

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS R. CURRIN

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 Thomas R. Currin  
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott  
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Location: Dean's Office, Engineering Technology Center, Marietta campus, KSU

TS: Dean Currin, if I could ask about your educational background, I googled Southeastern Massachusetts University. It has an interesting history that in some ways parallels the story of Southern Polytechnic State University, maybe just a few years ahead of what was going on here. Why don't you begin by talking about your educational background? I know you got a bachelor's degree in civil engineering. I'm assuming you were probably a commuter student because it doesn't sound like Southeastern Massachusetts had residence halls before somewhere in the 1970s.

TC: Yes, I came from a family that would be considered a working class family today. I'm the first one in my family to go to college. There was one college that I was given the option to go to, and Southeastern Massachusetts was it. I remember vividly the guidance counselor calling my father and saying that he was doing me a disservice by forcing me to go to that college. He said there were other colleges that were much better that I had all the qualifications to get into and that I should be going to. It hurt my dad, and he got very upset. But it hurt him because at that time, if you hadn't gone to college, you didn't know what college was about, didn't know about college funding, scholarships, Pell Grants, and all that. So, as far as he knew, all the money had to come out of his pocket, and Southeastern Massachusetts was the best alternative.

TS: And that federal grant money was very new at that time, anyway.

TC: Oh, yes! Sure.

TS: So this was a high school guidance counselor that called him?

TC: Right. When I started, the campus was in New Bedford, and it had just changed its name [in 1962] from New Bedford Tech [New Bedford Institute of Technology] and combined with Bradford Durfee Tech [Bradford Durfee College of Technology] in Fall River, Massachusetts, to form SMTI, Southeastern Massachusetts Technological Institute. I went one year to the New Bedford campus, which was five miles from where I lived, and then they moved to a brand new campus in North Dartmouth. We were the first people to use the engineering labs ever. It was really, really, remarkable. Back then you had to finish in four years. When I was there, I won the only lottery I've ever won.

TS: Oh! On the draft?

TC: The draft lottery. I was number nine.

TS: That's not exactly winning in that lottery.

- TC: Right. Vietnam was going strong, and I had a deferment that said if I maintained a 2.0 [grade point average] and carried a full load, I was exempt for a total of four academic years.
- TS: Oh, because the [first] draft lottery was in 1969 [December 1, 1969].
- TC: Right. I partied and fooled around a lot my first year and ended up taking, in some cases, twenty-one and twenty-three hours to make up for the F's that I received, in order to stay in school and get my grade point average above 2.0, so I wouldn't get drafted. Of course, when I graduated in 1972, it wasn't three weeks, I think, that I got my draft notice, and I was drafted.
- TS: That was really about the last year of the draft. I think it ended in 1973.
- TC: Yes, and the Vietnam War ended in 1975, which is the year I got out of the army. It was an interesting experience. But we were forty-two civil engineering students as freshmen. My parents actually had a party when I was admitted because it was so hard to get into engineering school at that time. There were long waiting lists because it was very, very popular because of the space race and everything going on. So they were thrilled that I got in. Then going through, there were forty-two of us that started, and eight of us made it, graduated.
- TS: Wow! That's a pretty steep dropout rate!
- TC: Yes, that was back in the days where the professors would say, "Look to your left. Look to your right. Those guys will be carrying a gun by December." In my case they were. It was a unique time.
- TS: How early did you find out that you really wanted to be an engineer?
- TC: Other people have asked me that. I'm really not sure because I was good in math from a very early age. The standard saying was, "He's so good at math, he's going to be an engineer." I don't know whether that imprinted on me, or what, but I think that's probably where it started.
- TS: So you were not unhappy about going to Southeastern Massachusetts University?
- TC: Right. Which is the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth now.
- TS: I saw that they had their merger. Would you call it a merger that took place?
- TC: No, it's just a renaming [in 1991] because in Massachusetts they had the University of Massachusetts System, and there were a bunch of different names such as Southeastern Massachusetts University. Somewhere along the line one of the governors said, "We just need to name all of these the University of Massachusetts, and follow the North Carolina model." That's why UMass Amherst [University of Massachusetts Amherst, the flagship

and largest of the UMass campuses] is now called UMass Amherst. It used to be called just UMass. It was just a change. But when I was there they had the engineering school, the nursing school, and some miscellaneous liberal arts, social science-type things, and their art program was very well known. When I was there we had maybe three thousand students, if that. Now they have a law school, and the nursing school is big. They're looking at adding a medical school. But it's focused on providing opportunities to become professionals in Southeastern Massachusetts.

When I was growing up, New Bedford, Massachusetts, which is mentioned in *Moby-Dick* [Herman Melville's 1851 classic] as the "whaling capital of the world," really was. They were always in a race with Fall River, Massachusetts, which is fourteen miles away, to see how high they could go on the list of the ten most economically depressed cities in the United States. Our area was usually number eight or nine.

TS: Because all the industries had left?

TC: We had a huge immigrant population from Portugal, which was great, actually. It was really cool. I think it is still the major fishing port for commercial fishing in the United States. That industry was strong all the time we were growing up. There was also the textile industry. While I was growing up and then through high school and college, all of that moved south, and the people couldn't find jobs unless they were willing to move and move a long way and had some kind of skill to go with it. So they stayed there.

TS: If I remember, Fall River has a long history in industry, doesn't it?

TC: Right, they were textiles also, and shipbuilding and things like that. My very first job was working in a marina gassing up pleasure boat in New Bedford Harbor for a company that restored wooden ships. They had four marine railways, where they would lift these huge wooden boats out of the water.

TS: Did they have an ROTC program at Southeastern Massachusetts University?

TC: No.

TS: So you went in as a private?

TC: No, that was a time when all the anti-war demonstrations were going on, Kent State, all that stuff and everything. Anyone who walked around, who even had a haircut that looked military was persona non-grata.

TS: Did you have a haircut?

TC: Not while I was there. My brother was over in Vietnam a year when I was in high school and one year that I was in college.

TS: He was there two years?

TC: Yes, he had two different tours.

TS: Wow! He had to volunteer to do that.

TC: He was in the Air Force. Because it wasn't a [declared] war, the [Pentagon] could deploy someone for twelve months, bring him back into the United States for twelve months, and then deploy him for another twelve months without any recourse. Or you could deploy them for fifteen months, and then you couldn't send them back to that area again. My brother was deployed for twelve months, came back twelve months to the day, almost to the hour, before getting back on the plane and being sent back over for another twelve months.

TS: Wow! Were you able to use any of your engineering skills while you were in the Army?

TC: Yes, I was in an intelligence unit. We did a lot of stuff.

TS: Did you get to Vietnam?

TC: No.

TS: It was winding down by that time, I guess.

TC: I went in in 1972 and got out in 1975. During that time there were a lot of things that were going on in other areas of the world as a result of Vietnam. There were just lots of things going on.

TS: Did you stay in the states or did you get sent abroad?

TC: Most of the time I was in the states.

TS: But you stayed three years in the Army?

TC: Yes, I was in the unit that required a three-year commitment.

TS: When you did your commencement address a couple of years ago [May 10, 2016], you mentioned that you were afraid to go back to graduate school. Can you talk about why you were afraid to go back to school?

TC: I wasn't just afraid, I was *definitely* afraid. It really goes back to being the first college grad in your family. There was a very high standard, and the fear of failure was huge, absolutely huge. Failure was not acceptable. Being out of college for three years, the reason I actually went back to grad school is I figured that everything was changing so rapidly that I was far behind the other people that I graduated with and that the only hope I could have of getting a decent job would be that I upgrade my skills.

TS: Was it computerization? What had changed?

