

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT H. "ROBIN" DORFF

CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

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KSU Oral History Series, No. 149
Interview with Robert H. “Robin” Dorff
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
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Kennesaw Campus, Kennesaw State University

Part 1 – Friday, June 1, 2018

TS: Today’s interview is with Dean Robin Dorff, who will be here for one more month, and then he is going to be the provost at Plymouth State University in Plymouth, New Hampshire. Let me begin by asking you about your educational background. I know you were born in 1951 and earned a B.A. in Political Science from Colorado College in 1973 and then went on to the University of North Carolina for a master’s and doctorate in Political Science in 1975 and 1978, respectively. I did a little googling on Colorado College today. I don’t know how it was back when you were there, but now their acceptance rate is 15.8 percent of those that apply. It is very selective and a nice private school that goes back to the nineteenth century. Were you from Colorado? How did you get out there?

RD: I was not—born and raised in Iowa. Somewhat of a rare breed, I was an urban Iowan. I grew up in Des Moines, Iowa. But it is an interesting story how I got there. One, for reasons unknown to my parents and even to my older brother and me, the two of us became very outdoors kids at a young age.

TS: So a college campus in Colorado Springs was the place to be.

RD: It turned out to have a great draw. And I say it was a surprise to my parents because my father and mother were hardly the outdoor types. But we did a lot of hunting and fishing and even ran trap lines and things like that growing up in Iowa. So the outdoors in the West always had an attraction. That was one thing. The other thing was that I was very interested in physics and math. I initially thought I would be going off to a Cal Tech or an MIT or something like that. But at the start of my senior year and the summer before that of high school, I got very much attracted to the idea of going to a smaller liberal arts college. Smaller classes, and I figured I could do the specialization later in graduate school.

The other piece was my older brother; he was at Colorado College. So I was introduced to the school while he was there. The last piece of it was by then Colorado College had already decided that they were going to move to this very new academic calendar—probably one of the first experiments in higher education that I went through. We may come back in this conversation to what draws me to Plymouth State University today. After my freshman year Colorado College did away with the traditional academic calendar of semesters and moved to nine three-and-a-half-week blocks.

TS: I noticed that they offer that option today. I didn’t know it went back that far.

RD: I was one of the original guinea pigs with that.

TS: So one class at a time?

RD: One class at a time for three and a half weeks. When they started it, there were nine blocks [a year]. It has eight blocks now. Some students quickly discovered that that was not for them. I discovered it was very much for me. If I recall correctly, we all knew that was coming. It wasn't a surprise. I think that was another thing that attracted to me to CC. The colleges I wound up applying to were Bowdoin, Pomona, Colorado College, and I think Oberlin. So I was bound and determined to go to a smaller liberal arts college environment.

TS: I guess that historically Oberlin was a model for Colorado College, as I understand it.

RD: In some respects it was. I think the attraction for me was where Colorado College was located and the easy access to mountains, and skiing, and hiking and all of the outdoor things. It worked out very nicely.

TS: Why political science?

RD: Another interesting story. I think the *bottom*, bottom line was I was getting a little bit bored with solving math and physics puzzles. I exhausted all the math that I could take. I actually, by my sophomore year, took a couple of independent study math courses, if you can believe it, because of advanced credits and advanced placement credits and the courses I took. But there was some part of my brain that thought, "I can keep doing these puzzles," but I wandered into and just happened to get an open seat in a class in international relations that a professor by the name of Fred Sondermann was teaching. Fred Sondermann absolutely changed my life. Later, I went back and worked with him in the National Security Education Seminar in a couple of summers before he passed away at way too young an age.

I was fascinated by his class—just the notion that there were these kinds of problems in the world that, while you could think about them analytically and there were problem-solving types of exercises, there weren't necessarily finite solutions to them. His class was definitely the one that just first *really*, really got me interested in political science. I have to say that I was not interested in American politics. I was not interested in the traditional political science things. That would all come later, much of it, actually, in graduate school or even after I was a professor.

TS: It looks like you had a strong interest in Germany.

RD: I did and already had. I had gone off and lived with my family in Germany when I was 15 in the summer before 10th grade. My father was German; my mother was not. We did not speak German growing up. I walked over to the high school in my 9th grade year from the junior high school to take a German class first thing in the morning and then walk back to the junior high school. When I landed in Germany that summer of 1966, I

can tell you that none of the German I had studied was any help whatsoever. I couldn't really speak a lick. I would live with them on and off a number of different times later. My cousin, who was like an uncle in age, just passed away early this year in March at the age of 90, almost 91. His wife Inge still is with us. I just visited her last month. They were another transformative set of people in my life because by the time I got to college, I knew I was going to be doing something related to German and didn't know exactly what else.

TS: Tell me some more about Fred Sondermann.

RD: He was a German immigrant. I think PBS did a special on his parents. In any event, he was Jewish and was a Yale PhD [1953] and the [third] president of the International Studies Association [1962-1963] here in the United States. He was just very much a cutting edge and passionate liberal arts professor of the 1960s and 1970s.

TS: Were some of his family members victims of the Holocaust?

RD: Yes, but I can't remember enough of the stories right now. It was obviously something that was very formative in his life and I think was part of his interest in those large issues of international relations, international politics.¹

TS: What were the names of your German relatives that you lived with?

RD: Willi and Inge and Hüske.

TS: What did you learn from them?

RD: Well, the language was certainly one thing. In retrospect, now and a number of years ago, it became very apparent to me that what we would call today either intercultural competence, IC, or cross-cultural instilled in me a desire to get to know more about other people. I never mastered another language the way I would eventually master German, but just the whole inter- and cross-cultural stuff, the experience of being with a caring family who didn't speak my native language. I remember wondering—the little children in the neighborhood would make fun of me when I was out painting the fence because I couldn't speak German, and in the back of my mind I was thinking, “How do these little kids speak such perfect German?” Over many years it exposed me to much that has fed

¹ According to Robert D. Loevy for the *Colorado College Reader*, Sondermann was born in 1923. He and his family escaped from Nazi Germany to the United States in 1939. He served in the Pacific theater in World War II. Loevy's account can be found online at <https://faculty1.coloradocollege.edu/~bloevy/ccreader/CC-Reader-017-Loevy-Sondermann.pdf>. In an address at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association/West [Pasadena, September 27, 2014], Ole R. Holsti says that Sondermann returned to Germany in 1969, exactly thirty years after his departure, and the visit was the subject of a documentary entitled “Return.” http://www.isanet.org/Portals/0/Documents/Institutional/Holsti_ISA_West.pdf.

my passion for all things international. The study abroad programs that we do here are a lot more than just the German language. But we joke today that my German is Inge Deutsch, Inge German, because I spent more time with her. Willi was traveling quite a bit then. So I learned the language the same way most of us learn our native languages. I was imitating and emulating people around me, and I was saying things before I knew what they really meant. But I could say them in ways that soon would emerge as a darn good German for a non-German born, non-native speaker.

TS: That's great. I've often thought that the Colorado College model of one course at a time is a great way to learn a language, to be immersed in it. Even if it is only for three and half weeks, you can learn a lot.

RD: Yes, and I think that it is true today that the basic foreign language courses will be two blocks. So you have seven weeks, in which case, for many of those courses, they can pick up and go to a foreign country for six weeks because you don't have any conflicts with other classes. In archeology, for example, students would go off for three weeks up into the mountains to a Native American dig and actually camp out and dig and be immersed in it, but also knowing, "Oh, wait a minute; I don't have to worry about that English paper that's due Wednesday or the exam in math that I have on Friday."

TS: So how did you get to Chapel Hill?

RD: Back to Fred Sondermann, when I realized that I was both interested in and perhaps qualified for a graduate study. That's another interesting story. I actually went to graduate school to take some time off from the acting career that I had built up.

TS: Oh, really?

RD: I was a young character actor, and being 22 or 23 years old and a character actor, if I took two years or five years or whatever to do something else, it would probably not damage my acting career. I was no young Cary Grant or Robert Redford or anything like that. But I remember having a conversation with Fred Sondermann about, "Would this be something I might enjoy and be good at?" And then, "Where might I go to study?" Because my primary interest was in international relations and secondarily in comparative politics, Fred Sondermann had really great connections. He recommended a few schools that I applied to. But he knew one professor [at UNC] very, very well. He was instrumental in my deciding to go there and not to Vanderbilt or Columbia. As I recall, a lot of it had to do with whom he knew there and that it would be a good fit with me and my interests. And he was right. Again.

TS: I have to ask, since you're a product of the late 1960s and 1970s, whether Vietnam had anything to do with your interest in decision-making and strategy and military and politics and all of that?

RD: Oddly enough, it did not. The interest in national security studies is something that I probably got from a couple of the professors at Colorado College. I really got more into

it later, only to discover that Fred Sondermann was working in resurrecting national security studies as a field of study in the post-Vietnam era. That is why I wound up going back and working with Fred Sondermann the last two plus years of his life in a program they were hosting at Colorado College in the summer for young emerging scholars that were interested in the national security studies field.

TS: What years would those be?

RD: The seminar ran from the late 1960s, maybe 1969 or so until, the last one I did that was in honor of Fred, was 1979. He passed away in 1978 when I was then a first-year professor at Michigan State. I was invited to give a eulogy at the service for him. But, no, interestingly enough, my Vietnam story is that I don't buy lottery tickets because the only lottery I ever won was the draft lottery.

TS: You won?

RD: Well, I won it, which meant it was the booby prize for most of us. I was number 7. This was probably 1970-71. I was in about the middle of my college education.

TS: Good reason to stay in school.

RD: Well, actually, I gave up my student deferment. Number 7 was going to get called. My older brother was like 280. He was two years ahead of me, and he never came close to being called. They were going to get to number 7. I had pretty much decided by then that I might as well, and if I was going to go in, I might as well go sooner rather than later. We didn't know when it was going to end. It was already, though, fairly late in the Vietnam period. So I can't say that I was volunteering to be a hero. I also had a pretty good idea with my German knowledge and other things that they probably wouldn't ship me anywhere other than to Europe somewhere.

TS: Assuming they made rational decisions.

RD: Assuming. Also, I guess, having something of my dad's character, I figured out that I could probably connive my way around the worst of the assignments. But I had the thought that I would rather get it out of the way and come back and finish school than have it interrupted even further into my undergraduate education.

TS: But it didn't happen that way?

RD: It didn't happen that way. From my track and field days I had a slightly bad back. It was actually something that was congenital that I was born with. But I was a long jumper and a sprinter, and that aggravated it over time. By the time they called me up for my physical, it was on my 21st birthday in 1972. Literally, I had to get on a bus in Colorado Springs at 4:00 in the morning to ride up to Denver for my physical. The doctor who examined me was pretty sure that I would be 4-F, and shortly thereafter I did discover that I was.

