a time when it didn't exist, and then it existed. If you take, say early 1850s, 1860s in Chicago and New York, there were not tall buildings. Then, suddenly, there are tall buildings.
- TS: You had to have an elevator before you could have tall buildings.
- RC: That's right. So now there's something new under the sun, and I could relate to that. That was something that wasn't so very long ago.
- TS: Wasn't a guy names [Elisha Graves] Otis the inventor of the elevator in the 19th century?
- RC: Yes. He didn't exactly invent the elevator. He just made it so it didn't kill people. It was the Otis safety elevator. It had little cams that would catch on it. They had elevators before that, but they were sometimes deadly. And then steel. We went from iron to steel, and steel had much more malleable and ductal properties. You could go very tall with it, and buildings didn't have to have load bearing thick, thick, walls. See, in the world of rental space, you rent to the outside wall. The entire building has to be amortized.
- TS: Right. So you're losing money if you have to have a really thick wall.
- RC: Yes, yes. A lot of folks say, "Architects like to put these thin glass walls on because it's an aesthetic thing." Well, sort of, yes, but it's also thin. I was just fascinated by the equation of the functionality, the aesthetic, and the business of the tall building. It needs to pay off. So I got into that. Then field trips to see early tall building were relatively easy. You didn't have to leave the country for the most part. You go to Chicago and New York. So that was a good fit for me.
- Professional practice was a good fit for me. I have been doing that for a long time. The course was actually titled "Professional Practice and Ethics" because to be a member of the American Institute of Architects [AIA], there's a canon of ethics. I always did my best to make sure that students understood that you have an obligation as a professional to first serve others. If you make enough money, if there's some left over for you, that's great, but your obligation as a professional is first to other folks.
- TS: Right. Did you teach a course in the history of Atlanta architecture just because we are in the Atlanta area or was there a deeper reason?
- RC: Well, I was really interested in Atlanta because certainly it was convenient and easy to study, but also General [William T.] Sherman instituted an urban renewal plan, if you will, training his artillery [during the Union army's invasion of Atlanta in 1864] on the

Terminus district. So it was a clean slate, and it was an interesting laboratory to watch how things developed. And it's still very, very interesting to me. I look at the expressway system as it goes through downtown, and you can see that's where poor folks used to live because the expressways kind of trace out [where they were].

TS: It ran through them, didn't it? It was politically easiest to tear down poor people's neighborhoods.

RC: Yes. You can see that in a lot of cities, but Atlanta being so close, it's like a living laboratory. I can't think of anything particularly unique about my teaching design studio, other than I'll tell you this: I've never liked the culture within architectural academia when students have to stay up all night so long [working on their design projects], and they never leave the building. It's very, very difficult for them emotionally, mentally, etc. So I used to give my students extra credit for not staying up all night.

TS: Okay. How did you measure that?

RC: Well, when I was younger, I would actually stay up all night with them. I would work over here all night and help them with their projects and that kind of thing. Then I got a bit old for that and realized the toll it was taking on students. I remember when I was in school, it was a right of passage, I think. So I thought, "Let me try this. We'll have an honor system. You go to bed, get some sleep, and present your work the next day." You can usually tell who's been up all night, or up two or three nights. It worked out fine. Projects were just fine, and students were better adjusted. But it was interesting to give students credit for not staying up.

TS: Well, that's great. I told you that I looked at what students said about your classes on Rate My Professor. It's all there on the Internet.

RC: Oh, boy. You can't hide from anything.

TS: You can't hide from it anymore, but you should pay folks for what they were saying about your courses.

RC: Did I have one of those chili peppers showing I'm hot?

TS: I didn't look at the side where the numbers are. I just looked at the written comments. They said that you make students think. What faculty member wouldn't want people saying that about him? They said that you're tough but helpful, that you're funny, and that lazy students shouldn't take your courses [laughs]. So I guess my question is, is that a fair assessment of your philosophy of teaching?

RC: I think so, and I appreciate those comments. Those sound good. There were probably some that weren't so good in there too.

TS: I didn't see them.

RC: I've always thought, at least since I matured as an academic, that students or their parents pay good American dollars, a lot of money, to take these courses. And I'm going to do my best to give them their money's worth. That means critiquing their work, but diplomatically and trying to be gentle. If something doesn't rise to the level that it should, I think it's only fair that I tell you that. I'm not mad at you or anything. I'm not trying to shame you. It's just that's not good enough for you to compete. So that's the way I approached it. I'm just trying to give you something you paid for, and just trying to be consistent that way. But never, ever, ever belittle anyone or talk badly to them or about them; just treat people with a lot of respect. They deserve that respect because architecture and construction are pretty tough disciplines. But, yes, that's just been kind of my philosophy.