- TC: Yes, it was the computer. I got my bachelor's with a slide rule, my master's with a handheld calculator, and my PhD with a mainframe computer. It was quite a lot of change going on at that time. In civil engineering, in particular, at that time, and even now, the body of knowledge is expanding exponentially, so that if you're out for three years you and come back, a lot of the stuff that you did is no longer done that way.
- TS: Right. For somebody from Massachusetts, why North Carolina State for the master's?
- TC: Well, a couple of reasons. You may want to edit it out later, but once I got out of Massachusetts, I didn't want to ever go back. I love the ocean. I loved growing up on the coast. It's a beautiful, beautiful state. I just needed to get out of there, and once I got out and saw what it was like in other places, I thought, "There are a lot of other places I can go, but not there."
- TS: Okay. Were you stationed in North Carolina during your military service?
- TC: No, I was stationed in D. C. [District of Columbia].
- TS: So why North Carolina State?
- TC: My dad grew up in North Carolina. My dad never finished seventh grade. He went off to Hampton Roads to build ships, and World War II started. He grew up on what people would call Tobacco Road. When World War II started, he enlisted in the Army. He was stationed temporarily in Massachusetts, where he met my mother. Two weeks after they got married, he got sent over to Europe to fight World War II. But he grew in North Carolina. On our summer vacations we would get in the car, drive to North Carolina, pick tobacco for two weeks, get back in the car, and drive back to Massachusetts.
- TS: And you still wanted to go to North Carolina?
- TC: When I think back, it's kind of odd, but I only applied to two graduate schools, Duke and North Carolina State. Duke had that question, "Is financial aid required for you to attend?" I checked that box. I learned later on that if I had checked the box, "No," and then asked for financial aid, they would have accepted me, but because I said, "Yes, I need financial aid," they just cut me off.
- TS: Pretty elitist.
- TC: What is pretty ironic is my wife has a PhD from Duke.
- TS: I was going to ask you about that. You had mentioned in your commencement address in 2016 that your wife also had a doctorate, and I was wondering about that.
- TC: She's a clinical psychologist. She earned a doctorate there.
- TS: Wow! Did you meet her while you were at North Carolina State?

TC: No, I actually met her when I was fifteen years old at church.

TS: Oh, really? So she's from Massachusetts too?

TC: Oh, yes. We went our separate ways for forty years after that and then got back together after really having no contact at all in forty years.

TS: Oh, how about that?

TC: I'd been offered a construction and inspection job for the transit system in D.C., upon ETSing [Expiration Term of Service] from the Army. I went to NC State to just talk to somebody and ask, "What can I expect here?" I met with a guy at NC State, Bill Babcock.<sup>1</sup> He was a crusty old professor, and he pretty much said, "Do you care about your future or do you care about a paycheck?" My response was, "I care about both," and he said, "Right answer. You need to come here, and we'll figure out some way to pay you." While I was there, I had a full ride. In 1975 through 1977, which is when I was there, I was paid over \$10,000 a year and full medical benefits and everything as a graduate student.

TS: Ten thousand dollars was pretty good back in the 1970s.

TC: Yes, and it's like, "Wow! This is pretty good!" So, yes, that was pretty nice.

TS: Would you call Bill Babcock one of your mentors?

TC: Yes and no. As it turns out, he was more in the pavement area, and I was more in the traffic operations, traffic flow theory/simulation area. In civil engineering, there are transportation people, and then within the transportation people, there are materials people, operations people, and so on. I was more in the operations end of things. So I really didn't interact with him a whole lot.

TS: Any mentors at North Carolina State?

TC: Yes, Clint Heimback [Clinton L. Heimback, PhD, PE].

TS: What made him a good mentor for you?

TC: He was a funny guy. He explored different ways to teach engineering, and I was his TA on two different courses. It was a required transportation engineering course for undergraduates at NC State. I walked into his office, and he looked at me and said, "You're older than the other grad students." I said, "Yes, sir, I am. I've been in the

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Willard F. Babcock, 1917-1991, professor of civil engineering at North Carolina State, 1940-1957 and 1969-1974, North Carolina State Highway Director, 1957-1967, director of North Carolina State's Institute for Transportation Research and Education, 1974-1984.

Army for three years.” And he said, “Oh! Great! Here’s the book. Here’s the syllabus. The grades are due December...whatever. See you then.”

TS: But you had actually taken some education courses as an undergraduate hadn’t you.

TC: Right. I replaced six courses in liberal arts and social sciences with education courses.

TS: So very early on you developed a love for teaching? Is that correct?

TC: Yes. Something I saw was that the engineers that were my professors were great engineers. I mean, they were *really great* engineers. They all had lots of years of experience working as engineers. A lot of them still consulted. But they were really, *really bad* teachers. They were on one end of the spectrum or the other. So when I looked at them, I thought, “This is really, really, pretty cool. This is something that I would enjoy.” I never had a problem giving oral reports, stuff like that. In fact, I enjoyed it, seeing the reaction of people and getting people to talk about things. I enjoyed that. So I said, “I’ll look into that. It doesn’t mean I’m going to do it, but that’s something I’d like to do and see what happens.”

TS: Right. Now, there’s an eleven-year gap, I guess, between your master’s and your doctorate, so I’m assuming that you were gaining lots of practical experience during that time.

TC: Right, I was a consulting engineer.

TS: Can you talk about that a little bit?

TC: Sure. I went with a local consulting engineering firm in Manchester, Connecticut, when I was at the University of Connecticut. I was hired to be sort of the second transportation person. They had people who could design roads and who could do some of the basic drainage work and stuff like that. They had many other projects that we did. We were a fifty-person firm. But they had no one in traffic flow looking at level of service, quality of service, traffic impact studies, signals design, and stuff like that. They had one person who could do that, and I was supposed to be his assistant.

Long story short, a month after I got there, this guy quit. He went for another firm, and they told me. “You need to step up until we can find somebody.” They never found somebody. So I would work in there. Anyone who has been a consulting engineer in a small practice, and a fifty-person firm, at that time, was a pretty big practice, knows that you don’t count your hours other than when you bill your hours, billing them against the project. You don’t say, “Well, I worked forty hours.” You work however many hours are need to get the project out. So it was day and night, day and night, day and night. Doing my dissertation and all that, it was like, “Well, maybe not this weekend,” but eventually I just made that my priority.



I worked there, and then I was hired away by another firm to start their transportation division. I rented an office outside of Hartford. Literally, if you walked out the front door and took two steps to the right, you were in Hartford, but our address was Wethersfield, Connecticut. I rented the office, brought in a phone and a stool from home, and started the transportation division of a company at that time called Kasper Group [Inc.]

Starting that division, I had a verbal agreement with the owner. At that time Kasper had maybe 150 employees, and they had four offices. This would be the fifth office around Connecticut. I said to the owner, "You pay me this amount for the first year. At the end of the first year, if I'm not making any money for you, then fire me, and I will go somewhere else. But just leave me alone. Just let me do my thing." And he agreed. Now, I'm not so naïve to think that I did all that by myself, because he had the political connections. He opened the doors that needed to be open. He taught me a lot about politics.

TS: He is Kasper?

TC: Joe Kasper [Joseph T. Kasper]. He taught me a lot about politics, how to deal with people at the various levels of government, types of government.

TS: If you're building roads, it's usually for the government, isn't it?

TC: Yes, and then I had a lot of private clients. We had to balance for cash flow purposes between the government clients and the private clients. We made a lot more money off the private clients. He taught me how to hire people and how to keep them onboard and how to make them good. He was like my dad who started out changing fluorescent tubes over working machinery for Berkshire Hathaway right after World War II, and when he retired, he was managing three plants for Warren [E.] Buffett [chairman of Berkshire Hathaway since 1970]. I didn't know it at the time how much he was teaching me about dealing with people.

TS: He did pretty well for someone who didn't have a high school degree.

TC: Yes, a hard worker. He was very sensitive to how people were reacting to various things and what they really wanted. His philosophy was, "If the workforce is not happy and doesn't enjoy their work, we're not going to make money." Of course, the first thing he always said was, "You're in business to make money. If you're not making money, you're not in business. So keep that as your number one priority." And I did that in consulting. As a result, I ended up managing three of the five offices for Kasper. That particular office went from making no money to grossing when I left about three million dollars a year. It was quite a time and a great opportunity.

TS: You got your master's in 1977. Did you go straight to Connecticut from your master's?

TC: I did. My son was born that year in Raleigh, and four weeks after he was born, we moved to Connecticut. My parents were in Massachusetts. My mother was never well when I was growing up, and I was made an offer for a research assistantship at the University of Connecticut. This is funny because we moved everything up there. I had almost no money left in the bank. I had to borrow money from my parents to put a security deposit on an apartment, which was the only time I had to borrow money from them. Then I walked into the offices at the University of Connecticut, and there was the major professor that I was dealing with packing up his stuff to go to Arizona. I said, “You know, the reason I came here was to work with *you*.” He said, “Well, we’re going to Arizona.” “No, we’re not. You are, I guess, but I’m not.” That was a master disaster. But, you know, having dealt with other things in the past, it was just one more thing.

TS: Right, right. Now, it takes eleven years then to get the doctorate, because a lot of that time, you were working.

TC: Right.

TS: So you got your coursework out of the way, and then took your time writing the dissertation?

TC: Yes. I collected a lot of data. I think I had like fourteen thousand data items that I collected for my dissertation.