- TS: Well, by that time we were just about out of Vietnam anyway.
- RD: By that time we were. They weren't sending any more active duty forces to Vietnam. So that said, I don't want anyone to think this was some great heroic act on my part. On the other hand, I was not inclined to be a draft dodger; I was not inclined to run away from duty if it called. But I was not rushing off to enlist and fight the great fight.
- TS: I did an interview two months ago with [Thomas R.] Tom Currin [dean of the Southern Polytechnic College of Engineering and Engineering Technology], and he is maybe a year older than you. He used exactly the same language that the draft lottery was the only lottery he ever won [when his birthdate was number 9 in the December 1969 lottery].
- RD: Yes, I think he and I have shared that story. A side note in all of this, it turns out Tom Currin and I found out later when I came here that we had overlapped some at North Carolina State [while Currin was working on a master's in civil engineering from 1975 to 1977]. When I first met his wife, I had met him, and I knew he had been at NC State. She was at a reception at the Jolley Lodge, saw me across the room, and walked across the room and asked, "Are you Robin Dorff?" She had seen me on television and heard me on the radio because I was Kerwin Swint² on steroids for the Raleigh-Durham and North Carolina region. I had a monthly radio call-in show with one of the radio talk show hosts, and she remembered. I was stunned.
- TS: You mean you didn't look the same forty years ago?
- RD: I'm pretty sure I didn't.
- TS: Well, I know you did your master's thesis on "The Formation of Attitudes toward the Military: West German Citizens and the Bundeswehr," the military in Germany. How did that come about? I guess your focus was on how Germans came to think the way they did about the military. When you were doing the study it was just a little over thirty years since the end of World War II. That wasn't very long in terms of Germany's experience of losing the second of two world wars in the twentieth century and having to deal with a history of Hitler and the Nazis and all. They had a lot to live down, to say the least. So I'm sure it had an effect on young people's attitudes toward the military.
- RD: Well, again, several things played large roles in how that came about. One of them was another professor that I encountered early on in my studies at Colorado College, Horst Richardson. Horst came to this country with his mother, orphaned, as his father [Karl Fuchs, 1917-1941] was killed on the Russian front fighting for Germany. Horst came to the U.S. as a young child. Just as I was going through stuff to move, I saw the article

² Dr. Swint is the director of KSU's School of Government and International Affairs and a frequent guest on radio and television news and talk shows. He was selected as interim dean after Dean Dorff left KSU.

about the book Horst had written about the letters his father had written back to his wife, Horst's mother.³ I think he was killed on the Russian front in 1941. Horst's mother [Helene Fuchs-Richardson] subsequently remarried, and they emigrated to the United States. Horst was a German professor at Colorado College.⁴ We were talking earlier about my interest in the German language. I was studying German even though I wasn't a German major. I was performing in German plays every year. Horst was another inspirational early college professor for me. In fact, I was working with Horst before Fred Sondermann.

I applied for and received a Ford Venture undergraduate grant to do a study with Horst Richardson and Fred Sondermann as my faculty advisors. Again, because of Colorado College, I could take off for almost two months in the middle of the last semester and go use some of the contacts that I already had in Germany. I designed a very simple, perhaps even simplistic, survey instrument that I would distribute. I would interview people, and I would send tapes back to Horst Richardson in German. So he was monitoring my progress in the German language and Fred Sondermann in the content of the study. It was a study of the Bundeswehr. A lot of what I was interested in was exactly the post-World War II formation of attitudes toward what was then not even two decades old military [established in 1955]. And so it focused not so much on the World War II and World War I experiences and attitudes toward the military, although they came up from time to time, as it did specifically on a Bundeswehr that was designed not to have a military function. You probably know and recall that the early Bundeswehr was much more likely to be found rescuing people and dogs in flooded rivers than in any kind of even NATO-based military operation. So it was very much more of a kind of civil society study than it was a military study. But that was the project that then became my master's thesis.

I was able to return in the summer of 1974 for my first summer in graduate school, and again, I got a small research grant. I also worked in my cousin's department store to help pay some bills. I set up meetings, and by then, in 1974-1975, I was interviewing members of their parliament and some of the people in defense ministry and so on. I was looking at that transformation over time of creating a post-World War II military, and then seeing it move by the early and mid-1970s into being integrated more with NATO.

³ Horst Fuchs Richardson, editor and translator; historical commentary by Dennis E. Showalter, *Sieg Heil! War Letters of Tank Gunner Karl Fuchs, 1937-1941* (Archon Books 1987); reissued in paperback under the title, *Your Loyal and Loving Son: War Letters of Tank Gunner Karl Fuchs, 1937-1941* (Potomac Books 2003).

⁴ Horst Richardson was also the head coach for 49 years of the men's soccer team, retiring in December 2014 with a lifetime record of 567-304-71. During his career, he won five National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA) regional coach of the year awards and received the NSCAA Bill Jeffrey Award in 2001 for longtime achievement in college soccer.

Then, interestingly enough, in the 1990s when I was at the Army War College, I would be writing about the role of the Bundeswehr and, not renationalization, but the allowing of national interest as a concept to be discussed in Germany.

TS: By the way, I meant to ask you earlier, I assume your father was an immigrant to America.

RD: He was. He came to the United States in 1926 at the ripe old age of 17. He had two older brothers. We still don't know the myth from reality in terms of exactly the timing. Some would maintain that the two older brothers came and then my dad. Some said that, no, the three boys all came together. In any event, we know that for my dad it was 1926. There was a significant age difference between my dad's oldest brother. It was a Catholic family, and my dad was the second youngest. The older brother was the oldest in the family, the next oldest was his sister, who by the way was the mother of Willi and Inge Hüske. And then Hans I think. And Hans and Joseph and my dad arrived in the U.S. at roughly the same time.

TS: What is your father's name?

RD: Philip with one 'l.' The family name actually is Lültsdorf.

TS: So how did it get to Dorff in America?

RD: Well, I think they all settled originally into Chicago at some point, and I don't remember exactly when that was, but as my dad used to explain it, he got tired of people mispronouncing, misspelling, and just misunderstanding the name. So the family story is that he cut off the first part, the L-Ü-L-S, and just to be a little bit different he added the extra "f." So when we get those mailings about the Dorff, D-O-R-F-F, family being two hundred years in America; no. No. And the *stammbaum*, the family tree, we know very well for the Philip H. Dorff family, because there are two brothers, and we are the original D-O-R-F-F offspring (at least in *our* family tree, as there are other DORFF families).

But in 1926 he lands here, and they wind up in Chicago. If you can imagine, he was 17 years old and didn't really speak very much English. He spoke French and Dutch, as well as German. But he would land in Chicago in time for the height of the roaring 1920s and speakeasies and then the crash and all kinds of excitement. There are lots of stories about that, but he would not return to Germany until 1956 with my mother. When I went in 1966 as a 15-year-old, I became the bridge back to the German family. The two sisters, by the way, stayed there, both of whom were huddled in basements in Cologne as the allies bombed Cologne. My dad enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942 as a 33 year old.

TS: So he must have been born in 1909, I guess.

RD: Yes, and we suspect that the two older brothers were both at least Nazi sympathizers, if not active supporters.

- TS: Oh, really?
- RD: So family politics. We did not interact a lot with the uncles and the cousins that we had. Hans wound up settling out in San Francisco. Joe, the oldest, stayed in Chicago and virtually never learned much English. So we did not have a whole lot of contact with them. But that's an interesting twist on the family.
- TS: My father was from West Tennessee and went up to Chicago to find work in 1924, so they may have been there about the same time.
- RD: They probably were. Scary as that may be, yes.
- TS: Well you did your doctoral dissertation on "Employing Simulation Analysis in Decision-making Theory." That doesn't sound like an offshoot of your master's thesis, but maybe it was.
- RD: No, it was not, but there is a thread there. Another formative individual in my life was the professor that I met my first year in graduate school and whom I would later work with as my *Doktorvater*, my dissertation advisor. He was a German Swiss by the name of Jürg Steiner.
- TS: I saw his name as co-author on some articles you wrote.
- RD: Yes, we published together later, including turning my dissertation and some of his work into a co-authored book [*A Theory of Political Decision Modes: Intra-Party Decision-Making in Switzerland* (University of North Carolina Press 1980)]. We actually hit it off largely because of the German language and the intercultural stuff. He was primarily a specialist in comparative politics, which was one of my two fields in graduate school. You had to pick two in political science, so mine were comparative politics and international relations. And the international relations, while I was at UNC, then evolved with the subfield of national security—sort of foreign policy and national security studies. We started speaking a lot of German with each other the first year I was in the program, and that evolved, as my German got much better. I was spending summers in graduate school, again, working in my cousin's department store with the blue-collar folks. So I was learning the everyday actual spoken German. When I was interacting with Jürg on a regular basis, we would go back and forth between German and English, each of us, not even recognizing anymore whether he was speaking English and I was speaking German, or vice versa. We may have been speaking different languages, but they seemed like one language to both of us.
- TS: That's a fantastic gift to have.
- RD: It was very nice. And I say that because what he was interested in did interest me. It was in this whole area of consociational democracy, which would become a much hotter topic later in that decade.

TS: I saw that one of your papers [with Jürg Steiner] was entitled “Structure and Process in Consociationalism and Federalism” [*Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, Vol. 15, issue 2 (I January 1985), 49-55].

RD: Consociational democracy. It took me a while to learn how to say that. And what in the 1980s became very much a topic around South Africa and the transition out of apartheid. Another way of thinking about it is power sharing. Consociational democracy is where you don’t just have elections that decide who gets represented. You have representation based on attributes that may be language, religion, race, region, and so on that people share in common. Then you have built-in representation based on those characteristics. Belgium is another country that had it. Switzerland had had it for a long time.

TS: So if you’ve got two ethnicities, each gets a certain representation?

RD: Correct, and then you rarely have majority votes on anything. So it’s decision-making by means other than simple majority vote. Because I was interested in comparative politics, doing my dissertation in comparative politics was a natural. Working with Jürg was a natural because of the relationship that we struck up. Then, because I was very much from the math background, I was doing advanced statistical analytical methodology, which was another minor that I did for my exams. He was not very quantitative, and I was. So that was the mesh that we found there. But once again, the German language piece of it and the intercultural were also very much a factor.

TS: That’s great. Any conclusions from the dissertation?

RD: Yes. This was a study based on Jürg Steiner’s own participant observation of a cantonal system in Switzerland and how decisions in their state-level parliaments were made. There were four decision types, and we worked very hard on developing that typology and how to classify and code the types of decision-making that were used. We looked at a number of other variables: does the type of decision-making employed depend on the nature of the subject matter? And so on. It was very interesting. I can’t remember now the number of total cases that we had and the preponderance of decisions that were not made by simple majority vote. Perhaps the most interesting one was what we coined “decision by interpretation,”⁵ which meant that there was never a vote recorded or just nodding heads or so on. Whoever was writing up the minutes essentially exercised a kind of secretarial or interpretative power, as it were, to frame the decision for the group.

TS: I learned long ago that if you want to have the committee findings come out the way you want, be the secretary of the committee.

RD: Be the secretary.