I've always been really proud too of the fact that Kennesaw now, but Southern Tech and Southern Polytechnic before, had what I think of metaphorically as big open arms. We're going to give you your shot. In RPG stats [retention, progression, graduation] we're going to have a bigger washout rate than some schools that are more elitist in whom they accept. But I would rather have some retention problems and know that I gave students their shot at success. This is just me personally as a dean. I want to give you your shot. Your parents and sometimes students pay taxes for public education. We're never, ever going to lower our standards. We can't. We have a threshold we have to meet, the same as other schools that perhaps can be more selective about the SATs, etc. But here's the thing. "We are going to give you a shot, and we are going to give you your money's worth, and we are pulling for you and going to do all we can to make you successful, and we're going to give you a shot."

TS: You seem to be going beyond your classroom to the institution as a whole. Do you see this as the vision of the institution?

RC: I do. I think of it as the university's position. But even if it isn't, I can't control that. It's my college's position. "We're never, ever going to lower our standards. But young woman and young man, we're going to give you a shot where other schools might not. We're going to do all we can to make you successful. But if it doesn't work out, I hope you will look back and say, 'I had my shot.'" So, to me, that's what public education should be—give kids a chance.

TS: Yes. So we're never going to have the graduation rate of a Georgia Tech, because they take the best in terms of high school grades and SAT scores?

RC: That's true. They do take the best in those categories, but I think our young people in my college here are gritty. They try so hard! You can't measure those things in numbers—the persistence. Some of these kids are first time college kids, and I think that can make up for a lot of things, just how badly you want it. When I'm sitting with parents, and I do this often, they're trying to decide whether their daughter or son is interested in construction management or architecture. They say, "We're considering the University of Tennessee, Auburn, and Georgia Tech"—usual suspects around here. I tell them, "If you can get into all those schools, that's fantastic. You can't make a bad choice. They're

all great schools. In the State of Georgia, we're so lucky to have great public institutions and private schools as well. So maybe, if I'm pointing out any difference, if you come here, we're going to put our entire effort behind making you successful."

TS: When I say that the elite schools get the best [traditional-aged] students, based on my teaching at Kennesaw over the years, I always thought that we had the best because we had all these nontraditional students that came back that were highly motivated and brought work experience. Did you have nontraditional students to the same degree on this campus? I mean, there was a time when our average student age was 27 for undergraduates.

RC: We have that. I can tell you this as an example of that. From time to time, I'm asked to give a guest lecture, say, in construction management, particularly. I will go there, and it will be mid-afternoon, 2:00 or 3:00

, let's say. I look out there, and there are students who have been working that morning, and they've got mud on their clothes. They're sitting there attentively and so engaged in this, and many of them paying their way. I think, "I don't know what your SAT was, and I don't know what your high school average was. If you happened to go to a school that was under-resourced and didn't offer AP calculus, that was not your fault." So, again, I look out there, and I think, "You guys and ladies staying awake and working so hard and being concerned about your grades and your job and often your families, to me that at least equals, if it doesn't trump, a higher SAT. Yes. That's the old hippie in me, right [laughs]?"

TS: Well, it may be. It's my experience too. It makes perfect sense to me that motivated students, regardless of SAT scores, are going to beat unmotivated persons that aced all the classes in high school.

RC: And we're so fortunate. I mean, if we have the profile of a student at a Georgia Tech, well, that's fine. Now we've got just as great a profile. It's just different at KSU. I think we need to be comprehensive and serve everyone—give him or her a shot.

TS: Yes. I noticed on your website that your research focused on the history of architectural practices and the law. Is your research the scholarship of practice that you were talking about earlier, or is this something else?

RC: Well, this isn't quite the scholarship of practice in that I'm practicing. It's that in architecture, governing our practice, whether it's implicit or explicit, are a whole series of documents that have been developed really since the three quarter mark of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The reason I'm saying it that way, it's a little fuzzy when exactly this started. But there are documents, like the general conditions of construction, which set forth the rules of what each party is responsible for—everything from how someone gets paid to what their liabilities are. Well, that's fascinating to me because that has actually shaped the practice. The legality of doing something, like managing construction or designing buildings, is so fraught with the potential for damage to someone that the legal

profession, in conjunction with architects and contractors, has developed over one hundred documents that actually control the way that we practice. That has been fascinating to me, historically, when a change has been made.

There was a time when architects, for example, had far more control of the actual construction process, but that was so risky that architects essentially abdicated that position through their documents. And then it's interesting to me how our compensation went down because people generally pay you for taking risks. And so that's what I've been interested in, how these documents affect practice.

TS: Has this lead to presentations and publications?