TS: Wow! What was the dissertation?

TC: It was on traffic flow theory, signalized and un-signalized intersections where people stop. I developed a method for sizing loop detectors for signals. Today the technology is so far passed that that it’s just irrelevant.

TS: I think I saw something in the paper about some faculty here that are working on something similar to that.<sup>2</sup>

TC: Yes, they are. During the course of that research, I actually went to my major advisor and said, “I’m done. I can’t do this. I cannot do both. My professional career is going fine, and I’m doing well, and I just can’t do this.” He actually said, “Too bad. You have to finish.”

As soon as I finished, I went to teaching because in the last three years or so, it really became obvious to me that if I were going to stay in consulting, I had to start my own firm, and just do it. It just wasn’t worth it to me monetarily to work for someone else because they just never reward you. I do traffic impact studies, and at that time we’d be making 100 percent profit, and I wouldn’t get anything from that. And the reason I wouldn’t get anything is because we also did Connecticut DOT [Department of

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<sup>2</sup> Shaddi Abusaid, “KSU Professors Look to Reduce Wrecks at Collision-prone Intersections,” *Marietta Daily Journal*, January 14, 2018.

Transportation] work. Connecticut DOT said you could only increase the billing rate of your people by a certain percentage each year. That combined with a number of other issues regarding pay, and, it didn't make sense.

TS: So it was being an entrepreneur or being a professor?

TC: Right.

TS: The earliest catalog that I could find you in was the Southern College of Technology catalog for 1992-1993. Was it 1992 when you started here?

TC: I left consulting in 1988 and went to Western Kentucky University.

TS: Oh! Okay! So you taught at Western Kentucky to begin with?

TC: Yes. When they say business is different than higher education, they're not kidding. It was really a shock for me.

TS: Was it?

TC: Part of it was I was in business mode in terms of producing things. I had my whole semester of work prepared within two weeks of starting and went to the department chair and said, "What do I do now?" He just smiled and said, "You'll find something." He smiled because he retired that year after hiring me and came here.

TS: Oh! Who is that?

TC: Boyce [D.] Tate.

TS: Yes, he was the department chair that hired you here.

TC: Right. He came here, and I took his job at Western Kentucky as department chair. I was the head of the Engineering Technology Department.

TS: Why did you not stay there?

TC: He, Boyce Tate, would call me every week and tell me, "Tom, you need to come down here. At least come down for an interview. You need to come. This is where you need to be. This is the perfect fit for you. You need to come down here." I got to the point where I told my wife at that time, my first wife, "I'm going to drive to Atlanta. I can make it in a day and stay overnight, do the interview, and come back home. That will shut him up, and we'll be done with that." She said, "Yes, that sounds like a good idea." I drove down here. I was interviewed, and he told me right on the spot, "If you want the job, you've got the job. We'll go through the process." The hiring process back then was a little different than it is now. So I went back, and I told my wife, "You had better call the movers."

TS: Really?

TC: Part of going into higher education was to teach. After a year of teaching, I was an administrator. And I said, "I really don't want to do this. If I'm going to be an administrator and doing employment relations and cultivating donors and all this and that, I'll go back to consulting and make more than twice what I'm making here."

TS: Sure, sure. What was your department called? Did it have technology in the title?

TC: Department of Engineering Technology at Western Kentucky University.

TS: Okay. Did they have a Department of Engineering?

TC: No, they didn't have an engineering degree because the University of Kentucky would not allow engineering at any other state institution. They had the legislature behind them, very similar to what Georgia Tech had here. I've since found out there were other states that were that way too. You know, the times.

TS: Yes, so what was it about Southern College of Technology that appealed to you?

TC: Well, at that time I still was 90 percent sure I wanted to teach, but I thought, "I'm not so sure that I can afford to keep teaching." I took a 60 percent cut in pay when I left consulting to teach. So I thought, "If we go to the Atlanta area, there's much more opportunity. If in some way, shape, or form this teaching stuff doesn't work out, I'm going to start up my own consulting business or work for a consultant. Atlanta was an emerging market. It was a growth market. I mean, there were so many options, so many opportunities, that it would have been hard not to take it."

TS: Did you get to teach at all at Western Kentucky?

TC: Yes, the first year I taught a full load. It was four and four [four classes in fall semester and four in the spring].

TS: Pretty heavy load.

TC: Yes, and then when I became department chair, I taught two and two.

TS: Still heavy if you are a department chair.

TC: Yes, but when I came here, we were on the quarter system. We were teaching five and five and five—five courses each quarter. We were thrilled when we cut back to four.

TS: Were they three-hour classes?

TC: Yes. We had the advantage of we had labs, and the labs would count as well. If you had a one-hour lab, it would count as one and a half workload hours. We had multiple lab

sections of courses. Boyce Tate made sure that we never had more than three preparations. That cut down the load tremendously. He made sure we had our share of labs and all that. Then we were expected to teach at night also, at least one course at night.

TS: Right, so that is pretty comparable to the Kennesaw campus. Am I right that fall of 1992 would be when you started here, or was it the fall of 1991?

TC: It was 1991.

TS: I know catalogs were printed early and sometimes ran a year behind in including recently hired faculty. You probably got hired after the catalog had already gone to the printer for the 1991-1992 school year.

TC: Right.

TS: Why don't you talk about the campus when you came here? What was it like at Southern College of Technology in the fall of 1991?

TC: Well, we were very popular at that time. We were in a growth spurt. So when I walked into classes, they were usually full. We were limited only by the size of the room.

TS: What was a typical class size?

TC: About forty.

TS: So three preparations, forty students in each, plus labs. Same students in the labs, I guess?

TC: Right.

TS: So you had about one hundred twenty students a quarter?

TC: Yes.

TS: Wow! How was the pay? Did it compare to Western Kentucky?

TC: I came here, and I was making as much in nine months as I was making in twelve months [as a department chair] at Western Kentucky.

TS: So good salaries in Georgia. I guess it was still a little early for Zell Miller [Governor Zell Bryan Miller], but it was about that time.

TC: He had just come on. [Governor of Georgia, January 1991 to January 1999].

TS: I know we got some big pay increases several years while he was governor.

- TC: Yes. The pay was good, but the atmosphere was, “We are a teaching institution. We are absolutely a teaching institution.” I had written a couple of articles and was trying to get some input from faculty as to how much research, scholarly activity, I was supposed to do. I was told quite frankly by one old, crusty, professor that, “If you want tenure, you put that writing stuff away and get in the classroom and teach. That’s what we’re about.”
- TS: So no encouragement at all to do research?
- TC: No, not at all. But we did have one day a week to consult, and we were encouraged to do that. That was the model.
- TS: The model was that they wanted people that had practical experience?
- TC: Yes, and that was one of the reasons I got hired too because I’d come from industry and I had the teaching experience. What is interesting is that in the CET [Civil Engineering Technology] Department that I was hired into assumed that I was going to be the next department chair and that I was actually hired to be the next department chair.
- TS: That’s what the faculty thought?
- TC: Yes, and when Boyce Tate retired, the assumption was that I was just going to walk in there. Truth be known, I was offered the job, and I said, “I’m here to teach. I’ve been down that road of department chair. I don’t want to do that again.”
- TS: Who became the chair? I noticed in the 1992-1993 catalog that the only other civil engineering professor with a doctorate was David [E.] Hornbeck.
- TC: Yes, he had been department chair before Boyce Tate and actually quit as department chair.
- TS: Didn’t want to be chair?
- TC: Didn’t want to be chair anymore. Then Boyce Tate came on, and he was there for a while. Then Al Troemel [Hans A. (Al) Troemel] became the [acting] department chair [for two years], and then Timothy [W.] Zeigler [became department chair in 1997]. But those were interesting times. We were growing fast. Two years after I got here, I think it was 1993, I wrote my first proposal for a civil engineering bachelor’s degree. Over the years it wasn’t until I wrote the fifth proposal that we were actually successful.
- TS: So the degree was civil engineering technology, period?
- TC: Right. The degree programs were civil engineering technology, mechanical engineering technology, and electrical engineering technology.
- TS: Okay, so you had to wait sixteen years until [August] 2009 for a civil engineering degree.