⁵ Jürg Steiner and Robert H. Dorff, “Decision by Interpretation: A New Concept for an Often Overlooked Decision Mode,” *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 10, issue 1 (January 1980), 1-13.

TS: I saw a paper that you did in 1981 on “Political Decision Making in Face-to-Face Groups: Theory, Methods, and an Empirical Application in Switzerland” [by Robert H. Dorff and Jürg Steiner, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 75, issue 2 (June 1981, 368-80)]. I guess that was an offshoot of your dissertation?

RD: It is. Jürg and I continued to collaborate. Jürg is by the way only semi-retired. He still teaches some at UNC Chapel Hill and lives in Thun, Switzerland. I have not seen him and his family in a number of years. I was hoping to get back there this summer. It is on the *Thunersee*, the Thun Lake. We continued to collaborate until the late 1980s. I went to Michigan State and then came back, lived in Chapel Hill, and taught at North Carolina State [University]. We continued to collaborate on a number of things after that.

TS: I wasn’t sure of my years, but I assume that in 1978, as soon as you got your PhD, you went to Michigan State?

RD: Correct, my first job out of graduate school was Michigan State. My first interview was Harvard.

TS: Really?

RD: Yes. My second or third interview was Cal Tech. I returned to Cal Tech where I thought I would go as a physics major ages before that.

TS: But you ended up at Michigan State.

RD: Yes. One of my committee members said, “Well, Harvard is easy to turn down,” because they were hiring assistant professors in those days to be “servants” for the senior big name government professors. The other thing was that I knew they wanted to hire me because of my quantitative methods.

TS: Oh, so you turned down Harvard?

RD: I’m not sure I had a firm offer from Harvard to “turn down,” but the other reason I accepted an offer from Michigan State was that one of my other committee members told me at the time, “Michigan State is a great place to be from.”

TS: To have on your resume?

RD: Yes. And what he meant by that too was that they were very well known for providing resources and support to their junior faculty. It was also quite quantitatively oriented. But they had a very good reputation for the younger faculty coming there, many of whom stayed for many years. But it sounded like quite a contrast to Harvard.

TS: Well, I would say that up until 2017 Michigan State was very prestigious. I hope you didn’t know that doctor [Larry Nassar] that was [sentenced in January 2018] for sexually assaulting numerous gymnasts [over a twenty year period dating back at least to 1997].

RD: No. I'm pretty sure he was not there then. But I will share a funny story that has nothing to do with any of what you're interested in, Tom. I came back and lived in Chapel Hill starting in 1980 and joined the faculty at NC State.

TS: Oh, so you were only at Michigan State for two years?

RD: Yes, 1978 to 1980 at Michigan State. In 1978–79, my first year, Michigan State won the national championship in men's basketball.

TS: Oh, yes, was that ...

RD: [Earvin] "Magic" Johnson, yes. And [Gregory] "Greg" Kelsner was in one of my classes that year. I moved back to Chapel Hill in 1980 and taught at NC State in Raleigh. My wife at the time was a nursing graduate from Chapel Hill, and she went to work in the first-ever regional burn center, which opened at the North Carolina Memorial Hospital in Chapel Hill. It was easier for me to make the commute. But UNC Chapel Hill was national runner-up my first year back (1981) and won the national championship in 1982. Then North Carolina State won the national championship in 1983.

TS: Who was that guy that was so good at North Carolina State?

RD: Oh, David [O'Neil] Thompson [NC State basketball 1972-1975 and star of the 1974 NCAA championship team]. I saw David Thompson and Phil Ford [Jr.] for [the University of North Carolina [1974-1978] play originally when I was in graduate school, and we could get free tickets to the basketball games. But, anyway, I used to joke that I was the first political scientist to be recruited by athletic departments at R1 universities around the countries.

TS: I bet you were very much in demand after that.

RD: Yeah, very strangely much in demand.

TS: Okay, so you came back to North Carolina State, and you were there for fourteen years, I guess?

RD: Yes, almost seventeen years. I think officially seventeen years because the two years that I was gone from 1994 to 1996 ...

TS: When you were a visiting professor?

RD: Visiting professor [at the United States Army War College]. I gave up my tenure when I went to the Army War College [for a permanent position] in 1997, but I was on the faculty at North Carolina State from 1980 to 1997.

TS: And you continued writing a bunch of articles and ...

- RD: I did.
- TS: Some related to your dissertation, but I also saw one on the Persian Gulf crisis, which I guess you co-edited [Robert F. Helms II and Robert H. Dorff, editors, *The Persian Gulf Crisis: Power in the Post-Cold War World* (Praeger 1993)].
- RD: Yes, it was based on a conference that I co-organized. That was really done in 1991–1992, so it was just after the first Gulf War. But you put your finger on something. By the late 1980s, I had really transitioned, post-tenure granting, back to doing more work in the foreign policy/security policy fields. You can see in my curriculum vitae that the comparative politics works don't go away, but there is a lot more of a thread from 1989 on in the national/international security studies field.
- TS: Yes. Another work I saw that didn't look like it fit [your international focus] was Robert H. Dorff and Saul Brenner, "Conformity Voting on the United States Supreme Court," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (August 1992), 762-75].
- RD: Yes, another interesting foray. That was jointly with a professor who was at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. When I moved back, I think he read one of the pieces that I published, probably with Jürg, on decision-making in small groups. There is a subfield of judicial behavior that looks at judicial decision-making as a small group process.
- TS: An exclusive nine-person group.
- RD: Correct. Saul Brenner was doing work specifically on the Supreme Court and saw the small-group framework that I had been involved with as well as the methods background that I brought to it. He contacted me to see if I would be interested in collaborating with him. We wrote a National Science Foundation grant proposal and actually got it funded. It wasn't very large, but I know that at the time, and I think to this day, it is probably the only NSF research grant that anyone in humanities and social sciences at NC State or a number of other places had actually gotten. There just aren't that many of them. At least at NC State, we didn't have a whole lot of National Science Foundation quantitative behavioral social scientists. But we got that grant, and I think we published two or three different pieces off of it. But it was applying that small-group decision-making theory to, in this case, the Supreme Court.
- TS: So you found that they were conformists?
- RD: I would actually have to go back and check it to see if I remember the findings correctly, but there was some explanatory power in the small-group framework. The interesting thing about the Supreme Court is that they start with an initial vote, which is recorded. Then they have the final vote with the opinions. So there was an opportunity built into the framework that we used and the methodology, to see how much fluidity there was. We were looking mostly at 5-4, 4-5 kinds of decisions to see how much evidence is there of position switching between the initial vote and the final vote?

- TS: Was it that justices on the losing side decided to join the majority?
- RD: That's some of our explanation in terms of small group behavior. What you might see is the conformity voting would be much more prevalent in cases where there was maybe a smaller minority that now decides to join in on a majority vote either because it might make the majority vote more persuasive or they just didn't care to fight the fight anymore.
- TS: Or they wanted to write a concurrent opinion?
- RD: Correct. I could give you more details, but it would bore everyone to death. But there was evidence that individual persuasiveness in a small group had an impact. It wasn't just pure positions based on pre-ideas or pre-ideology in all of the cases.
- TS: Isn't that what you would hope for sometimes: that you would listen to somebody making a reasonable argument and be persuaded to come over?
- RD: Yes, of course. That's one of the main premises of our work on small-group decision-making: that there are some inherent characteristics of small groups and small group decision-making processes that are influenced by those kinds of things and also grow out of that kind of behavior. Eventually, it would lead to some of the arguments, for example, for power sharing in post-apartheid South Africa. If you went right away to a majority vote model, the lines that had been drawn before were likely to be just reinforced. Even if the decision-making wasn't as efficient and effective in a power sharing, compromise-seeking sort of system, you were likely to have more success in the long run of trying to build up the attitudes that underlie the behaviors.
- TS: And if you have a white minority that has been oppressing blacks for years and they suddenly are frightened out of their minds about majority rule, it might help smooth things in the transition.
- RD: Right. Of course, they never really did adopt that model. What I would argue wound up happening in South Africa is you had that initial resistance to relinquishing any of that decision-making power. Then over a not very long period of time you wound up, instead of with the Truth and Reconciliation committees winning out, a now black majority disagreeing amongst itself and breaking up into factions, but also exercising majority power over the now white minority, and not to, I would say, the greater good in South Africa over what has been more than a couple of decades now.
- TS: So how did the visiting professorship come about to the Army War College?
- RD: As I said, I had become more active with that [security studies] research agenda. I was presenting papers at conferences, working on some publications, and building more of a network in that community of scholars. Quite coincidentally, within a month of each other, I think in the fall of 1993, I got phone calls from the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, from someone who knew me there, and from

someone who knew me at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, both senior service colleges. “Would you be interested in a visiting professorship?” It was one of those great times in my career and in our family life that a visiting professorship would have worked out. The kids were old enough, but still young enough, not to be moving them in high school or even junior high. If they had been infants, that would also have been a challenge.

I was at a late associate professor stage of my career, so it was an opportunity to dive into the scholarship and research in that broad area, combining some of the comparative with the international national security studies. That was the German piece that I would write when I was there. And in the “great, informed, rational decision-making processes that we all know govern our decision-making so much” [he said sarcastically], the question was Alabama or south central Pennsylvania. My kids had been born and raised in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and I figured north was a better direction just because they hadn’t spent very much time there. And so off we went to south central Pennsylvania; I started teaching at the United States Army War College in summer 1994.

TS: I understand that the Army War College is built on the grounds of the old Carlisle Indian School.

RD: It is.

TS: Any ghosts of [James Francis] Jim Thorpe⁶ still around?

RD: Not just ghosts, monuments. There are some gravestones there, though not his. Of course, his burial spot [in the borough of Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania] is hotly and highly contested.⁷ But one of the great history stories is that the oldest continuously operating [military base] in the U.S. is West Point, and number two is Carlisle Barracks. It dates from [1757 during the French and Indian War. Substantial brick buildings were built at Carlisle Barracks during the Revolutionary War], and it was a cavalry school before and during the Civil War. Then it went through the years of a large part of it being converted to Carlisle Indian Industrial School [1979-1918, until the army took the barracks back to meet the nation’s military needs during World War I]. But in the early 20th century Jim Thorpe and [legendary football coach Glenn S.] “Pop” Warner were known to inhabit the place. To this day, they still hold Jim Thorpe days as the athletic competition amongst a bunch of early to mid 40s men and women and later military-affiliated students and faculty.

⁶ Thorpe was a member of the Sac and Fox nation, a former student at Carlisle Indian School, a college football All-American, an Olympic gold medalist in the 1912 pentathlon and decathlon, a major league baseball outfielder, and a National Football League running back.

⁷ Thorpe died in 1953 at age 65. Between 2010 and 2015 family members sought legal action to return the body to Sac and Fox land in Oklahoma, but ultimately failed in federal court.

TS: How about that? Okay, so the visiting professorship lasts from 1994 through 1996. Then you got a permanent professorship starting in 1997. How did that come about?