RC: Yes, some. I'm not one of the heavy weights in publications.

TS: Well, you haven't had time have you?

RC: Yes. I have had publications, and I have limited research, but as dean, that's just really difficult to keep everybody else going and happy.

TS: What about expectations for faculty, nowadays, in terms of scholarship and service? How has that evolved from your early days?

RC: Well, it has evolved. There's no doubt about that. When I started teaching thirty-six years ago in 1982, in my discipline of architecture, and now construction management, practicing and teaching and doing some limited service was good enough to be tenured and promoted. As dean of the College of Architecture and Construction Management, I know that is not the case now. There has to be research and creative activity that I think is increasingly more and more important to the tenure and promotion process. Notwithstanding that we say at KSU we are a comprehensive university with some expectations in research and creative activity, you know and I know too that research is valued differently than service. I've never known anybody that got tenured because of service.

So research is increasingly more and more important, and that's fine with me. I want to make sure that faculty members are supported, so that they can achieve that expectation, however. If you're teaching a three, four load [three courses one semester, four courses the other] or a four, four load, it's really difficult to do that component. So we have to find creative ways, particularly when we're not maybe as resourced as an R1; but as an R3, we still have to find ways for faculty to involve themselves in research.

TS: In your college, do you have a scholarship track that people can get on, like the Coles College?

RC: No, no. We really don't. We've investigated, and I think this is going to happen, having a faculty position that's like a chair of practice where it doesn't have the same

expectations of conventional scholarship, but it would be a renewable position every year, but wouldn't expire like a limited term. So we're working towards that.

TS: Well, it'd be a good thing to raise some outside funding to support a chair.

RC: Yes, always funding. That's what it gets down to so many times.

TS: Could you talk about some of the commercial projects that you worked on in your consulting practice over the years?

RC: Oh my goodness. Yes, sure. I was fortunate, when I was in deep water days of practice, to have a partner who was retired military. I was a youngster, and he was older and was a mentor as well. His name was Bill Simpson. He had a lot of connections still in facilities engineers on military bases. With the onset of the volunteer Army, Army and Navy bases had to be competitive with the facilities in the private world. They had to build shopping centers and, really, much, much nicer facilities. We were a leading edge of that, so we did a lot of shopping malls on military bases and Army Reserve training centers, and a lot of work for the Naval Facilities Engineering Command. So we had a really nice foundation of work on military bases.

My territory was more or less—sometimes I ventured outside of this—from Miami to Richmond, Virginia—anything that I could get as a commission in that area. In fact, we did a big shopping mall at Homestead [Florida] Air Force Base. Then Hurricane Andrew came along [on August 24, 1992] and blew it away. It was one of the most impactful episodes in my career. We had some attorneys from the military visit our office, and I thought, “This is it. We're going to be sued.” True story—they came in and were very, very nice to us. They said, “Look, we know you're anxious because your building got blown away, and you're probably suspecting that maybe some things weren't up to code, but we're here because we need you to help us locate the building. Where was it?” And so we rolled out these huge photogrammetry drawing of the debris field and compared it with our drawings to locate the building. It was emotional to me. I just couldn't believe that there was this kind of destruction. The sidewalks were peeled up. It was just amazing. The debris field just covered everything, so we had to find some reference points.

TS: Did they build it back?

RC: No. We had done everything we were supposed to do, but it was very difficult to withstand that. So I've had a lot of really, really interesting buildings, some small, some large, and some projects that were just weird, but were really interesting. One time I had a gentleman come to me who packaged condiments for fast food places. He needed to streamline his processes. I said, “Why are you talking to me? It seems like you need an industrial engineer or something like that.” He said, “I don't know. I'm here because somebody mentioned you. If you don't want to do it, it's not a big deal.” And I said, “No, no, no.” I learned a long time ago, notwithstanding the fee, I don't turn it down. I just say, “What can I do for you for that amount of money?” So he takes me out to his

operation, and I look there, and he's got two-story high, stainless steel, big containers of ketchup and mustard and all this stuff, and I was fascinated. I couldn't get enough of trying to figure out how do you get all that stuff in these little packages? And so I had that sort of weird projects. And there have been a few others, just strange projects.

TS: How does that work affect your teaching and the things you do on campus, your professional career? Can you bring those things into the classroom?

RC: Well, I think as an old prof, I tell probably too many stories, but it does tend to engage students. I think the overall message is that you're going to be a professional, and again you're granted that. You've earned it, but at some point, the governmental authority bestows upon you certification that you are now a professional in your discipline. I try to instill that what that means is you do things for other folks. You try to make their lives better. If you can make a fortune at doing it, all the better. I've got no problem with that, but your focus has to be taking care of other people first.