- TC: Yes. We had meetings and everything. In June 2006 we got [a bachelor of science degree in] construction engineering, which I wrote the proposal for, which became the first ABET [Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology] accredited engineering program at Southern Poly ever.
- TS: I think the Board of Regents approved a B.S. in mechatronics engineering in [October] 2006 also.
- TC: Yes, the sequence was that we already had a master's degree in systems engineering [approved by the Board of Regents in October 2002]. But we didn't have an undergraduate degree in systems engineering [until March 2007]. So the first [bachelor's] degree was construction engineering. Before that [the Board of Regents approved a master of science degree in] software engineering [July 1997], but software engineering was in the School of Computing and Software Engineering. When they went up for ABET accreditation, they were turned down. So they were not the first accredited engineering program. Construction engineering got approved [by the Board of Regents] in 2006. And then the undergraduate degree in mechatronics and systems engineering followed that, all in a very short period of time. Those are the three that started what is now the College of Engineering. We were separate from the School of Engineering Technology.
- TS: I learned in my interview with Dean [C. Richard] Cole that you were part of the School of Architecture, Construction Management, and Civil Engineering Technology [from 2001 to 2011], before civil engineering technology moved to the School of Engineering. I didn't understand why you were in with architecture.
- TC: Sandy Pfeiffer [William Sanborn Pfeiffer], who was vice president for academic affairs—this is a true story; I'm not making this up—after six months of studies and committees and meetings of how to reorganize the campus, threw that report away and in the shower that morning had an epiphany and came up with the School of Architecture, Construction Management, and Civil Engineering Technology. We were the only engineering technology program that wasn't with the other engineering technology disciplines.
- TS: What did you think about that?
- TC: I thought it was terrible. I thought it was the worst move I had ever seen. In the Kasper Group we had an architecture division. The architects didn't like being with the engineers, and the engineers didn't like being with the architects. There was mutual respect and we got along, but in that particular school there was a pecking order. Architects got whatever they wanted, and they will admit that. Construction management was second with civil engineering technology a close third, very close third. But at the time, President [Lisa A.] Rossbacher [president 1998-2014] had just started. She held that architecture was the only professional degree on campus [accredited by the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) in 1995], and that she supported that 100 percent.

TS: She thought that?

TC: Yes.

TS: Wow! So there was a little bit of dissension between the engineers and the rest of the campus.

TC: Yes. And considering that 80 percent of the students on campus were in engineering technology, that was a little surprising.

TS: Yes, and the College of Architecture and Construction Management is really small compared to the [Southern Polytechnic] College of Engineering and Engineering Technology.

TC: Yes, but we got those first three. The initial idea was that we would create a boutique engineering school. When I say school, it was like a college at KSU. We just called them schools.

TS: Did you ever have colleges before the consolidation?

TC: No, no. Eventually the School of Engineering and School of Engineering Technology, but in 2006, those three undergraduate engineering programs, construction, mechatronics, and systems were looked upon as boutique types of engineering, where we could bring in something like an industrial, mechanical, or biomedical degree, which is a very specific, sort of a boutique type.

TS: Because the Board of Regents was saying it has to be something that nobody else is offering?

TC: Yes, that, and how do we distinguish ourselves from Georgia Tech in the field of engineering. If we're an engineering technology program, that's actually easy to do, but when your engineering it is like, "Okay, how are you not replicating what is offered at Georgia Tech?" And that was the approach that I took in developing those degree programs. We were looking at some other possible degrees, and the political climate got to be such that we were encouraged to go for civil, electrical, and mechanical bachelor's degrees—the classical degrees.

TS: When you said the political climate, do you mean on campus or at the Board of Regents?

TC: Off campus.

TS: Off campus? Georgia Tech?

TC: There were just multiple people. Let's just leave it at that. Some of those people are still around and still active.



TS: But they wanted you to have the straight engineering degrees?

TC: Right. And if you had to point to one area, industry was saying, “These Georgia Tech graduates are great, but they are leaving the state or going to grad school and then doing something else. We needed some engineers. We need workforce development.”

TS: Or their education was too abstract to be able to communicate with anybody in the industry?

TC: Well, let me back up to when I was consultant. If I hired somebody from a regional school, we could usually turn a profit from them within a year or in some cases six months. I hired a University of Pennsylvania person one time and a Duke person one time. They came in, and it was like, “Good grief!” It took eighteen months, in one case, and two years in the other, before they were making money for us, just teaching them the basic business practices and interaction with people in a work environment and that team approach. It was very frustrating. They were brilliant people, and they have turned out to be very, very successful in the industry, but it took a long time. You don’t have that luxury in business. You have to keep the cash flowing.

So, if I had to point to one thing, that’s the thing that the industry around here was looking for, and that’s what they liked about our engineering technology grads. They came out ready to work with appreciation for the idea that you are in business to make money. If you’re not making money, you’re not in business. Then going forward with that, they wanted the engineering classification because especially in civil engineering the professional licensing is important. Many states outside of Georgia have done away with licensing engineering technology grads. We had to have an accredited engineering degree.

The times are changing. The engineering seemed the right thing to do, and then we were encouraged to go with civil, electrical, and mechanical. We put those proposals together, sent them in, and lo and behold, we got approved in 2009. I actually have a framed copy of the letter from the Board of Regents that I keep behind my desk to remind me that we haven’t been on this train too long.

TS: No, just nine years ago.

TC: At that time we had an enrollment in engineering of somewhere around two hundred. That has grown to over four thousand.

TS: Wow! You said you wrote the proposals. Were you chair of the committee? Were you getting into administrative roles at that time?

TC: In 2005, my wife and I were in a civil engineering conference in Chicago when I got a phone call at the hotel from [vice president for academic affairs] Zvi Szafran saying, “We’d like you to be the director of planning for engineering.” I said, “What does that

mean?” He faxed me a list of ten duties. That was to write proposals, get engineering established at SPSU, and grow the engineering program.

TS: Right, and he had just arrived in 2005, so I guess this maybe was his first objective when he got here?

TC: Yes, one of the first initiatives. Of course, construction and systems followed the next year. So that first year I was a full professor with tenure, and my teaching load was cut in half in order to do this. Then the following year it was cut by two-thirds, so I was teaching one course a semester. I kept teaching one course a semester until actually we merged with KSU.

But the interesting thing was that there are two different philosophies on how to bring engineering about. One was to have a completely separate engineering unit and grow that engineering unit independent of engineering technology. The other was to take the existing departments and just add engineering to the engineering technology departments, so for mechanical, you take the MET Department and add a mechanical engineering degree, and so on.

I did some research in different places around the country. By that time, I had started on the construction engineering proposal. The dean of engineering at Northern Carolina State and I would talk on the phone, and he would give me input as to where we were going. I did the research and found that every place that had engineering technology and added engineering—if they were in the same department, engineering technology disappeared. If engineering technology was a separate school, it maintained [its existence]. Purdue [University] was the best example of that. They have a College of Engineering Technology and a College of Engineering, and they are both thriving.

So I really pressed for two separate units. Then we had a School of Engineering, eventually a School of Engineering and a School of Engineering Technology. But that met with a tremendous resistance from the faculty at that time, because the ET faculty wanted to just overnight become engineering faculty.

TS: Oh! So they didn't want to be in a separate department?

TC: Right. There was a lot of controversy associated with that. It was a hard road for a while, dealing with some of these folks, but I'm confident that was the right way to go. You can see it living out right now. As SPSU, we have a School of Engineering Technology and a School of Engineering. The School of Engineering was growing rapidly, but the School of Engineering Technology was not declining. It was thriving also.

TS: But not growing as rapidly?

TC: Right, but now with the consolidation we have both of them together in the same college. While we have a Department of Engineering Technology, the Engineering is soaring, and

Engineering Technology has stopped [growing]. It has declined, and is now flat. I think that is a great example of what we were trying to avoid when we were SPSU—maintain our heritage, maintain what got us to the point we're at, maintain that expertise and add to it with engineering rather than replacing one with the other.

TS: So you would have preferred fourteen colleges instead of thirteen in the new KSU?

TC: No, I think we have way to many colleges in KSU already.

TS: So you didn't want a separate College of Engineering Technology?

TC: Yes.

TS: How did they make the decision on which faculty would go to the School of Engineering and which faculty would go to the School of Engineering Technology? Was it on the basis of degrees or experience or how did you make those decisions?

TC: When we had consolidation, we kept the departments that we had. We modified one, and dropped CET because we knew that CET enrollment was going down tremendously. The PE [professional engineer] license was such a big deal that they were going to civil engineering. We made some minor changes, but we still had the ET department. As engineering grew, we needed more faculty. Prior to consolidation we were hiring five to six new engineering faculty per year. But there were some ET faculty that wanted to become engineering that did not have a PhD, which is the terminal degree for teaching engineering virtually everywhere in order to get and preserve accreditation.