RD: That was again another formative individual in my life. The one who had recruited me and asked me to go there to be a visiting professor, would later confess to me that he had it in his mind the entire time to recruit me to leave, as I sarcastically describe it to this day, my “cushy tenured professorship” for a non-tenured, renewable contract position with the U.S. DOD [Department of Defense]. But he was not only plotting for me to do that, but eventually to succeed him as chair of the Department of U.S. National Security Policy and Strategy.

TS: What is his name?

RD: Gary [L.] Guertner. It sounds German and is in origin, but is not. This would be G-U-E-N-T-E-R. But it still has an unmlauted U because if you don’t use the umlaut, an “e” after the vowel is the umlaut.

TS: So he knew he was going to retire?

RD: Well, actually, he didn’t know he was going to retire, but he was grooming me because he was a civilian, although early retired military. I think he was a marine, but not a career officer. But the relative paucity of civilian PhDs interested in teaching at that level and teaching that kind of subject matter is very limited. So what Gary was doing was trying to see if he could recruit specifically civilian PhD types to come who would also have eventually the kind of skill set to take over as a department chair. That actually happened. I went back to NC State fully expecting to stay there and got a phone call from Gary, which was to say, “Would you be interested in applying for this full-time position?” We had the family pow-wow. I’ll never forget, the two boys, “Do you want to stay here in Chapel Hill and the Research Triangle or go back to Carlisle?” And the two boys were for Carlisle. My oldest son had really become a very good soccer player and loved it there. Youngest got into it. My daughter, who is the real outgoing flamboyant [type], said, “Either one is fine with me.” And of all things, my then wife, Connie, who was from Wilmington, North Carolina—we met when she was an undergraduate at UNC—said Carlisle. Her parents were still in Wilmington, but we had just really fallen in love with the community there: the small colonial town environment that it was. I’m really glad we did it because all three kids wound up going through pretty much the full public school system in Carlisle, and I think they are all better off for it.

TS: You were teaching primarily army officers? Or how does that work?

RD: Primarily military officers, although it was by then very joint. We had seminars of eighteen students. You had to have one air and one sea component and at least one civilian. So you had State Department, sometimes CIA, usually the analyst types, not the field operative types, and two international officers. So you taught in those core seminars

for about two-thirds of the year, and then one-third of the year were electives courses that we got to design and teach pretty much on our own as faculty.

TS: And a lot of research it looks like?

RD: Yes, it was a great environment for that because there was a lot of support and a huge network, nationally and internationally, if you were interested in doing research in issues broadly related to national and international security. It did not have to be military. In fact, a lot of my stuff is more on the political and policy sides of things like NATO and decision-making, again coming back to my interest in decision-making theory. And time—because at that juncture we taught everyday. The three core departments would teach one piece of the core course each. We were in teams of three faculty members. We would sit in on parts of all of it. When we were in the [lecture] seat, we were running pretty much each day five days a week, but then we had big blocks of time where I could go do fieldwork in Europe or I could pop down to D.C. We had a network of policy interested people and so on.

TS: Sounds like a dream job.

RD: It was if you were interested in that kind of thing. I have to be clear about that. I recruited more than a few, but not a lot, of civilians to come to the Army War College during my time as course director and then as department chair. But, one, there are not a lot of traditional academics that want to give up tenure; two, there aren't a lot of traditional academics that are all that interested in the more applied policy sides of research; and three, there aren't a whole lot that are interested necessarily in teaching professional mid-career students. But we had some great historians there, by the way. I re-learned a great respect for history that has stuck with me ever since, doing some of the battlefield staff rides that I now do here at Kennesaw State at the feet of great, great, PhDs in history who are also just wonderfully gifted with helping senior political and military leaders learn what the lessons of history actually are.

TS: You held the General Maxwell D. Taylor Chair from 1999 to 2002 and were department chair from 2001 to 2004 for the Department of National Security and Strategy. I wonder, with all your focus on decision-making, what your opinion is of General Maxwell Taylor who was criticized quite a bit for his decision-making during the Vietnam era.

RD: Oh, yes. There is no question that Max was a controversial figure. You also notice that later I was the [General Douglas] MacArthur Chair [of Research, 2009-2012]. I held chairs of army officers who had great difficulty with political leadership. But there was no relationship there. A couple of chairs in fields like military operations were in the specialty areas, but the MacArthur chair was more generalist. I would never be considered for [the specialty chairs].

TS: You were putting out articles at this time such as “Germany and the Future of European Security,” [*World Affairs*, Vol. 161, no. 2 (Fall 1998), 59-68] and “Public Opinion and NATO Enlargement,” 5-37, [in *NATO after Enlargement: New Challenges, New*

Missions, New Forces, edited by Stephen J. Blank (United States Army War College, September 1998)]. I guess after the fall of the Soviet Union all those Eastern European countries had started coming into NATO. Then you wrote “Some Basic Concepts and Approaches to the Study of International Politics,” [pp. 31-41] for the *U.S. Army War College Guide to Strategy*, [edited by Joseph R. Cerami and James F. Holcomb Jr. (February 2001)]. That sounds like interesting work.

RD: Well, if you go back and look at my publishing, my dissertation title [“Employing Simulation Analysis in Decision-making Theory”] doesn’t sound like a very stimulating, interesting title. But if you look at some of my earlier publications, I was using multivariate discriminant analysis to do fairly high-level sophisticated methodological studies. By [2001] I was trying to be a bridge from that very contemporary quantitative social science world to the policy and practitioners’ world.

TS: I was wondering about your audience. The audience is not really academics so much as people that want to formulate intelligent policies, I guess.

RD: Yes, or be involved in the discussion about those policies. Now, again, where the bridge was so nice for me is that we held lots of conferences. I would be involved in the International Studies Association and even the American Political Science Association. Some of the people I would be working with were much more on the traditional academic side and were big recognized names in the field, but because they were doing IR [international relations] theory—balance of power theory as applied to rising China and things like that—I just happened to have very much a foot in both worlds at the same time. That was something that intrigued me. I don’t know why, but I think it goes back to the problem-solving engineering mind that I mentioned very early on. These were problems without finite solutions, and therefore informed, intelligent, and analytical discussion and debate had something to contribute.

TS: You took two years off from your time at the War College to go back to Raleigh as executive director of the North Carolina Institute of Political Leadership (IOPL). From what I could find, it was created in 1974, originally, by a man by the name of Walter DeVries, to produce better political leaders in North Carolina, as I understand it.

RD: Correct.

TS: So how did you get back to North Carolina for that job?

RD: A phone call; I was teaching a lot about campaigns and elections and voting behavior at North Carolina State—the one thing I mentioned to you early on that I had no interest in when I first got interested in political science. When I went to the Army War College, I was told, “We are the Department of National Security and Strategy, so we teach strategy.” Well, I said, “I’ll learn this.” When we did the first preparations, I said, “I’ve been teaching this for years. It is ends, ways, and means.” So going from political campaigns to war campaigns was kind of a natural. The other thing that we were working on all the time at the Army War College was developing future leaders—

transitioning leaders from the tactical and operational levels that they had been working at for years to the strategic level. We called ourselves VUCA U, the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous University. It was that.

When Walt was retiring, there were people there in North Carolina who had been through the program that I had worked with a little on campaign strategy stuff. So I got a call one day from a former student who was now running another nonprofit and was on the board of the Institute of Political Leadership. He said, “Someone suggested that maybe you would be interested.” So he got in touch with me. It happened to come at a time when I had just re-upped for three more years as department chair. There were some things going on there that [I didn’t like]. To some in the military world, you couldn’t be a chair of a department and then go back and be a faculty member in the same department. Yes. You are making the same face I did at that time because for us in academe, that happens all the time.

TS: They thought it was equivalent of going from general to colonel, I guess?

RD: Correct, that was their view. We tried to dissuade them from that view, but, in any event, it came to my attention that I might finish that three-year term and wind up in one of the other departments that I had no interest in being in. Other than the department I was in, there was only one other place I would like to be, and that was the Strategic Studies Institute. Oddly enough, a few years later, I would wind up there. But the others didn’t interest me. So when this phone call came, I said, “Well, let me take a look.” It just seemed to be the right time. There were other things going on personally, and I thought it was a great opportunity to see if we could take some of the things that I had now learned in developing future leaders in the political and military world to the world of campaign and electoral politics. So that’s why.

TS: To me, that sounds like a fascinating job.

RD: It was. What I didn’t know until the day I actually landed down there and met the chairman of the board in an emergency, urgent meeting at the Raleigh-Durham airport was that the board had just found out that basically they were significantly deep in the red on the finances. There were some structural problems and so on. So it became another great learning experience for me. But working with the program was fantastic—having to redesign and come up with a whole new strategy for the nonprofit. We had to disband the board and start over again, and it really was a five-year process. Before in 2007 I would go back to the Army War College, I did a couple of other things in between. But from 2005, when we put the Institute on hold, until 2008 when we restarted it, I was working basically as a volunteer executive director while working with potential funders and partnering. Eventually we would partner with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. We had a foundation on a little bit to the right of center and a foundation to the left of center that I had as a model. I said, “Look, if I can get two-thirds of the budget supported by anchor funders, then I only have to fundraise for our student fellowships for one-third of the budget on an annual basis.” In 2008 we brought that back to life. In

2011 I stepped down, not yet knowing that in the spring of 2012 I would wind up at Kennesaw State.

TS: Okay so, you were volunteer executive director. What were you doing to make a living?

RD: That was when I went to work [as senior advisor] with Creative Associates International, Inc. [in Washington, D.C.] They are not an NGO [non-governmental organization], but they are an international policy implementer. They were founded, originally, as a female minority-owned company. They were heavily involved internationally in women's and education issues. In the 1990s, post-fall of the [Berlin] wall and after the Gulf War [1990-91] and 9/11—by the way I was in my first full year as chair of the Department of National Security and Strategy on 9/11/2001—a couple of other folks from the War College and I were working with Creative Associates. We were back and forth in D.C., organizing some workshops for them. I think we wrote some white papers for them because, more and more, we were seeing that security issues were less and less purely military issues. The kinds of humanitarian and other things that Creative Associates were specialists in had a real play in the security realm. I was just doing some things informally for them. Then they hired me on as I was putting the IOPL on ice for a while and working on that as best I could. I was living in Raleigh and working with Creative Associates out of D.C., and that was about two-years-worth.

TS: And then in 2007 back to the War College as research professor of National Security Affairs.

RD: Right, in the Strategic Studies Institute, which was the other place I mentioned earlier where people like me could really gravitate. It is the think tank of the Army War College. It writes the policy-oriented papers. It does its own version of unpaid or non-paid consulting. We were paid to be actively engaged in the policy processes.

TS: Then 2009 is when you became the General Douglas MacArthur Chair of Research.

RD: Continuing my journey through generals with troubled presidential relationships [laughs].