And so if you look around and you think, "That environment is ugly. And here I have a client who wants me to do a fast food place or a convenience store." I tell them don't turn that down. Try to make the world better. Take that commission and do your best to make things better. Don't turn your back and say, "No, it's too ugly. I don't want to have anything to do with that." So, I don't know, [that is the philosophy of] a hippie.

TS: Well, architecture and art, if you have a feel for art, I would think that would go a long way toward helping you make things look better.

RC: Yes, I think that's right. In construction management and construction in general, I always have been really, really interested in how you put things together with the most efficient procedures. I think there's some misunderstanding about construction management. Some folks might think, "It's about construction," and it certainly is about construction, but it's as much business or maybe more business than it is construction. So that's interesting to me, how you go from an idea and basically just dirt, and then there's something there that people benefit from. How do you get there? How do you do that?

TS: Right, right. Well, this building, the Architecture Building, opened in the spring of 2002. Where were you before then? And how did it affect the architectural program to have this nice building?

RC: We were in a building that I guess was a fifty- or sixty-year-old building. We call it now the I1 [Design 1] Building, but back then we used to call it the AET Building. It's one of these long, bar-shaped buildings towards the west campus. We were stuffed in that [35,027 square foot] building. Then, when we got this [101,793 square foot] building, as you said it came online in 2002. It seems to me that we moved in here in March, I want to say. It's made a big difference. Funny aside, funny to me anyway—this building was designed in a way to reveal the layers of construction. I don't know if you noticed, but if you walk down the corridor, the ceiling will begin and then end and reveal the next strata



of construction. It, basically, is the same now as for the last couple thousand years. You put up small stuff, then bigger stuff, then slap a bigger thing across it. So the building reveals that. I've had probably a dozen sets of parents come through and say, "This is really a nice building. When is it going to be finished? [laughs]"

TS: Right, right. Your wall in your office shows how it was constructed.

RC: Yes, they think we ran out of money. And this building has won a number of awards. We're very, very proud of it. Interestingly enough, when we were in the design stages, I think there were 145 Ethernet ports in this building in all the classrooms. Then, right after that, robust Wi-Fi came online, so all those are just sitting there. Nobody ever uses them. We were so proud of those for about thirty seconds before technology changed. But the building has been a great recruiting tool for us, and students take a lot of pride in it. I've been in a lot of architecture buildings all over the United States, and this is one of the very best. This is a very good building. In the architecture and construction management domain, we have two other freestanding buildings, and then we have the top floor of the H [Academic] building.

In my college, architecture takes up a lot of space, and that is because there's an expectation for accreditation that architecture students get about eighty to one hundred square feet of space 24/7. That's their space, so they don't have to come and go. They operate in that studio space. If this were something in Gen Ed [General Education], you could put three or four sections in there in a day and really get some returns on the space. We can't do that in architecture. But as I've said to everybody that will listen, if you're going to be a big boy university, you've got to have architecture and football. You're never going to make any money on architecture. You might break even on football.

TS: Some institutions do. I don't think Kennesaw is ever going to.

RC: I am forever trying to remind people that architecture has its benefits, but you're not going to get any kind of return on the space aspect of it that you get in some other disciplines.

TS: Right, right. Well, we've already talked about how your degree changed in the 1990s from architectural engineering technology to a NAAB accredited program. In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when we got the straight engineering degrees, especially electrical, civil, and mechanical in 2009, did that change the campus culture at all? Did it have an impact on the architectural program?

RC: I think it upped the expectations again. There still was engineering technology, which is a very, very valid discipline in itself, and there are arguments to be made as to whether it is equal in prestige, etc., to engineering. I won't get into that. I don't have a dog in that fight, particularly, but I know that the professional engineering put even more pressure on computing and architecture and construction management in the way of more scholarship, more research. Nobody wrote that down, but I think just we all felt it. And I think it has overall been a good thing.

I've always thought that if an institution is getting better, and if it is doing that by the written documentation and demands, that's one thing, but also just organically if it's getting better because people make one improvement here, and there's some pressure for other people, I think that's a good thing. I look back, and I think it's a good thing. I don't believe I could get into Georgia Tech now, and that's good. So I'm okay with that. And I've told students that the best thing that can happen as you look back at Southern Poly or Kennesaw State University twenty years from now, you think, "Man, I couldn't get in that place." And that's good.

TS: Yes, I've long thought that I got hired at the right time [in 1968] because later on they wouldn't have hired me with the qualifications I had back then.