I have some experience with the accreditation body. I was on the commission, and what we looked at was, "If we have these people with master's degrees get a professional engineering license, we could then use that as evidence they are qualified to teach. These would not be people that we were hiring in as new faculty because they don't satisfy the Board of Regents' requirements for new faculty, but they wouldn't lose their job. They would have that opportunity to teach in engineering. So that is what we did, and several of them went and got professional licensing. But, overall, it was really student-driven. If we needed someone in engineering, then we would take a look at the engineering ET faculty that wanted to do that first, rather than go outside. But that has pretty much stopped.

TS: I have one other question with regard to the engineering degrees, and that is that I've heard different stories about Georgia Tech's role in the development of engineering degrees here and what you had to do to win over Georgia Tech. Could you talk about the degree to which Georgia Tech was an obstacle to getting engineering degrees at SPSU and the degree that maybe Georgia Tech in the end supported Southern Polytechnic?

TC: It's much simpler than people have made it out to be. I've heard some of the stories that have gone around that people have generated that weren't really part of it. It was simply that there were a lot of faculty members at Georgia Tech, who were at Georgia Tech

when Southern Poly split off from Georgia Tech in 1980. That was not an amicable separation. So there was a lot of baggage that was carried.

TS: Georgia Tech didn't like it that Southern Tech split off?

TC: Right. And all I heard from the Southern Tech faculty was how evil Georgia Tech is. If you looked at some of the tenured, senior professors at Georgia Tech, certain ones were more involved in that separation than others. They said, "That's where the flunkies go; they're stupid," and all of this other stuff.

So at the prompting of Zvi Szafran, we actually went to Georgia Tech and sat down first with the head of the Civil Engineering Department, and just asked the question, "Why don't you people want a civil engineering degree at Southern Poly?" His response was, "We don't care." "What do you mean you don't care? You've been blocking this all along." "We haven't been blocking it." It was people's perception down at the board. We hadn't even submitted it downtown. Of those five proposals that I wrote, only two of them went downtown. One of them was withdrawn before it was reviewed.

TS: They were held out by the administration here?

TC: Right, so it was only the last proposal that actually went downtown.

TS: Because our administration here didn't think the chancellor and the regents would support engineering degrees?

TC: Right, right. I've heard stories from Dan Papp [Daniel S. Papp, interim president of Southern Polytechnic, 1997-1998; president of KSU, 2006-2016]. I've heard stories from Lisa Rossbacher as to what was happening here. But all of that was put aside when we realized that a lot of the opposition at Georgia Tech and a lot of the rabble-rousing at Southern Poly came from people that had now retired. So time heals all wounds.

TS: It was twenty-nine years after the separation from Georgia Tech that you got the engineering degrees at Southern Poly.

TC: Right. The first was, of course, construction engineering. Then getting mechatronics and systems was really a nothing. But the board said, "We're not sure we can afford another full-blown engineering college. So unless you get something a little bit different, we're not sure that we want to go that route." In 2009, when we submitted the civil, electrical, and mechanical engineering proposals, I'm aware of some of the politics down at the system office, but not the complete thing, so I don't really talk about it all that much. But it came more from the graduates from SPSU and Georgia Tech having more demand than they could meet and in-state people applying political pressure to admit more [in-state] students and provide more seats.

TS: Oh, Tech wanted to be a national university and recruit students from all over the country?

- TC: Right, but they were getting pressure from in state, so it was mutually beneficial [for Southern Poly to help meet the in-state demand]. It was like, “Okay, this is something that we want because this is how the profession is going. We [SPSU] would provide workforce development.” We would be a reliever. Georgia Tech was definitely afraid at that time of the University of Georgia getting engineering and cutting into their research budget and all of that. And so that happened in 2009. Of course, UGA and Georgia Southern [University] got civil, electrical, and mechanical in 2010.
- TS: Oh, okay, but Georgia Tech would have preferred Southern Tech [getting engineering programs] to the University of Georgia?
- TC: Right, and they came out and said that. They said, “We’ll take care of the graduate PhD research. We’ll be the research engineering university. Southern Poly will be the workforce development university.”
- TS: I wanted to ask you how the engineering programs at Southern Poly and Georgia Tech compare. It used to be that you thought about Georgia Tech doing the abstract engineering and Southern Tech’s engineering technology programs preparing people to go into the workforce and make money for companies like you were mentioning earlier. Now that you have engineering on the Marietta campus, is it still more hands-on than the similar courses and programs at Georgia Tech?
- TC: It’s just more experiential learning. What really sets us aside is our faculty, because one of the requirements to teach in the Southern Polytechnic College of Engineering and Engineering Technology is you have to have at least three years of full-time industrial experience, in addition to a PhD. To the best of my knowledge, we are one of maybe only two universities in the country that can say that. So our professors bring a different view of the same subject into the classroom than they would somewhere else. Our focus is on getting students out into the workplace because I think over 92 percent of people, nationally, who get bachelor’s engineering degrees go to work. They don’t go to graduate school; they go to work. So we’ve chosen to focus on that group.
- TS: If we could back up just a little bit, what were your favorite courses to teach here?
- TC: Statics [ENGR 2214: Engineering Mechanics—Statics]. And the reason is that that’s viewed by a lot of engineering students as their first real engineering course.
- TS: Oh, really?
- TC: Because they have calculus and physics and chemistry and all of that stuff, but Statics, they can see, it’s like, “This is a beam, and it is loaded a certain way. What are the reactions, and how does that actually work? And what is the deflection?” So they can actually see the engineering point of view, and it is a gatekeeper course.
- TS: So if you can’t get through that, you might decide you want to do something else?

- TC: Yes, and their study skills have to be a little different than they've been in other courses because it's more high level critical thinking, multiple answers to a question, and those kinds of things. It is an eye-opener for them. But without a doubt, everyone that graduates comes back and says, "I don't know why I saw statics as being so hard. That was a piece of cake, actually."
- TS: They just didn't think so at the time?
- TC: Yes, but now it is.
- TS: What other courses did you teach?
- TC: I developed the transportation sequence. Transportation Systems was at the time one of two required transportation courses, and I taught that. That was good because I taught basic signal timing, quality of flow, capacity analysis, and all that. That was neat stuff. They could go out and actually do a traffic count and then come back and analyze the data, come to some conclusions, and everything. It was a fun class to teach. The other would be, I taught Senior Project in civil engineering [CE 4800] for years. No one else wanted to do it.
- TS: Really?
- TC: They said they didn't. I taught it every semester, and I loved it because it brought everything together.
- TS: So that was a capstone course?
- TC: Yes, it was a capstone course. The students had to start with a proposal and various alternatives, and I never chose one of their alternatives. I always chose a combination of them, just like you would expect in the real world. It was interesting. It's an interesting course, fun course to teach. It is labor-intensive because if they have a question, they come to you. They were always in your office, stopping you in the parking lot, and all that stuff. But it was fun.
- TS: Yes, sounds like fun. Your book, *Introduction to Traffic Engineering: A Manual for Data Collection and Analysis* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., Brooks/Cole 2001; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cengage Learning 2012)—was it developed for a class or for a professional audience? Who was the audience for that book?
- TC: The audience there was partly for classroom exercises in transportation lab, but mainly for practicing consulting engineers because in that area, the whole capacity analysis thing, it's difficult to keep up with how things are changing and what they really mean and how you would actually gather the real data and analyze it. I found that I was getting lots of calls from people saying, "How do I do this? How would I address this?" It's like, "Okay, there are ways to do these things." I got some good feedback. Just got a royalty check last week.