TS: Well, maybe this will start a transition. I saw, among other things in that period, you edited a work with a Kennesaw State University professor named Volker [C.] Franke [*Conflict Management and "Whole of Government": Useful Tools for U.S. National Security Strategy?* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, August 1, 2012)] . I did an interview with Volker about three years ago [September 16, 2015]. I guess from the question mark in the title that you had some doubts whether "whole of government" was a useful tool.

RD: And whether "whole of government" was spelled "whole" or "hole." That became one of the inside-the-beltway jokes about the black hole of government. When I first went to the Army War College, it was very much in the middle of the Eastern European dissolution of Yugoslavia, fall of the Soviet Union, and so on. There was all this hope that peace and democracy would win out over everything. Then by 9/11 and in the aftermath of the

Second Gulf War [2003-2011] and other operations that were ongoing, the whole field of security studies was increasingly occupied by military people working in humanitarian spaces and humanitarian actors working in military spaces. It was a very, very interesting time for a company like Creative Associates. Then going back to the Army War College—they were specifically looking for someone like me, who had feet in the different worlds of academe, policy, and security.

The Army actually had a Strategic Outreach Program, and the Strategic Studies Institute was the agency of the Army War College for the Army on that. It was possibly strategic communication, possibly public relations. It, basically, was designed to find avenues where the military and intellectual communities could interact. This program helped fund and helped organize and helped to identify speakers for workshops and conferences around the country with partnering academic institutions. We had done a number of them around the country, and not long before 2010 Volker Franke, whom I had known for a number of years, had moved from McDaniel College in Maryland, not far from Carlisle, to Kennesaw State University. We didn't know each other at North Carolina State, but we found out later there was some overlap there. He was in a couple of summer programs that I ran. I got to know him before he had finished his dissertation. He moved down here [to KSU in 2009]. The next year the PhD program got launched, and Volker, through [Dean Richard] Rich Vengroff, my predecessor here, contacted me about helping organize one of the Strategic Outreach Programs down here. That was the first of, I think, two or three conferences that I helped organize from my position there.

TS: Okay, so you knew about Kennesaw before you became dean.

RD: I did. I got an email inquiry shortly before Christmas in 2010 from someone at the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia. They had a proposal for a PhD program and asked if I would serve as an outside reviewer. I said, "Sure." A couple of weeks later, a pile of things about as tall as I am arrived with the program proposal and all this documentation. I thought, "Wow! What have I gotten into?" I pulled out the master book with the proposal, and in it I see President Daniel S. Papp. Well, I met Dan Papp in either 1975 or 1976.

TS: That far back?

RD: At one of the summer programs at Colorado College that we were talking about early on, organized by Fred Sondermann. Dan was attending. He was at the Army War College around that time as a visiting professor there and also at Georgia Tech. I traveled with Dan Papp and others from Georgia Tech in 1991, two or three weeks before the Iraqis invaded Kuwait, out to the [Fort Irwin, California] National Training Center. I came down from North Carolina State and flew out there on the Learjet of then General [Carl E.] Vuono, the Chief of Staff of the Army [1987-1991] to spend a couple of "fun-filled days" [laughs] watching the Georgia National Guard get trounced by the Red Forces out there. But I had gotten to know Dan pretty well, and I stayed in touch with Dan over time. I knew he had gone to the Board of Regents. But about the time he went to Southern Poly [as interim president in 1997-1998] or somewhere in there I lost track of

him again. That was around the time that I had gone back to the Army War College. Anyway, I look at this and say, “Oh, so that is where Dan is?” I didn’t think that much of it other than thinking, “Oh, I may have a chance to have a conversation with Dan as part of this external review.” I did not. But I wrote the external review, pointing to some challenges, some opportunities, and so on. Overall, I said that this was a great program, not knowing that I would come down and teach here in 2011–12 for just a one-hour course a couple of times [on strategic decision-making].

TS: For the International Conflict Management Program?

RD: Yes, and we were running that conference either two or three times. In either December or January, I got a call again, saying that I had been nominated for the dean’s position and was I interested in applying? I said, “No.” They called me then I think two weeks later and said, “Well, they just want you to apply.” I said, “Well, look. It is the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. I’ve been down there. I know the people. I know the university. It’s a great place. But I’ve been in colleges of humanities and social sciences all my civilian academic career, and they are not going to want a professor coming here from the Army War College to be the dean of their College of Humanities and Social Sciences. But I’ll apply.” And here I am.

TS: So what do you have to lose to apply if they are not going to take you anyway?

RD: Right. So I did apply. And the rest, they say, is history. But I had gotten to know Kennesaw State University, and I will say this that may be at least a segue into some of the things you may want me to share. I was flying down here on three or four weekends during the semester because we would organize these graduate one-hour classes on strategy and strategy formulation and how that applies to developing policy and strategy for conflict management scenarios. I was flying in usually on a Friday and then flying back early Sunday morning. I was frequently coming back for the conferences and so on and talking with Carolyn, my wife, who I had relocated from North Carolina to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and saying, “This is not like any other university or academic institution I’ve been around. They are doing these things that just are so innovative and different from what I am used to seeing.”

Another reason for not wanting to apply for the position here was I would get asked from time to time about faculty positions. While I loved my years at NC State and at Michigan State and I loved the twenty years in traditional academic life, that wasn’t what I was looking to go back to or to move around in. I could interact with those people in all the other venues that I had and bandy ideas around. So that kept playing back in my mind. But I would tell Carolyn, “They are doing some of these things that I haven’t seen anybody else in a traditional university setting doing.” As the process wore on, when the search committee got more interested in me, I was getting more interested in them as I was having more conversations with people here. By the time I was invited down for the interview, I can share with you that when I got home, I told Carolyn, “I didn’t know that I would want to do this, but I’m going to be crushed if I don’t get a chance.” By this time

every star aligned. It suddenly started dawning on me that this was not like one of those academic places that I didn't want to go back to.

TS: Would you like to stop at this point and do another session next week?

RD: Is this a good transition point?

TS: We have you to Kennesaw now, and you've explained why you wanted to come here. My next question was going to be that you had always been at an R1 [Research 1] and we clearly weren't in 2012. Was that a problem for you? Maybe we can talk about that next time.

RD: Thanks. We can pick up there next Friday.

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
KSU Oral History Series, No. 149
Interview with Robert H. “Robin” Dorff
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
Location: Dean’s Conference Room, College of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Kennesaw Campus, Kennesaw State University

Part 2 – Friday, June 8, 2018

TS: Let’s pick up where we left off. You were talking about why you wanted to come to Kennesaw, and that you were finding things that were exciting about Kennesaw. But you were a research professor when you came here, and Kennesaw was by no means a research university at the time. We are classified as an R3 now, which is still a long way from an R1. Why would you want to go from where you had a tenured research professorship to be the dean of a state university?

RD: Well, for one thing, to clarify, there was no tenure at the U.S. Army War College.

TS: As soon as I said that, I knew better.

RD: I will quickly add that they have a history there of, if you are a good fit, I don’t think anyone there has ever had their contract non-renewed. The only occasions I knew of the very infrequent non-renewals of faculty members were for issues that were quite apart from performance in the classroom. I was definitely happy where I was. I think the context of the research piece in particular goes back to some of the things we were talking about last week. What I saw going on at Kennesaw State was a lot of innovation, a lot of [scholarly activity] that didn’t fit into the category of classical academic research, but was still research. Some of it, perhaps, was a little more applied. As we were talking about earlier, my interest had shifted very much into the policy arena. While it was still research, it was, most frequently, research on international and national security policy, foreign policy, and U.S. relationships with other countries and regions and what the implications were for policy in those areas.

I think one piece of it, especially with the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, was the then still fairly new PhD program in International Conflict Management. There were also things going on in other departments here in the college in fields such as criminal justice and psychology that were on that cusp of, if not directly engaged in the policy arena—particularly, relationships with the community. It wasn’t that much of a shift for me in terms of the kinds of things that I was interested in. I was teaching a one-hour graduate course in the PhD program. My teaching and research gave me a little exposure to at least a part of what Kennesaw State University was doing. In that one-year period before I was asked to apply, I got to know some of the people and the players, so to speak. It all reinforced the notion that this was a very exciting place to be, but also not a traditional academic institution that I was pretty sure I did not want to go back to—not because I disliked it, but it was no longer the best fit for me.

- TS: From your teaching in the PhD program, what was your impression of KSU students when you got here?
- RD: I was very impressed, and it wasn't just with the graduate students, although, initially, I had the most interaction with them. I had occasion to be a guest instructor in a number of our undergraduate courses, primarily in my fields, of course, in political science and international relations. I had excellent experiences with them. I've worked with a couple of students on capstone projects that they were doing, and I've spent a fair amount of time with some of the student clubs and associations on campus and students in study abroad contexts. I must say that I've been greatly impressed by them. I also found it very interesting that we had such a large percentage of first-generation students. I came to joke about it, because I was always told, "We have a lot of non-traditional students." I said, "I think every student at Kennesaw State is non-traditional." By that I meant a number of things, but part of it is that even our traditional students, the classic 18 to 23 year olds, are working quite a large number of hours outside of their program of study. I was greatly impressed by the fact that so many were juggling so many different things. Commencement every year was always wonderful when the president or provost would ask students to stand up if they were first generation, or if they were working, and then to stand if they were working two jobs.
- TS: It was always interesting that almost nobody was still seated after being asked to stand if they held down a job while going to school.
- RD: Absolutely, and I think that is important. It is important that we understand who our students are and that we understand what almost all of them are going through, which is not typical everywhere around the country. It is important for us as teachers and administrators to do the best job we can in getting to know who our students are.
- TS: Our president to be, Pamela [S.] Whitten, this morning was touting the fact that at the University of Georgia, all students have to engage in experiential learning activities, and she defined that very well to include study abroad, internships, or working with a professor on a research project, as well as doing projects in the community and those kinds of things. I think we have been doing a lot of those things already at Kennesaw, but can you talk about the record of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences with regard to experiential learning over the past six years.
- RD: I think the record has been excellent. I think it was very good when I came, but also my second year here when we were redoing our college strategic plan, personally, I wanted to be very sure that we focused heavily on experiential learning. It includes those and a number of other categories as well. I had a task force that we formed to get input from the faculty, students, and staff. Part of our vision is to become the most engaged College of Humanities and Social Sciences that we could be. Engagement to us meant engagement in the classroom with active learning—things like role playing exercises, applied kinds of practical experiences, and we worked very hard on increasing paid internships for our students. We increased them by quite a bit by working directly with businesses to try to engage them with our college. Over 80 percent of our internships,

and we have a lot of them in this college, were unpaid. That is because the majors our students are in often involve working for local agencies and non-profits, agencies like law enforcement that don't have budgets to pay interns. I would say that we are probably one of the leaders on campus in terms of the size of our college and the percentages of students in our college who are actively involved in that engaged learning process and experiential learning in all of its forms and fashion. It is very, very big in this college.

TS: I like the term “engaged learning” because I can pronounce it better.