RC: Well, I've always thought I was lucky in a similar way. I've always had really great people around me too. I don't know how I lucked into that. Right now, I have two chairs, a chair of architecture [Anthony Rizzuto] and a chair of construction management [Khalid Siddiqi], and those guys are just amazing. They are so good. They work so hard, and they're so supportive. And they like each other. They're friends, and that just makes my life so easy.

TS: I know you became an interim dean in July 2012 and permanent dean on July 1, 2013. Were you a department chair before you became dean?

RC: No, I've never been a department chair. In fact, when I became the interim vice president for academic affairs [in 2014], I asked the question because they were asking me if I wanted to do this. I said, "Don't you need somebody that's had some heavy administrative experience and somebody that's really smart?" The person that was interviewing me said, "No, no. We like you because you're old, and you don't panic easily [laughs]." So I thought, "I can do this." But going back to 2012, when I became interim dean, that came about because we had a situation wherein there was a search for a new dean, and I guess you'd call it a failed search. It didn't work out. They didn't hire any of those candidates. So that's when I was approached for whether I wanted to be interim dean. So I took that. Then that went on until the talk of the consolidation. Then when Dr. [Zvi] Szafran left [to become president of State University of New York College of Technology at Canton], that's when I asked, "Don't you need a smart person?"

TS: I still get Zvi Szafran's *Weekly Blab*. He's so funny when talking about what he's doing inside his house, and whether he needs to get it painted, or whatever.

RC: Yes, he's a dear, dear friend of mine, and I miss him.

TS: We lost some talent with consolidation, I think.

RC: Well, the reason that the system office consolidated us was to save a few bucks that were supposed to be redirected to student success. Most of your money is in personnel, so we lost a lot of people from this campus. I'll just tell you, it was devastating. In fact, when I

was interim VPAA, we had to get counseling in because, just think about it; we lost our identity. We lost all of our coaches. We lost our sports teams. We lost our mascot. We lost our school colors. We lost important people, and that's the most important thing. We lost all of our leadership. I don't mean anything in a bad way towards Kennesaw State University. In fact, they've been wonderful to us. They've done everything humanly possible to make this all work out, and it has. But there's no denying that it was just a gut punch to us.

TS: Yes. Well, I remember coming out here at the time to do some interviews, and so many people were taking an early retirement or applying elsewhere because they were uncertain about their future.

RC: Well, let's see. I believe it was November 1, 2013.

TS: That's correct, the announcement.

RC: I got notified at my home the night before by Dr. Rossbacher, saying to be at her office at 9:00 in the morning or whatever it was.

TS: She didn't say why?

RC: No. And so all the deans were there.

TS: So you knew it was important?

RC: I thought it was about a hole in the budget. I mean, we've had those kinds of things where we had to have an emergency meeting to come figure out what we were going to do, but it wasn't that. She said, essentially, the consolidation is the end of Southern Polytechnic, and they were going to make the press release, I believe, at noon. So we only had a couple hours to go back to our colleges and explain to our chairs and all what was going to happen. Then we went from that situation, and I believe there were fourteen months of [planning]. There was OWGs [operational working groups] and working together to get everything done.

TS: Yes, by January of 2015.

RC: Yes, January the 6th, six minutes after 10:00 AM.

TS: You don't forget those days, do you?

RC: No, because it changed my life. On January 1, 2015, I came over with my wife, Lori, and we went all over campus. Nobody was on campus. It was on New Year's Day. I stood in front of every building and she took my picture.

TS: Oh, really?

- RC: Yes. Southern Poly had these little green hexagon signs all over the place for directions. I tried to steal one, but they were all gone except for the one outside the Administration Building. I put my shoulder in that thing. I could not break it off for anything. All the others were gone, and I wanted one.
- TS: Because people had taken them for posterity?
- RC: Yes, and I couldn't. I would've taken one, but I couldn't get it off. I was up at the [Joe Mack Wilson] Student Center once classes started, and I was explaining to a young man at the reception desk about what happened to all the signs. He said, "If you had come in here and wanted to check out a pry bar and a hammer, we were checking those out to students."
- TS: Is that right?
- RC: Because they were just going to destroy all the signage anyway. People wanted souvenirs. But I was fortunate to get a lot of pictures that I think I'll look back on fondly.
- TS: Oh, we need digital copies for the archives, for the record.
- RC: We got a bunch of them. I went and stood in front of all the signs. I wanted to get one of those sign souvenirs, but it just didn't work out.
- TS: At least those photographs will be invaluable for the university's history for sure. So you didn't have a clue that the consolidation was going to happen?
- RC: I had heard rumors for a decade. There had been talks about this. Off and on it would heat up, and then it would go away. But I did not know. The evening that I was contacted before November 1, I didn't know what was going on. I don't know if my fellow deans did or not. I don't think so because when I went into the room, there were a lot of long faces. I thought Dr. Rossbacher was magnificent! She took this in stride and could not have been more gracious. This was her job, and she had done so much to build this place.
- TS: And she knew she wasn't going to be president of the new [consolidated] school.
- RC: Right, but she worked tirelessly to make a seamless transition. I think she knew she had to be the example of how you deal with something like this. She had great dignity, and I just thought she was the solid rock for many of us. We thought, "If Lisa and Zvi can deal with this, then we can deal with it."
- TS: And fortunately, they both got jobs as college presidents.
- RC: Yes, they did.