- TS: Let me ask you a few questions about Southern Polytechnic State University. How did gaining university status in 1996 change things with regard to the civil engineering program and the campus in general? Did it make a difference at all to become a university?
- TC: No, not really. I think what changed was that all of a sudden there was a perception on campus among the faculty that we had to do a whole bunch of research now because we were called a university. But we just had a different name. We literally walked in one morning and found out that the name was changed.
- TS: Was it an accurate perception that more research was required?
- TC: Oh, I think it's still that way. People still think that because we have the university title, that we're expected to do much more research.
- TS: But you don't think that's the case?
- TC: Well, my view is this. When virtually all of the faculty members have PhDs, you get a PhD in an R1 [Research 1 university]. So your perception of doing research is based on your one data point at an R1. When someone comes and says to you at an R3, "You need to do research," your understanding of that statement, is you've got to act like a professor in an R1. Well, that's not true. You need to act like a professor in an R3. The problem is that no one seems to be able to define what is the difference between research expectations for an R1 as opposed to research expectations for an R3. That is a constant battle that faculty have with themselves trying to figure out what am I supposed to do?
- TS: Right, and that is just as much true on the Kennesaw campus as down here, I think.
- TC: Oh, yes. Early on, and I say maybe 2006 or 2007, we were looking at how to do annual evaluations, and we came up with a rubric for scholarly activity. We have another one for teaching and another one for service that identify, if you're at the highest level, these are the kinds of things we should be able to look at. And scholarly activities helped a lot. Recently, some of the interpretation of that is reflecting the lack of understanding of what we should be doing across the whole university. But that has been something that the faculty and the college have been wrestling with for a long time. My view in engineering is pretty much a standard view that if you're going to do "research" or write journal articles or whatever, it needs to be in your discipline. Your discipline is not engineering education. Your discipline is your discipline.
- TS: So not scholarship of teaching and learning, but...
- TC: That's in the teaching section. Boyer's scholarship of teaching [from Ernest L. Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990)] should be rewarded in the teaching section. But in the scholarly activity section it should be the scholarship of creativity and discovery. That should be in your discipline.

TS: Right, sure.

TC: So, yes, getting that across, some people get it, and some people don't. But I think the university as a whole has a long way to go in helping faculty define what is scholarly activity and what is acceptable research. That'll be something people do after I retire.

TS: And maybe providing more support for research as well.

TC: Yes.

TS: I'm sure there are many universities around the country that are going through this same process.

TC: Oh, sure! Sure. If they are not an R1—and most universities aren't—they're dealing with this on a daily basis.

TS: Right, right. And sometimes if you want to do research, you had better be entrepreneurial and go out and get a grant or some community support to do what you want to do.

TC: Exactly, exactly.

TS: Let me go back twenty years when you were relatively new here. Do you remember anything about the controversies towards the end of the administrations of Steve Cheshier [former president Stephen R. Cheshier, 1980-1997] and Harris [T.] Travis [former vice president for academic affairs]? Were you involved with those at all?

TC: I was an educated observer.

TS: Okay, you stayed out, in other words?

TC: There were a couple of things that come to mind immediately. One is that I hadn't been here that long, and Bill Rezak [William D. Rezak] who was the dean [of the School of Technology], visited me in my office, and said, "What can I do to improve things? The faculty seems to dislike me. What am I doing wrong?" I was just so taken aback. "My God! What have I gotten myself into here? Here's this guy two levels up in the hierarchy from me coming to my office asking me what I thought." I was like, "What?"

TS: You don't know how honest you want to be in the case like that.

TC: What is this? That stimulated me to go around and ask what's been going on and everything. Evidently, Steve Cheshier promoted him to full professor [in 1993] without going through the process on campus. There were some questions as to whether there was supposed to be a search done for that position and there wasn't.

TS: For the dean position?



TC: Yes, that he was just appointed and had never been on campus as a professor. He was appointed from some other campus. I heard all these stories, and I was like, “Wow!” And then the other thing that stood out is that the first summer I was here, the summer of 1992, Boyce Tate took the summer off, and I was interim department chair for the summer. That’s where I learned how to be interim: keep the boat pointed in the direction that the captain left it, and don’t do anything. You’d be a good interim if you do that. That’s what I did. I didn’t change anything, just kept it going. But I had to go to several meetings. One of the meetings was with the department chairs of Engineering Technology, and they proceeded to bash the dean and Cheshier, not so much Travis, but Rezak and Cheshier.

There were saying things that I thought, “This is out of control! What in the world is going on here?” It wasn’t long after that that we had this big meeting of all of the faculty [on June 3, 1993], and it was a vote of no confidence in Steve Cheshier. That was just like, “This is like the anti-war protests when I was in college.” It was like, “This is nuts. What is going on here?”<sup>3</sup>

Those were interesting times. Steve and I got along fine. My first real encounter with him was over these heat pumps in the offices. I went away for a week’s vacation, came back, and evidently the heat pump had failed. There was mold growing all over my books, and my only copy of my dissertation had mold all over. I came back and Facilities wouldn’t do anything. So I decided to make an appointment with Steve Cheshier and get this taken care of. He was very gracious and everything.

TS: Yes. So you weren’t part of the protest, then?

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<sup>3</sup> The controversy is covered in the student newspaper, *The Sting*, in two stories by Andrew Newton on May 4 and July 13, 1993. The first is entitled, “Rezak Resigns: To Become President of Alfred State College of Technology.” Despite the good news, the story reveals that the faculty of the School of Technology had passed a vote of no confidence in Rezak’s leadership the previous fall quarter of 1992. As a result, Cheshier had reassigned Rezak on January 11, 1993, letting him keep his title, but without any responsibilities other than coordinating a half-million-dollar grant from IBM. The second story on July 13 is entitled, “SCT [Southern College of Technology] Faculty Reprimands President.” At a June 3 annual meeting of the general faculty, the vote was 52 to 20 with 16 abstentions. At issue was a decision of Cheshier and Travis to promote Rezak from associate to full professor without going through the customary tenure and promotion committee. Travis said he ignored normal procedures because Rezak would never get a fair hearing from the faculty. Cheshier later withdrew the recommendation after Rezak submitted his resignation to become president of Alfred State in New York.

It is not mentioned in *The Sting* stories, but Rezak earned a PhD from Georgia State University in the early 1990s. The PhD is first listed in the 1992-1993 college catalog. According to an Alfred State news release, “Remembering Former Alfred State President Bill Rezak” (January 16, 2017), Rezak was a popular president at Alfred State for ten years until his retirement in 2003. His PhD from Georgia State was in human resource development. He died on January 14, 2017.

- TC: On that type of stuff, I just thought, “Okay, I don’t see a big value here. I don’t see a big value added from doing this.”
- TS: How was Dan Papp as interim president?
- TC: He was fine. I mean, he was the interim that just kept us going on the boat in the right direction until a full-timer came along.
- TS: All right. What about Lisa Rossbacher? Did that change things when she came in?
- TC: It did. It’s not a secret that I think that she never understood who we were. I don’t think she ever understood what engineering technology was. I think her actions just did not support that. It seemed like she wanted our university to become a liberal arts college, and wanted more liberal arts, more liberal arts, more liberal arts.
- TS: Okay. When did you first know that the consolidation of KSU and SPSU was going to take place?
- TC: The Friday before the first accreditation-of-engineering visit was going to take place, we got called into a meeting on Friday morning. I actually had come in a little bit late. I had come in [to campus] on time, but I hadn’t bothered to check my email or phone because I was dealing with a student. When I finally checked my phone messages, I saw a phone message about an emergency meeting of the deans and president’s cabinet. So I went over there to the meeting. I walked in, and there were a couple of people crying. I leaned over to Ron [R.] Koger [vice president for student and enrollment services], and I said, “What the hell is going on?” He says, “We’ve just been absorbed by KSU.”
- TS: Absorbed?
- TC: I looked down and said, “You’ve got to be kidding.” I thought that he was joking. And he says, “No.” I thought, “Oh, crap!” At that time, six of our engineering programs had not been accredited. They were up for initial accreditation because you can’t get accredited unless you have a graduate. The accreditation team was coming Sunday. This was Friday. So when I left there, I did two things. I walked back over to my office, which was in the other corner of the building, and the first thing I did is I checked to make sure my TRS [Teacher Retirement System] account was correct and that I could still log in. The second thing I did is I started calling all the people that I knew were involved with ABET. I’ve been involved with ABET, the accreditation board, for twenty years now, I guess. I was a commissioner and an executive board member. What I did was I called them and explained the situation to them. I was on the phone most of the day Friday and Saturday to just mitigate any problems, to head issues off before they became problems. And we came through the visit with flying colors.
- TS: So they still came on Sunday?
- TC: They still came on Sunday, and all our programs got accredited.