RD: Experiential. Well, you just need to practice it more, Tom [laughs].

TS: I guess so. She also was talking this morning, I guess everybody does nowadays, about progression, retention, and graduation rates and what she had been doing at UGA and elsewhere, and what UGA is doing to facilitate student success after they graduate. I know we track the rates on retention and graduation. Do we have records on how successful our students have been from this college after they graduate?

RD: We have not historically. In fact, when I arrived six years ago, I want to choose my words carefully, but we had very poor records on our alumni generally. We had multiple lists, classic mailing lists, emails, and contacts on the vast majority of our alums, but there were competing lists. Mark [R.] Anderson [dean of the College of Science and Mathematics] came in at the same time with me. I think he asked for an alumni mailing list, got three different lists, and none matched with either of the other two. It was something that was very apparent to me and to others that historically Kennesaw State had not done a very good job of staying in touch with alumni. It wasn't because we didn't care about alumni. I think quite a bit of it was because we grew so fast that our ability to do the record keeping and keeping up with alumni was just way behind the rapid growth that we went through. I know there has been very explicit talk since I arrived of trying to work more on staying in touch with our alumni and trying to do some of that tracking.

What has been difficult about that, Tom, and you know this, is with only a few exceptions in undergraduate education generally, outside the professional programs, students don't wind up “working in their field of study.” That makes it very difficult, when you have the data, to try to make sense of the data. One of my pet peeves is people who talk about data-driven decision-making. Well, data don't drive decision-making. If you let data drive decision-making, it means you aren't using the data to make decisions. I think there is a big difference between data-informed decision-making and data-driven. I think the data are useful, but it is going to take probably at least a five-year, and I would say almost certainly a ten-year and beyond tracking to find out where our students really-and-truly land. I think you hit on it that the student success is not just success in the classroom, but it is success after graduation—how prepared they are for life. Our students graduating today will probably change careers, not just jobs, but careers, more than ten times in their working lifetimes.

- TS: I know you have been inviting the alumni back for homecoming the last several years, and I saw the other day an appeal for scholarship funding for Humanities and Social Sciences that went out to alums from this college.
- RD: We made a conscious decision, when KSU got football [in 2015, to hold homecoming on the date of a football game]. Welcoming alumni back is pretty hard to do if you don't have a homecoming weekend or event. That was the catalyst for us to make the decision immediately in this college to start an annual alumni event as part of homecoming. It was just trying to figure out what game was going to be homecoming and what time would be available. For the last three years we have held our Humanities and Social Sciences homecoming on the [game-day] Saturday in the late morning or early afternoon. You can help us work with the Athletics Department to have that homecoming game in the evening, because that helps us get alumni back on campus for a larger block of time during the day, and so we can do some things with those alumni at the college and department levels that attract them to more than just the game. If the game is at 1:00 o'clock in the afternoon, there isn't much of a window in the morning, and they are not going to stay after.
- TS: One more question that came out of Pamela Whitten's presentation this morning: she said that when she was dean [of the College of Communication Arts and Sciences] at Michigan State University [2009-2014], that for the first time she got into fundraising. Has that been an important part of your job?
- RD: It has been. The early part of the fundraising—and I would share this with faculty on different occasions throughout the year—was what I call more begging for bucks than fundraising, because it was on a much smaller scale. But I did help in recruiting some small endowments for scholarships. I probably had a fair amount of say in the kind of indirect fundraising, which was working with business people to get those paid internships, which has translated into a considerable amount of money, although it doesn't show up in an endowment. I can't say much about it, but I was directly involved with a donor that I have been working with for a number of years, and am still working with, who has expressed an interest in naming our Social Sciences Building. That would be on the order of \$5 million. Whether that will happen or not, I'm told that it is going to, but it just hasn't happened yet.
- TS: Is that the going price now to name a building—\$5 million?
- RD: It depends. I've talked with people nationally, and if we were to get \$5 million for naming a Social Sciences Building, it would be stunning. Now medical centers, chemistry labs, or business schools, not so much. The point of that is, there could be almost \$2 million for endowed student scholarships and \$2 million for an endowment to support early faculty professional development, which I think would help us recruit young faculty going forward and keep them here. I think there was another million dollars in there for other endowed programs. There were other successes that we realized along the way, including probably as much as \$300,000 in student scholarships. Again, if they are endowed, that doesn't generate much more than a couple thousand dollars a year,

but we have many more students now in several of our programs that are getting annual help at that level.

It is definitely a part of a dean's role these days, whether it is a Michigan State or a Kennesaw State, or maybe a little bit less so in a very small private college. I have been actively engaged and very pleased with what some of our department chairs have done in fundraising. I told them, "We are not looking for you to get a million dollars. If you get \$5,000 from somebody who wants to support, for example, our mock trial team on an annual basis, that is huge because the students are paying a lot out-of-pocket. Otherwise, it is coming out of the overall college budget. So if \$2,500 of that comes in from the outside, that's \$2,500 that I as a dean can invest in faculty professional development or additional support for students who get invited to participate in a joint research project with a faculty member.

TS: We have had three new schools created in our college during your tenure. The first one was 2015 with the School of Communication and Media. I guess, to some degree, the creation of that school was a result of consolidation, because Southern Polytechnic State University had a technical communication program. Can you talk about how that came about?

RD: Yes, the School of Communication and Media oddly enough was in the works before consolidation. Technical Communication and Interactive Design is still in a separate department housed on the Marietta campus. The School of Communication and Media was something that I was involved in discussions about from the year after I arrived here. The then chair of the Department [of Communication], Birgit Wassmuth, left [in May 2013 to be director of the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at Kansas State University]. Barbara Gainey came in as an interim right at the height of the discussion about what eventually became a school. A good piece of that had to do with the diversity of the programs, but also the size. By then, there were over 1,500 communication majors. There was increasingly the challenge of trying to figure out the umbrella under which the different programs would work the best. I will get ahead of your question a little bit, but the idea of schools probably, in my mind, was an early kind of focus for what I am going to at Plymouth State University, where disciplines are less important than the clusters of problem-solving around which they are organized. I just thought that the school concept would be a little more facilitative and supportive of cross-departmental and even cross-college kinds of collaboration. So the size, scope, and diversity of the programs in the Department of Communication were factors. And around the country, schools of communication or journalism are more professionally focused programs, and the school concept tends to work well there. It is also easier to do fundraising for a school than it is for a department or a program.

TS: Why is that?

RD: The naming of a school is traditionally one of those things that happens a lot more often than naming a department or a program. That definitely was part of the discussions in the case of all three. You are probably going to ask, but I will jump ahead and say that very

early on from when I arrived there was talk about creating a School of Conflict Management. We had the PhD program in International Conflict Management that reported directly to the dean. We had a master's in Conflict Management housed in the Political Science and International Affairs Department. Then we had the Center for Conflict Management that was quasi-independent, reporting directly to the dean's office. They were separate and in different places. So that was the second school in the sequence in 2017, but we had been operating as a school there for about a good half-year before that. There were some changes that made it easier to create the school by 2017, but that was something we had been working on because it seemed like they all needed to be under one conflict management roof.

TS: The School of Conflict Management, Peacebuilding and Development.

RD: Right, a classic compromise among faculty and others in terms of what an appropriate naming would be. It is probably not one that rolls right off your tongue. It doesn't have an acronym that is easy either, because it's SCMPD, which doesn't have a vowel, so you can't pronounce it. But it is really reflective of what the program is. The PhD program itself was designed to be both an academic and a practitioner, applied-oriented program, and that very much attracted me to it. When I reviewed the program in advance for the Board of Regents, I was very impressed by what it was planning to be and how it was planning to do that. Subsequently, in the discussions about creating the school, [we realized that] some of the people coming in to the PhD program, the center, and to an extent the master's program, were not just working on conflict management, but peacebuilding and development. Over the years—I am now in my third decade of working in the area of security and international security studies—development has become very much an integral part of how you deal with conflicts from wars to internal family feuds and business feuds and so on. But definitely, internationally, the development and the peacebuilding components are things that we work on.

TS: Yes, all the way back to the Marshall Plan.

RD: Absolutely, and probably before that too, but the Marshall Plan was very clearly an early step in that direction.

TS: Volker Franke told me several years ago that he thought that consolidation held up the creation of the school because people were too busy on other things. Can you speak to that?

RD: Yes, I think being too busy was a part of it. I think the depth and breadth of the challenges of consolidation certainly drew a lot of attention of senior administrators that would need to be involved in any decision about creating a new academic unit, even if it was made out of existing academic pieces. It was something that had to work its way up all the way up to the president. It didn't require Board of Regents approval, but probably adding that to the mix of a complex reorganization was just not a case of good timing. Maybe more so than just the time, it was trying to figure out from my level whether we

wanted to take this on when people were still asking questions about where this group of faculty were going to go in the new College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

TS: Why doesn't it require Board of Regents approval?

RD: It's just one of the interesting oddities about the University System of Georgia. I don't know what other universities around the country do, but under Board of Regents policy, it's an internal reorganization, as opposed to new programs or program eliminations, or significant program changes. Those all require Board of Regents approval. This one just simply requires informing the board of the decision. Typically, I am sure that presidents and provosts communicate with the system about what the intent is, but it is officially, policy-wise, considered an internal administrative reorganization and not something that the Board of Regents has a policy role in.

TS: That's interesting. I'm pretty sure back in 1983, when we went from divisions to schools and departments, the Board of Regents had to approve it.⁸

RD: That's entirely possible, and it could be because that was an institution-wide shift, as opposed to what they consider internal, like when one unit is changing its name. I am just guessing at that, because I wasn't here then, but the other would have been like a whole institution-wide reorganization, and that might fall into a different category.

TS: Well, the most recent creation of a new school was the School of Government and International Affairs. Could you talk about how that came about and why it came about?

RD: Lots of things going on there. Number one is that schools of government, public policy, public administration, and international affairs are not at all uncommon around the country. It is a broader kind of roof under which faculty can feel comfortable without [having to decide], is this on the international side or the domestic side; or where does public administration fit in, and so on? Again, we thought that that broader roof allows for more fluidity, both within the academic units, and from one academic unit out across and with other academic units in our college and in other colleges. I will say too that part of [the reasoning] was related to the fact that a number of the faculty in Political Science and International Affairs—especially in international affairs—were key faculty in the PhD program in international conflict management and the masters' program in conflict management. It was a way to organize that academic unit in a way that was a little more transparent when faculty shared their time across the schools. It became a nice kind of parallelism that someone worked in the School of Conflict Management, Peacebuilding and Development, and worked in the School of Government and International Affairs.

⁸ Editor's note: In the fall of 1982, President Betty L. Siegel sent to the chancellor a report entitled *Proposed Consolidation and Realignment of the Organizational Structure of Kennesaw College*. The Board of Regents approved the academic reorganization plan at its February 1983 meeting.