- TS: Of course, eight colleges in the University System of Georgia had already been consolidated in early 2013 into four new institutions, so I guess everybody knew that it was in the works, that the university system was moving in that direction.
- RC: Yes. We were classified as a special purpose institution. I believe we naively thought that might give us some protection. In the end, it did not. I don't want to sound like I'm not appreciative of all the good things about consolidation. I get it. I understand it, but I think it is important to note that it was pretty hard on this campus. It was really, really, hard.
- TS: When you say that they brought in counseling, could you explain that a little bit?
- RC: Again, I was interim VPAA, and I'd have folks come there very, very distressed and just wanting to talk. I think we requested it through legal; I think, that we had a counselor available. Kennesaw graciously paid for that, and that helped. We eventually began to heal and began to feel like a community again. Now, it's interesting to me that we are developing, I think. We're cohesive. We're one university, but I think it's a good thing that there are identity differences in the two campus. I started referring to our campus as the lawless south campus.
- TS: The lawless?
- RC: Lawless, because we're down here with—just teasing—nobody watching us. We're the lawless south. I've said that a few times, and then I've noticed a few other people are saying it now. That's not a bad thing. It's those kinds of quirky little things, I think, that help to build community. On our campus, we lost all of our traditions. I think to the credit of the New U, we're beginning to think about rebuilding some of those. We had the bathtub races.
- TS: Well, I know you had a race—it wasn't bathtubs—but there was a race on campus just a couple of weeks ago.
- RC: Well, the bathtub races really did get out of hand. I mean, they were going like seventy miles per hour. They stopped [in the 1990s], but then they tried to get it going again where you just push them. And I don't know; that didn't go so well.
- TS: There was something in the newspaper where the kids are building their own race cars, and they were going seventy miles an hour around the roads around here just, I guess, a week or two ago on a Saturday. [Editor's note: KSU's Motorsports Formula SAE team hosted its sixth annual Formula South invitational on March 3, 2018. Randy Emert, assistant professor of mechanical engineering technology, was the team's advisor. Ross Williams, "KSU Hosts Competition for Student-Built Race Cars," *Marietta Daily Journal*, March 4, 2018].
- RC: And we used to have a tradition that I just loved. It was called Goat Night. Other universities do this too. It's the night that sororities and fraternities put on skits. But

what was unique about this campus was for a skit to be successful and have any chance of winning, it had to have a live goat. There are few things funnier than college students and live goats [laughs]. So I hated to see most of our traditions go away.

TS: Right, but you think they're coming back?

RC: Well, I think it'll take some time. It's hard to mandate or create a tradition. That's something that's organic. It just has to happen. But it will, I think, given time.

TS: Yes. During the consolidation, when did they tell you that you were still going to be the dean of the new College of Architecture and Construction Management?

RC: Well, there were conversations about reorganizing the colleges, and one of the conversations was about putting architecture and construction management together with engineering.

TS: Just one big college?

RC: Yes, it seemed logical because they were all on this campus. I think there was an OWG that looked at that. Or it may have been the level above the OWGs. But one of those levels, I guess, made the decision that we should leave this as it is.

TS: Okay. You weren't involved in that?

RC: No, I was in the OWGs, but I was in a different one.

TS: Well, there was the consolidation implementation committee above the OWGs, I guess.

RC: We had representation on that, but I didn't sit on that one that was above the OWGs. I think we had, what, eighty-two OWGs?

TS: There were a lot of them.

RC: I used to tease that we needed an 83<sup>rd</sup> one on how do we make all this stuff happen?

TS: But was there a time when Dan Papp sat down with you and said, "We want you to continue to be the permanent dean," or did they just assume you were going to continue to be dean?

RC: I can't remember a specific one-on-one like that, but I knew that there were conversations going on because I knew people in the OWGs. Then I think there was in print some announcement that things were going, essentially, to stay the same on this campus. Now we were, and still are, the smallest college [805 bachelor's degree students and 16 graduate students in Fall 2017]. There was another category called Other/Non Degree Students that we've actually passed [594 students in Fall 2017]. But at the most, the College of Architecture and Construction Management, before we got whacked by the

recession, was just over one thousand majors in, say, January 2009. And then with the recession, we lost half of our student body. There were just no jobs. But now, we're making a great comeback. I think we're up 21 percent in enrollment just this year.