- TS: So you had your hands full and were worrying about things other than the consolidation per se.
- TC: Yes, and then after that the concern was, “Okay, it is pretty obvious that they are going to combine the School of Engineering and the School of Engineering Technology. Right now there are two deans.”
- TS: Okay. So somebody is going to have to go.
- TC: Somebody’s gotta go.
- TS: So how long did it take before you knew that you were going to be the dean of the combined college?
- TC: Evidently, the decision had been made already. Dan Papp thought that Ken Harmon [Provost W. Ken Harmon] told me. Ken Harmon thought that Dan Papp had told me. I think four or five weeks after, I asked for a meeting with Dan Papp, and I said, “Dan, I’ve got to ask you something.” He said, “What?” I said, “Am I part of this new university? Am I faculty? What’s my role?” He looked at me and said, “Ken didn’t talk to you?” I said, “Well, Ken talks to me, but he didn’t tell me anything about this.” He laughed and said, “We made that decision long ago.” And I said, “Well, it would be nice if you guys told me this. I’ve been wondering what the heck am I going to do here? Am I going to retire, do some consulting, or go back to teaching full time? Is that something that I would want to do? Or should I find another job in another institution?” Yes, it was quite a time.
- TS: I guess so.
- TC: And that combined with the faculty of both schools were in my office all the time asking questions that I had no clue how to answer, because I didn’t know anything.
- TS: What kind of questions are you talking about?
- TC: The faculty would come in and ask things like, “Is our workload going to change?” “Well, I don’t know.” “Am I going to be able to keep my office?” “I don’t know.” “I heard all the department chairs are going to be fired and all new ones are going to come in.” “I didn’t hear that. Where are you hearing that? I have no idea. It doesn’t sound reasonable to me, but I have no idea.”

But a week or maybe two after it was announced, there was a meeting that was sponsored by one of the legislators to look at how do we get more engineering graduates to stay in the state. In particular, how do we get them to see that Robins [Air Force Base, Warner Robins, Georgia] is a good place to work? Robins was on the table for being one of the bases that BRAC [the Base Realignment and Closure Commission] might want to cut, to close down. They [the legislators] were trying to come up with things to support staying open. All the engineering colleges and their presidents or provosts were invited and went

there. Ken Harmon and I drove down there together. We had a long drive and had time to get to know each other on the way and while we were there and on our way back. He knew at that time what the college was going to look like and who was going to be sitting in what chair. And I'm thinking, "Is this my interview going back and forth? What's the deal?"

TS: You didn't ask Ken on the way down?

TC: No. I figured if he asked me to go down there, it was probably a good sign.

TS: And you're thinking this is a test to see how you're going to perform?

TC: I guess. That was a crazy time.

TS: Oh, my goodness, yes. How do you think the consolidation went from your perspective? Was it a smooth process? It sounds like there was a lot of angst on the part of the faculty as to what expectations were.

TC: The expectation from Dan was that there was going to be a blending of policies and procedures and best practices would survive. We went through a lot of work on these [Operational] Working Groups and everything, and at the end we were told the KSU process would survive and the SPSU process would go away.

TS: Oh! So it's not a blending?

TC: No, it was never a blending on anything. It was an appearance of a blending, but it was never a blending. Promotion and tenure is a great example of that. It was the KSU process all the way with no changes. The annual evaluation, that's the KSU process all the way with no changes.

TS: I thought that the idea of having outside reviewers came from Southern Polytechnic.

TC: Right. That was the external letters. We had that for ten years before the consolidation.

TS: But other than that, it was all KSU policy?

TC: Right, and four years into the consolidation we still don't have external letters, and it doesn't look like we're going to have them for another couple of years.

TS: We don't? Okay. I've been retired, and I didn't know.

TC: We don't, and it doesn't look like that's going to happen. In some areas, they're saying, "Oh! This process is broken. We have to go back and take a look at it." The intellectual property policy is going around now and being drafted. SPSU had an intellectual property policy ten years ago. The Feds thought it was great. The USG [University System of Georgia] thought it was great. It wasn't even looked at. I had pointed it out in

the dean's meeting when we were looking at the draft. I said, "Did anybody bother to compare this with the SPSU policy?" They said, "Did SPSU have a policy?" "Did you bother to even look? We've been operating under this IP [intellectual property] policy for a decade." So has it gone smoothly? My job has been to try to make it as smooth as possible for my faculty, so that we have the least impact on our students as possible, because we're here for our students. To that end, I think we, as a college, have been successful in minimizing the impact on the students.

TS: But you're basically confirming Ron Koger's statement that you were being absorbed by Kennesaw State?

TC: Absolutely. I have no doubt in my mind that we were absorbed. We had zero input. We had the appearance of having lots of input. We had zero input.

TS: You mentioned in a 2015 interview for *Kennesaw State University Magazine* that you thought consolidation had a lot of advantages in terms of visibility for the college as part of a larger university.

TC: I agree. Having an athletic program gets us in the news, and we can identify with that name. Being in the top 50 largest public universities in the country gets our name out there. Even being associated with some of the negative press...

TS: Gets the name out there.

TC: You know, all press is good press.

TS: You mentioned that you thought the consolidation would improve chances of getting grant dollars from institutions that would not have looked a second time at the old Southern Poly.

TC: Yes, it has opened us to other categories of revenue sources. If the school is under a certain size, you're not even allowed to submit. So that is an advantage. I'd hope that we would have benefited more than we have from our research foundation, KSURSF [Kennesaw State University Research and Service Foundation]. They have had their problems with audits and so on, but I think they've got that straightened out. What hasn't helped is that since consolidation, the hiring ... I won't be here when they hire the next president, but with Ken Harmon as interim president, I've had six presidents in four years.

TS: Yes, that's been tough, hasn't it?

TC: You can't stabilize. It's just so hard to stabilize so that you can just keep going on. You can't think about developing things for the future. You're trying to smooth the waters right now. Look at our strategic plan. One of my faculty said to me, "I've written our strategic plan." I said, "Really?" He said, "It's one word: survive." And I thought there's a lot of truth in that.

TS: Yes, survive, but you've really been growing in student enrollment the last several years.

TC: Yes, over a third of the KSU's growth since consolidation has been in this college.

TS: Just this one college?

TC: Just this one college. I have to check my numbers to be sure, but this campus is responsible for over half of the growth of the university in the last four years. The growth has been on the programs that are on this campus. But our budget hasn't grown since consolidation.

TS: Has not grown?

TC: Has not grown. We do not have one more dollar.

TS: Despite the fact that you have so many more students?

TC: That's correct. We do not have any more money. The money that we have, we've generated from e-tuition, the tuition differential, which is going away next year, and summer revenue, which we get, and regular operating money. With the e-tuition going away, that represents 28 percent of our operating budget. So not only we are not getting another dollar since four years ago, but we're going to lose 28 percent of our operating budget.

TS: The student body has grown. What about the faculty? Have you been able to hire faculty to keep up with the growth?

TC: We have a net increase of three faculty [slots] since consolidation.

TS: In your college?

TC: Right. Prior to that, we had I'd say five to seven. The lowest we ever had was five new faculty per year.

TS: Wow! How were they justifying that?

TC: They just say they don't have the money. I don't believe it.

TS: So are classes getting bigger? Are you hiring more adjuncts? What are you doing?

TC: Yes, we're going way up on part-timers. It's hard to find a plastics engineer with a PhD who wants to come and work for what we pay a teacher per course and at night.

TS: Right, right.

- TC: Even in the Atlanta metro area it is becoming more and more difficult. We're teaching more and more courses with part-timers, bigger classes, much bigger classes that we've had. It's a crisis. All of the deans in the university are facing something similar. When the enrollment of engineering goes up, the load placed on Math and Science and on the Social Sciences goes up proportionally.
- TS: For general education courses?
- TC: We have incoming freshmen who can't get into the classes that we specify they need to take in their first semester because they're already full. So that's a crisis. But I think there's a lot of money on campus. I think a lot of money has been directed away from academic affairs. This is my opinion that academic affairs need to be given a much higher priority. I think with Ken Harmon as interim president, it will get and is getting a higher priority when it comes to budget. He is well aware of what the situation is and knows that we are first about education and educating our students, and we have to cover that first. Everything else is extra.
- TS: Right. The case for consolidation was that we were supposed to have \$5 million of redirected funds each year to go into more faculty positions and more advisors and lots of other things as well, but particularly those two. But you're suggesting it's not happening as far as this college is concerned.
- TC: Not happening as far as this college is concerned. The issue that I brought up to every president we've had since consolidation is that our engineering faculty is the lowest paid engineering faculty in the southeast. Our faculty get on average \$15,000 to \$20,000 per year less than Georgia Southern University engineering faculty. And nothing is being done about it. There is supposedly study after study after study, but when somebody comes in and says, "When am I going to get an equity adjustment? I'm falling way behind," they're tired of me saying, "I don't know."
- TS: Well, I mean, we give it to Coles College of Business.
- TC: Yes. They gave a big raise to the [WellStar] School of Nursing right after consolidation, a blanket raise across the board. That's my understanding. I wonder where that money came from.
- TS: It sounds like you're confirming some of the fears about consolidation that the Marietta campus is going to go back to being the stepchild that you were before you broke away from Georgia Tech.
- TC: Right, and there are some retirees that have come back and visited that have said that very thing.
- TS: You were the 2016 Georgia Engineer of the Year as chosen by the Georgia Society of Professional Engineers. Can you talk about that? I saw one source that said there were

twenty-two thousand or more professional engineers in the society. A lot of professional engineers, and you were *the* one of the year for 2016. How did that come about?