- TS: Right. It's a little bit of a shift, but I would like for you to talk about consolidation. You were here only about a year when the chancellor made the announcement [on November 1, 2013 at noon]. My first question is one I've asked everyone since then, so I pretty much know the answer, but when were you first told that the consolidation was going to occur?
- RD: To give you some idea of how this went, it was November 1, 2013, at 10:00 a.m. in the morning.
- TS: Okay. That's the answer I've heard from practically everybody other than Presidents Papp and [Lisa A.] Rossbacher.
- RD: The deans were summoned over to the president's office that morning.
- TS: The same thing was happening on the Marietta campus.
- RD: Correct, same time. We were also told that there would be an announcement later that day, but we couldn't tell anyone about it until the announcement came out.
- TS: Oh, really?
- RD: Yes.
- TS: The top administrators on the Southern Poly campus were rushing back to tell their departments chairs and others that reported to them.
- RD: Well, that doesn't surprise me. I think the leadership and the leadership styles at the two universities, soon to be the two campuses, were very different. Let me put it this way. It wasn't a total secret. I mean, there had been rumors before.
- TS: That's what I wanted to ask you too. What rumors did you hear ahead of time?
- RD: There were some. There were rumors before I came here. When I arrived, there had been four previous consolidations.⁹ I won't say there were really rumors, but it was said

⁹ Chancellor Hank Huckaby recommended the first four consolidations on January 5, 2012, and the Board of Regents voted to finalize the consolidations on January 8, 2013. The institutions involved were North Georgia College & State University and Gainesville State College into the University of North Georgia; Middle Georgia College and Macon State College into Middle Georgia State College, later elevated to Middle Georgia State University; Waycross College and South Georgia College into South Georgia State College; and Augusta State University and Georgia Health Sciences University into Georgia Regents University, later renamed Augusta University].

that there were discussions about possible future consolidations. I don't remember now if they were saying Kennesaw State and Southern Poly.

TS: Did that come up at all in your job interview?

RD: No, definitely not, because I remember several of us new to the ballgame, again Mark Anderson and I especially, saying, "I'm not sure if this had been part of the job interview that I would have signed on." Let me put it this way. It wasn't like complete amazement that it happened, but it started a thread of the conversation that continues to this day about the absolute absence of any involvement of the leadership of the two universities—the leadership at any level, including presidents, let alone deans. The complete absence of any pre-communication would be what I consider one of the lingering challenges, and what I would call a big problem, for the whole consolidation process. There was no time for people to get used to it as a concept before we were already off and running and making announcements about whom the new leadership would be.

Something the Board of Regents had learned from a prior consolidation was to announce right away that Dan would be the president [of the consolidated university]. Then at least a month later or maybe after the first of the year, they announced who the deans would be, because they announced the new structure fairly soon thereafter. We didn't know [immediately] whether we were continuing as deans of our colleges or whether they would go in a different direction.

TS: I just recently have interviewed [C. Richard] Rich Cole and [Thomas R.] Tom Currin [deans of the College of Architecture and Construction Management and the Southern Polytechnic College of Engineering and Engineering Technology, respectively. Dean Currin has a story of Dan thinking that [Provost] Ken Harmon had told Tom that he would still be dean, and Ken thinking that Dan had told him, and for several months nobody had told him. He finally asked for a meeting with Dan and asked, "Am I part of the new university?"

RD: That's interesting. I've talked with Tom quite frequently during and after consolidation, and I may have forgotten it. I did not know that. I think I got a phone call before it was in the school newspapers, or wherever they put out the announcement.

TS: That you were still going to be the dean?

RD: Yes.

TS: Did you think there was ever much of a chance that you wouldn't be?

RD: You always think there is a chance.

TS: Of course, Southern Poly had a School of Arts and Sciences.

RD: The social sciences and international affairs were in one Department of Social and International Studies. The history and political science people and so on were in that unit. Then they had a department that was an odd collection of disciplines called English, Technical Communication, and Media Arts. That was the hardest one [to consolidate into the New KSU]. There were English faculty members teaching in areas like interactive design. Some of the technical communication faculty had eventually to go into the English Department. Some of them weren't altogether very happy with that. There were communication people that were clearly in the Communication Department, but some were also teaching and working in spaces that weren't traditionally communication. For our college, the consolidation of the English, the communication, and the technical writing turned out to be the most challenging task. The combination of people, their preferences, and likes and dislikes, and what their actual degrees were [was challenging] in sorting that all out for SACS [the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools] eventually to bless the consolidation structure. Mark Anderson and I, the Colleges of Science and Mathematics and Humanities and Social Sciences, we say to this day, were ground zero in consolidation. We were the colleges that were most affected. We had the most faculty, the most students, and the most two-campus presence of any of the academic units in consolidation.

TS: Southern Poly had to teach the general education courses.

RD: Totally.

TS: And the Kennesaw campus didn't have any engineering programs, so there wasn't any overlap there.

RD: No. There was a little with business, but not much. There was none with education, because they didn't have a school of education. Similarly, the College of the Arts—I think I had three to five arts faculty in this one department that had a bit of everything going on in it. I remember discussions with several other colleges and with our departments about who was going to go where.

TS: I know that for faculty down there, their first concern was, do we still have a job? Secondly, what are the standards for promotion and tenure? Do we have to do something different than we did before?

RD: That was beyond the initial, just emotional concerns about consolidation. The questions of workload, promotion and tenure, and a number of things that impacted an individual faculty member's career and family life were very, very challenging for those of us that had fairly significant numbers of faculty making the transition. On this end, it often gets lost in the shuffle, but the Kennesaw campus faculty members were not unanimously just, "Oh, this is fine. We don't have a dog in the fight." No, there were some that were very angry about consolidation and did not lose any time in expressing that whenever they could.

TS: As if you could do anything about it?

RD: Correct. I started many a meeting when I was initially co-chairing [an Operational Working Group (OWG)]. Then the co-chair was the chair of this other department, and he went to Appalachian State University that summer.

TS: Oh yes, Mark Nunes [chair of the Department of English, Technical Communication, and Media Arts].

RD: Yes.

TS: I did an interview with him just before he left.

RD: Oh, good, good. Especially after he left, I would start many of our operational working group meetings and, subsequently, other meetings with department faculty with the thought, “Look, none of us in this room had any say or vote in consolidation, so we need to focus on going forward. There is no sense in wasting time on a decision, whether we agree with it or not. We didn’t have anything to do with it.” That is back to my bigger point. I don’t think the faculty and staff and students should have had a vote, but I think it would have been wise to have a little more time for it to sink in. That’s my one big point about consolidation. I’ve spoken about this nationally.

My second big point is that anyone who talks about university consolidation as though it is similar to a business consolidation or an acquisition, or a hostile takeover—we heard that language too—or a merger, is really missing several important, fundamental differences. The key point in our consolidation, and it was not seen early enough by senior leadership, even though some of us were talking about it a lot, was organizational culture. Some of it was processes and policies, but some of it was just the attachment people have to an organization, and why and how they are attached to it. Presidents and provosts were working up here at the 10,000-meter level. We were leading operational working groups at the tactical level. In between were deans often operating on their own and trying to make things up as we went, because nobody was really paying any attention. The culture challenge was the biggest one that was not seen and anticipated enough. That then played into the problems that would emerge in trying to force the tactical up to the operational in the face of pockets of real resistance.

TS: I would think, given your field of strategic decision-making, you could have given them a lot of advice.

RD: Well, it certainly helped me a lot, doing what I did, but the thing you also learn in terms of strategy and leadership and organization is you learn that strategy would be very easy if it weren’t for people [laughs]. You can look historically at great military battles, when everybody knew what the plan was, but somebody decided that he had a better idea in the heat of battle or somewhere along the way. Here, I think, communication from presidents, from provosts, from the Board of Regents, and so on could have been more reflective of understanding people and the organizational, cultural challenges that were being thrown out there. Downtown was talking over and over and over again about how easy this stuff was because it was just like a business consolidation. Well, if you look at

mergers and acquisitions or even hostile takeovers, what happens most of the time is that after a very short period of time, if there is one unit that doesn't fit with the new organizational model, it's gone. You fire everybody and close it down. You sell it off. You can't sell off a History and Philosophy Department. You can't sell off the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, although some people might want to [laughs]. It was just that 10,000-meter view of things that didn't realize how difficult it was going to be on the ground.

TS: I still hear on the Marietta campus that it was not a consolidation; it was an absorption.

RD: Yes, absorption or hostile takeover. That is reflective of feelings. I would say that the number one lesson I knew before, but relearned big time through that process, was that the most senior leadership needed to be speaking the language or languages of the people who were most directly affected by it. That was not consistently and effectively done. During that time, promises were made without sufficient thought behind them. One example was equity issues because faculty salaries on the Southern Poly campus were noticeably lower than on the Kennesaw campus, and staff salaries on the Marietta campus were noticeably higher than staff salaries on the Kennesaw campus. We were told that equalizing salaries would not come at the expense of merit salary increases for the Kennesaw State University faculty. That turned out not to be the case. We went through another full year of no merit increases while the messaging was about how we had to put [redirected funds] into signage and so on. That was not a powerful message.

TS: Well, of course, this was a time when the country was recovering from a recession, where there weren't any salary increases anyway.

RD: Yes, we had just come through several years [of recession and no salary increases] when I arrived, and we had one more year of no salary increases. Then we wound up with this big equity problem. The equity problem then led to two years where we got a total of around \$40,000 for this college for equity.

TS: Only \$40,000?

RD: Only about \$40,000, and we had over \$2 million of obvious equity problems, not even getting into gender, which was also a problem and continues to this day. The next year, we got around \$75,000, and we were falling further behind. Faculty were seeing that and saying, "Where is all this money that is supposed to come from consolidation that would mean we wouldn't be paying off our backs for this?" It became apparent over time that the big savings and reallocation of funds just were not going to happen. It is an expensive proposition to do any kind of a consolidation, and I don't think it was confronted effectively up front. I'm not sure why, other than I do excuse our leadership in the sense that a lot of this was so top-down driven from a Board of Regents that itself was, if I could coin a phrase, decisively disengaged from the actual implementation of the consolidation.