TS: Wow.

RC: And all signs are it's climbing, but I'm a realist. I've been doing this a long time. The next time we have a recession, it's going to knock us back again.

TS: Right. What about this new fixed seat enrollment plan that we've got? Is that going to limit your growth?

RC: I've seen the projected models of that. It doesn't look like it has a significant impact. It may reduce freshman enrollment by six or eight students in each of the departments, something like that. Which is important, but we can survive that.

TS: And I know the engineering programs have been growing by leaps and bounds too, so a great part of the growth of Kennesaw State has been on this campus, hasn't it, since consolidation?

RC: It has. It has. That's my understanding. In the engineering college, Dr. [Thomas R.] Tom Currin is the dean there. Tom is an old and dear friend of mine. We tease each other a lot and go way back. We entertain folks around us by teasing each other. But my point is that he essentially built engineering on this campus. He's done a remarkable job.

TS: He is somebody I hope to interview this year too.

RC: Engineering did not exist at SPSU, and Tom put it all together and lobbied to make engineering happen. Before he became dean, there was another title he had [director of planning for engineering]. Essentially, he built that whole division.

TS: Well, their college became the only place where the name Southern Polytechnic was preserved, the Southern Polytechnic College of Engineering and Engineering Technology.

RC: That's right. I think I could have managed that for the College of Architecture and Construction Management, but I intentionally did not because I wanted to leave a space for some other naming at some point, if you get a [large] donor. I wish this weren't true, but I believe people will forget about Southern Polytechnic, and you will have to explain what that means in your name. Lots of universities have had other names, and you see on trivia contests that nobody knows [what the previous names are]. So it does happen.

TS: I think Dan Papp said that we were redirecting five million dollars as a result of consolidation annually. Have you seen it on this campus?

- RC: I think I'll speak for Architecture and Construction Management. We are definitely better resourced. We have adequate funding for most of the things we want to do. So in that way, yes. I think it's fair to say that the consolidation did not save money in some significant categories, but actually cost more money, for example, running the buses back and forth [from the Marietta to the Kennesaw campus], and changing all the signage. So I think a lot of the expectations ... If I remember correctly, it seems like at first they were talking about seven, maybe nine million [dollars in savings]. Then it got down to less and less. Now I don't hear much talk about it. What will probably happen long after I'm gone, twenty years from now, some politician will look at the north campus and the south campus and say, "Those should be two different universities. They have all this engineering stuff on the lawless south campus, and they have all this other stuff at the north campus."
- TS: So back to 1980 [when Southern Tech split away from Georgia Tech]?
- RC: Yes, they'll say, "Let's go back."
- TS: Well, that could happen.
- RC: I will not be alive, probably, but if I am, I'm going to get a chuckle out of it.
- TS: Well, I've heard some people suggest that there is going to be a time when things go from one end of the pendulum to the other, and we start splitting apart the consolidated universities again.
- RC: There was something to be said for so many access points, for so many universities and so many different types and all. But I figure there are big heads that know more than I do about this.
- TS: It seems like every time that KSU gets some positive news in the newspaper, it's from this campus, with students winning some kind of award at a national competition, or what have you.
- RC: This is a competitive, quirky little campus. And I really, really, like that about it.
- TS: Right. Which Operational Working Groups did you serve on? You were probably on a bunch of them, weren't you?
- RC: No. I may have been in name on a couple of others, but the one I worked the most on was I was a co-chair with Elke [M.] Leeds for the distance learning. She did all the work and carried the water for that because I knew nothing about distance learning, and she was very patient with me. And she is fantastic. I've met a lot of great people on the north campus of Kennesaw, and she's one of my favorites.
- TS: It seems like the favored terminology down here is north campus, south campus, whereas folks on the other campus say Kennesaw campus, Marietta campus.