TC: I was actually nominated by the faculty here, who are members of the Georgia Society of Professional Engineers. The Association of Consulting Engineers puts it all together. There are actually six societies in Georgia that get together and each of them nominate someone. I was nominated by two societies, the Consulting Engineering Society and the Georgia Society of Professional Engineers.

TS: I didn't realize that there were more than one. You were nominated by the consulting engineers, I guess, for your additional work with industry and the state?

TC: When I was doing that, yes. But I was nominated as Engineering Educator of the Year by both of them. Then in the review process they looked at the various categories, and they said, "Okay, we're not going to give you the Engineering Educator. We're going to give you the Engineer of the Year," which is the overall award, the highest award. And that is, personally, very, very satisfying.

TS: I guess so.

TC: I've gotten awards from fellow educators before, but from practicing engineers in the industry, that's a big deal to me.

TS: Sure.

TC: A real big deal.

TS: I would think.

TC: In administration you don't get a lot of confirmation that what you're doing is right. Having a group outside the university recognize you is pretty special.

TS: Sure. And we've had students win a lot of awards from this college, as well.

TC: Yes. One of the reasons that I came here way back when is that SPSU and now Southern Poly College is extremely student-centered, student-focused. It doesn't mean we're easy by any stretch of the imagination. Ask any of the students. But by the same token we're very, very focused on student success and education first.

TS: I'm getting near the end of my questions, but I wanted to ask you about graduate programs here. You have a master of science in applied engineering. When did that come about?

TC: Actually, that was originally the master of science in electrical engineering technology, which was part of SPSU. When we were absorbed, there were five proposals on Lisa Rossbacher's desk. There were master's degrees in construction, electrical, mechanical,



and mechatronics. We already had civil. We had brought civil in, and at the Board [of Regents] meeting, the associate dean of engineering at Georgia Tech, the dean from Georgia Southern University, and the dean from the University of Georgia came over to me and said, “Well, where is the rest of them?” And I said, “What are you talking about?” “Where is the rest of your master’s degrees? We were hoping that you would have all these in place.” I said, “Well, they’re coming next time. We just wanted to make sure that we had a favorable political environment. They’ll come next month or the month after.” They said, “Okay, fine. We’ve already told the people that we support you doing that and everything.” That is great.

This gets back to some of the Georgia Tech stuff. After we got construction engineering and then systems and mechatronics right away, I called the other deans of engineering [in Georgia]. I guess it was 2010 because UGA and Georgia Southern didn’t have engineering until 2010. I called each of them, and I said, “We need to get together and talk about this. We each have different markets that we serve. It is better for us to work together and support each other in our work, rather than going after things independently. At the very least we need to communicate as to what we are doing.” So we had our first meeting in 2010. It was the Georgia Consortium of Engineering Colleges. That was what it was called. It is still active, but we haven’t been in a while. We met here, and the deans of UGA, Georgia Southern, Georgia Tech, Mercer University, and SPSU met. We talked about the future of engineering in Georgia. I said, “What are we going to do about it?” What we all agreed was that our presidents really didn’t have a clue as to how one’s college related to another and how one university related to another, and that we would work hard to impress upon them that we are not adversaries. We are all in this together.

I remember the third or fourth meeting we had, we had Houston [D.] Davis there, when he was [executive vice chancellor and] chief academic officer [for the University System of Georgia]. We sat him down, and he was great. I was a Houston Davis fan from the get-go. He started out with, “What can I do to help engineering?” We went around the table, and we were freely talking about what we wanted in our different colleges. It was fantastic. He went back to the board and talked to them. So when those master’s came along, it wasn’t a surprise to any of the other colleges or any of the other deans. We had worked all this stuff out.

They were on Lisa Rossbacher’s desk earlier in the week that consolidation was announced. She had not signed them because, let’s put it this way, things tended to live on her desk and have a life on her desk before they finally left her desk. That’s as politely as I can put it. She wasn’t known for expediting things. Then consolidation was announced, and the board said, “No, we’re not going to approve any degrees.” We still don’t have a master’s in mechatronics. We got the master’s in mechanical. The master’s in electrical was the MSAE, which is master of science in applied engineering. We’ve renamed that the master of science in electrical engineering. That was downtown, but when [President Samuel S.] Olens left [in February 2018], that was all sent back, taken back by [interim provost] Linda [M.] Noble and [interim president] Ken Harmon to just make sure everything is right. That will go through finally, but here we are four years

later, and we're finally getting that name change [to master of science in electrical engineering] on that.

TS: And then the applied engineering is going to go away?

TC: It'll go away.

TS: Well, you talked before about a possible PhD program down the road. How long do you think it's going to be before that happens?

TC: A long time. I think the issue is not whether the college wants to do something like that. The issue is really, what is KSU and what does KSU want to be when it grows up? That question has never been answered. Is it a comprehensive university? If it's a comprehensive university, what is a comprehensive university? And I don't want to hear, "What the Board of Regents says a comprehensive university is." What does KSU say a comprehensive university is? How does that translate into the allocation of resources and effort? Unless that question is answered, we can develop degree programs every other day, but if they don't support the mission of the university, then why bother?

TS: Right. I've got really a couple of questions to wind things up. I thought you had a really good 2016 commencement address. You did a lot with the word BOLD. I guess B stood for Brave, among other things, O for Opportunity, L for Love, and D for Diversity, among other things. You really encouraged students to pick hard majors and go for what they wanted to go for regardless of the dangers in the way, I guess, and to do things they enjoyed.

TC: Yes.

TS: Could you elaborate on those points a little?

TC: The way I try to live my life is that if you try and fail, it is better to have tried and failed than, like that saying, "It's better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all." That's the way to live a life. I think that the big change for me was when I was in the Army, just looking around and just realizing that all of this could end at any moment. And then what?

At that time too, unlike the way it is now, when I came to SPSU, within the first eighteen months my father-in-law passed away, my dad passed away, and my mother passed away. It caused me to reflect. I thought, "Okay, did they live their life to the fullest? Did they regret not doing this thing or the other? I just said, "Why not?" Instead of asking why, ask why not. You usually don't come up with a good reason other than, "Well, I'm afraid." In my case it was, "Well, I'm afraid of failing." Well, there can only be one number one. There can be four billion number twos. So I'd rather be a number two and have had the experience than to be the one number one. That's just how I look at it. I started motorcycle racing when I was fifty years old, and I was road racing, and some people thought I was crazy. I had a great time. I just really enjoyed it; it was

soaring, wonderful. When I was done, then I stopped. So it was like, this is cool! But if you don't try, the answer to the question is always, "No," if you don't ask it.

TS: Right.

TC: One of the things that I enjoy is learning. I think that is a motivating force because I see something like golf. What is this deal about this three and a half degree loft versus a five degree loft?

TS: Some engineering principles.

TC: You get into that, and you learn different things. I enjoy that. I really, really enjoy that; learning all that stuff is just exciting.

TS: Yes. What has kept you at SPSU and now KSU for the last twenty-seven years?

TC: Oh, that's easy. It's the students. We are changing the world. There's no doubt in my mind whatsoever. I mean, I am a first generation college graduate. We get a lot of them in here. When you see them five years down the road, ten years down the road, you realize that you haven't just changed their lives; you've changed their immediate family's lives; you've encouraged their extended family. You really changed the entire future of that family for generations for the better. And for the better is the important part. That's why I do it.

TS: Okay. Any plans after retirement?

TC: Don't respond to KSU email. Don't answer the phone if it's a KSU number. Don't drive on South Marietta Parkway or Chastain Road by either campus for at least a year. And just go off. My wife and I enjoy spending time with each other. We routinely come up with ways to save the world.

TS: Okay, all right!

TC: But just spend time doing the things that I haven't had time to do. Just walking my dog. Sometimes I can barely find time to walk my dog. Doing that, taking my wife out to lunch, sitting on the deck, watching the birds and the occasional possum go running by the fence, apparently thinking they're going real fast, and they really don't. Those kinds of things. Just appreciating life.

TS: Fantastic! Thank you very much for the interview.

TC: Well, thank you. I actually enjoyed it.

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