- RC: Yes, I think we do tend to think of it as north and south. I don't know. It's maybe just a shorthand.
- TS: For fighting the Civil War all over again?
- RC: Yes. When we first consolidated, the deans on this campus were me, Currin, and Han Reichgelt [dean of the School of Computing and Software Engineering]. We wrote a little Christmas jingle. It was *We Three Deans*. It was, "We three deans of south campus are, driving north in a late model car." "We get there and climb the stair up to the office of Harr-mon." We were going to sing it at some event.
- TS: You talking about [W.] Ken Harmon [KSU provost during the consolidation]?
- RC: Ken Harmon, yes. That was the chorus. How did we sing it? "Harmon giveth, Harmon take, Harmon does our careers make."
- TS: Well, you need to save that for posterity too. I think he'd appreciate that.
- RC: I think maybe I did sing it to him one time.
- TS: You had mentioned in a 2015 *Kennesaw State University Magazine* interview that you thought that consolidation would be good in the sense that it put you in a better position to be a major player nationally. Do you still think that is true?
- RC: I think it is true. I think this part is true too, though, if I'm going to be real about it, I heard a lot of Southern Poly people say, "No one has heard of Kennesaw State University around the country." Well, the truth is I go around the country a lot, and I don't think that Kennesaw State or Southern Polytechnic were well known around the United States. I don't think so. But I think there is more mass there now, and we will touch more people's lives with almost thirty-six thousand students. So I think it will help with national recognition more. And recognition and rankings go hand-in-hand. A national ranking isn't important unless you have one, and then it is very, very important. So we're working hard in my college towards that.
- TS: The football team has probably done more to make us known outside the area than anything else.
- RC: Well, just think about that. You get a thirty-second commercial at halftime, and you're on the map.
- TS: Right. I just have a couple of finishing questions that I ask everybody about the intellectual atmosphere, the cultural atmosphere, on campus. How has it changed over the years, do you think?
- RC: Let me see if I can define it first. I'm not very good at comparing it to anywhere else because I know Southern Poly. Now this is just me; I'm not speaking for anybody else.

My favorite people are those who are really smart, but don't try to act smart. You can tell they are really smart, and they don't have to convince you that they are. I've always thought that our campus—and I just don't know as much about the total university yet—but all my years experience on this campus, I've always been impressed that most of my colleagues are really bright, but they can be really goofy too. They can be kind of silly and goofy, and it takes a lot of trust there to do that. And so I think that's been an intellectual thread that I've noticed from thirty-four years ago.

TS: I hear often the lament on the north campus that, "We don't know people anymore outside our little discipline." Have you felt that on this campus as much?

RC: I would say yes, but I would qualify it and say that you can only absorb so many people and know them well when you get up to as many faculty members as we have—plus the distance between the two campuses, which I travel almost daily and sometimes twice a day. When it gets up to three times a day, I just stay up there. But you've got those distances.

TS: And with the traffic on I-75, it's not fun to be going back and forth.

RC: No, and it's just not as likely that I'm going to phone somebody up from that campus and say, "Let's go to lunch," because it just complicates it.

TS: Well, this may be too much for a concluding question, but I think you eluded in that interview for *Kennesaw State University Magazine* that the fields of architecture and construction management have changed big time over the years. How has that affected what you do here?

RC: Well, I think the biggest change in my lifetime and in my practice is that the design professional (the architect), and the construction professional (construction manager) once reigned more supreme. They had more legal power, if you will. But everything has got so much more risks now, and buildings are so much riskier, and people have access to suing so much easier, that the power has been distributed, if you will. So they're not in as powerful a situation. However, that makes for opportunities now for a different kind of leadership. You might lead a team of folks who have their onerous possibilities, but you are the leader of that. So we try, in our teaching methodologies, to instill in students to take that leadership role. Buildings are so much more complicated, even during my time of practice. Go back fifty years ago, and buildings were pretty simple animals, relative to today.

TS: Well, thirty-one years have passed from 1987 when you became a full-time faculty member and thirty-six since 1982 when you started teaching here as an adjunct.

RC: Where did the time go?

TS: What's kept you here all that time?

RC: No skills other than ...

TS: Well, you know that's not true.

RC: I don't know. I may be wrong, but I think that I'm doing some good. I'm old enough now that I've had a few students approach me and say, "I don't really know you, but you taught my dad or you taught my mom." And I think, "Wow, how did that happen? [laughs]" But I get enthusiastic. I'm not jaded. When I see young people engaging and doing things and being politically active, being really caring about their school life, I think it keeps me a little bit younger. I really like them. I don't talk to them much. I don't have a chance to because I've just got all these other things.

And in fact, if a student ends up in the dean's office, it's almost never a good thing. I haven't had one go through all the things they need to go through to get to me and say, "Dean Cole, I suffered all these barriers to get to you because I just want to tell you you're doing a great job." But when I do engage with them and I see what they're doing, they are fantastic. Most of them hold down jobs. A lot of them have families. They come here in an uncertain future with all the student debt and all, and they give it their all. I'm very, very impressed with young people. I really, really am. I see them, and I just think, "Well, that's the future. The future looks pretty good if these guys are going to be in charge."

TS: Fantastic. Maybe that's a good way to end the interview.

RC: Well, thanks. You did your homework. I appreciate it.

TS: And thank you. I appreciate the time, and am grateful for all I've learned from you today.

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