- TS: Wow! Where are we now? Do you think that consolidation on the whole has worked well? Do you think that we are still recovering from the problems that you've cited?
- RD: I think we are still recovering from the problems. I think particularly the ones I mentioned in terms of salaries across the board. I think, though, the equity piece is the one that has suffered the most because we created more inequity and not less. We didn't get more resources to allocate toward equity. I think there are still some process issues that we're struggling with. I think there are still pockets of attitudinal problems, bad attitudes, or people who aren't ever going to get over it, and some of whom like to get other people angry along with them. On the whole, I would say that it has gone pretty well. At least in terms of overall academics, I don't think our academic mission has suffered at all significantly. But, operationally, we are still trying to figure out things like [how to run] buses going back and forth [between the two campuses]. Quite frankly, a number of those things were compounded by the leadership situation that we've been in for over two years now.
- TS: Well, the last time I interviewed Dan Papp, he said we were redirecting \$5 million a year, and after we got through all the expenses for new signage, he said that much of the redirected funds were going into new faculty positions and more advisors. Have you seen any of that in this college?
- RD: Maybe Dan's last year was the first year that we had significantly new positions. I know we had no new faculty positions for at least three of the six years that I've been here. We haven't seen what new faculty positions are yet this year. We did get significant increases in the professional advisors last year, and in new faculty lines. The first year we got new faculty lines was maybe five or six. We needed fifty or sixty easily. Dan is probably right in one sense, but a pure million dollars doesn't even get you ten new faculty lines.
- TS: Right.
- RD: You can be talking \$5 million, but it's not a lot. I think last year when I ran some numbers for our college—we ran them on our own because they weren't running anything at the university level—on equity alone we needed over \$2 million [to resolve] equity [problems]. That could have easily projected across the campus to something like \$10 million. There were not \$5 million of additional monies coming to this campus each year. No way. No way. At least, if it were coming here, it was not going toward new faculty lines, because it literally was two years after consolidation before we saw what would be considered a significant number of new faculty lines.
- TS: It makes you wonder whether all the effort was worth it.
- RD: It is a great question to ask, but the problem is that we didn't have a vote on whether to make that effort. I do think there was a rush, and there still is a bit of a rush, to see consolidation as an answer to funding challenges across a university system that had [thirty-five colleges and universities and now has twenty-six]. If there have been

significant savings or significant redirected funds from any of the consolidations, I would be very surprised. It is just easy to sell if you are an elected official, to say that consolidation is a money-saving exercise.

TS: I know the first four saved very little, and the fifth one [KSU] was supposed to do better.

RD: Let me put it this way. I have yet to see a full accounting of that consolidation.

TS: That's a good way to put it. You have already alluded to the many changes in leadership. That is coming up in a lot of the interviews that I have been doing, particularly with folks on the Marietta campus where they have had six presidents in four years, with the seventh coming in July. Lisa Rossbacher left in June 2014, so if we count from there, Ron Koger replaced her as interim president. Then after consolidation became official in January 2015, the Marietta campus was under Dan, who left in 2016 to be replaced by interim president Houston [D.] Davis, then President [Samuel S.] Sam Olens, and in February 2018 interim president [W.] Ken Harmon. Pamela Whitten will be the seventh.

RD: I think the Kennesaw campus has only had five [laughs].

TS: Yes, only five, but that's not for four years, but for two. What I hear other deans saying is that it is hard to have consistent direction when just as soon as you've explained what you are doing to one president, somebody else has taken his or her place. You are nodding your head, so ...

RD: Yes, definitely, and I think that the frustration there has been more that you spend a lot of your time and energy trying to explain things all over again, after you have explained them on multiple instances. Or, in some cases, the people in those positions were just simply resistant to hearing contradictory or contrary information. That has been very, very difficult. It is also very difficult to communicate with our faculty and staff because we don't control all the answers to those questions. I get asked all the time about equity, and I have to keep coming back to, "Well, we have submitted our analysis. We have told them what we need. Here is what they are giving us." We came up with our system for allocating those small sums of money, and then just this last year, they came up with another formula for doing it. The formula that our new Office of Institutional Effectiveness came up with under the guidance of then President Olens, I believe, essentially was going to make equity worse in our college. They were going to do percentages to the highest paid faculty, and that just widened the gap. It addressed a little bit of compression, but the wider problem was that we had inversion occurring at the assistant to associate levels. That was really hard.

I will say, Tom, and I've said this before to others: two of our three new schools were created in the transitional leadership period. We have increased grant funding. We have got some new degree programs; Asian Studies, for example, is one. Very innovative, creative things are going on across departments and across colleges. We have some wonderful partnerships that have been developed with the Coles College of Business, and not just traditional humanities and social sciences relationships. We've been able to do

some very exciting things. Maybe some of that is because I don't have to go running to ask for permission because I don't even know whom to ask [laughs]. It is not like we have been stifled, but I would agree with my colleagues who say that we have been slowed down, or on certain things it just takes so long to get an answer, if you get one at all. There were a lot of confusing statements about the million dollars that was going to equity, and then it wasn't a million dollars. Those are things that just don't need to happen at all in a large complex organization. Despite our fondness for saying we are academics, and we are different, we still have some of those same organizational challenges. Poor or ineffective or stagnated decision-making and leadership at the top is always going to hurt.

TS: We talked briefly after we finished the interview last time about the incredible turnover in deans that is taking place this year. A number of deans have retired or are going on to other jobs or what have you. Could you talk about that? Is it coincidence? Or is the turnover related somehow to the lack of leadership at the top?

RD: The point I was making before, and I would make again, is that some of our faculty and staff see one set of deans moving on and lump them all together. Three of the deans are retiring. I think all three of those deans were at the stages in their careers and lives that [they were ready for] retirement. It is possible that Tom Currin may have been a little more frustrated with post-consolidation and the leadership problems that he was facing. You interviewed him, so you may know.

TS: Well, he was frustrated with the administration before consolidation.

RD: Yes. That is why I hesitate to say that [his frustrations influenced his decision].

TS: He is 67 or 68.

RD: Yes, that is my age, but I am ready for ...

TS: Ready for another challenge?

RD: I was ready to stay here because it would be a challenge, but a great one. So I'm not running away. The opportunity that I have is going to be a huge challenge, and I may get shot at even more than I got shot at when I first came here. I have spent a lot of time and invested a lot of personal capital in getting to know people here. I think I'm trusted a lot more than I was when I first arrived. I'm going to have to start that all over again. So I'm not taking some cushy pre-retirement position.

TS: But you are not leaving because of the things happening here?

RD: I am not leaving because of what is going on here. I would like everybody to know that. I think most people do, if they stop to talk with me about it, or to look at where I'm going and what I'm going to be doing. Some will think that I'm going because I have always wanted to be a provost, and now I get to be a provost. Wrong! I didn't want to be a dean

when I came here. It just seemed like that was the next calling along the way, and it was because of what was going on here. For Barbara [S.] Calhoun [dean of the College of Continuing and Professional Education] and Arlinda [J.] Eaton [dean of the Bagwell College of Education], it was a combination of what they wanted to do and I don't know if others felt it was time for a change, but certainly those three individuals made decisions based on [being ready for] retirement. Whether in any of those cases there was some frustration with what is going on here, I mean, we are all frustrated. But I don't think that is a significant factor [in their decision to retire].

Patty [Patricia S. Poulter, dean of the College of the Arts] is going to the University of Central Arkansas [as provost] where Houston Davis [is president]. I'm not sure entirely whether Patty had been looking elsewhere, and this was the one that happened to land. I know there were some personal reasons and draws of the institution and the area for Patty. So I don't get a sense that Patty was fleeing here. The other piece is that Patty might be more in a career path than I am. I think I am significantly older than her. But, you know, five or six years for a dean is not atypical. If they are career-oriented, moving on in five or six years [is normal]. The other thing is if you've been a dean for five or six years, other people are going to start asking you about positions that come open. I don't recall a number of discussions where other deans were saying, "Okay, I'm done. I'm getting out of here. I've just had it." I think there may be one or two other deans that might leave at some point, but those will also be motivated in part by whether it is a logical right time and a career path to move on. I would urge people to step back and see that some of these things were going to happen with or without the leadership challenges that we've been through.

TS: So what do you think went wrong for Dan Papp in 2016?

RD: Oh, I'd rather not.

TS: Let me phrase it this way. If there had been an accountability problem of nobody minding the store during the Betty Siegel era, I wouldn't have been surprised because she spent so much time off campus, as an invited speaker to groups across the country and internationally, exercising leadership roles in a variety of organizations, and so on. It was a shock to me with Dan Papp because I thought he was a superb administrator. Let me ask it this way. At the dean's level, did any of you see it coming?

RD: I'm going to give you my ground truth on what was going on. I think I shared with you that I have known Dan since about 1975 or 1976, when we first met because of our mutual interest in security studies. I was thrilled to come here with Dan as president. What was going on at Kennesaw State? I'll give you a small piece first, and then I'll get to the bigger piece of why do I think Dan wound up where he did in 2015-2016. When I arrived here, with a fair amount of experience in business and different academic organizations, it didn't take me very long to see that the organizational structure was the same organizational structure that existed when you all were about seven or eight thousand and just evolving into a university.

This is not in any way, shape, or form necessarily Dan's fault. But I arrived in the middle of SACS' five-year retrospective study. I asked if I could meet with institutional research. There was no institutional research office. I said, "We have 23,000 or 24,000 students, and you don't have institutional research? Well, how is this study getting done?" Well, individual faculty members were asked to do a piece or a part of the study. There were two people [doing institutional research], and it wasn't even a real office. It didn't have a sign on the door. It was up at the top of Kennesaw Hall, and it was one person who was a faculty member assigned, I think, from maybe the College of Education and one administrative person. The whole thing was farmed out to the colleges, and the colleges to the departments, and the departments to program directors.

It was one of my early exposures to the fact that [the organizational infrastructure] just didn't seem right for a university this large. I had a lot of interaction early on with Randy [C.] Hinds [Vice President for Operations, Chief Information Officer, and Chief Business Officer]. I really liked Randy. Randy was very good to our college and helped us with a lot of things. But, again, from my structure background, I looked at all his responsibilities: CIO [Chief Information Officer], COO [Chief Operations Officer] and CFO [Chief Finance Officer].

TS: Too many responsibilities?

RD: The operations line that he oversaw ran all the way from the top university budget and UITs [University Information Technology Services], all the way down to public safety and building maintenance and who knows what? It was just *huge!* Human resources was under him. That is just too much. There was no separate CFO. I kept saying, "You need to wipe all this out and do a new organizational chart." But they never did, and I get it. Randy was one of Dan's most trusted problem-solvers. He could solve problems, and when Dan needed them solved, he would move them under Randy.

Over time, I think it was impossible for Randy to keep a really good eye on all of those things. Dan couldn't do it. Also, he had a few people that he trusted too much, and some of those people were not really the right people in the places they were in. There were some things that were unraveling. Now, come fast forward. Was there this rampant, wild west, uncontrolled spending, and this, that, and the other thing? There were some creative spending revenue-generating things going on, but those went back to his predecessor. Betty was doing a lot of those things, building buildings off temporary funds, because they didn't want to go down to the board and ask. They said they would raise the money privately, and the private money didn't show up. There was that going on. But there was the food services guy, and one guy in [auxiliary services]. There were clearly some problems. But I think what happened to Dan totally emanated from the Office of the Governor, not even from the chancellor.

TS: Really?

RD: Yes, that is my opinion. Remember that I used to teach and analyze this stuff in North Carolina, and there I would have known who was speaking the truth. Here I am relying

on indirect information, but the scuttlebutt that I heard on the street was that Sam Olens was seriously considering a run for governor, and while he probably could never be elected governor, he could screw up the primary by drawing a large part of the vote off in the primary. The governor was trying to get those various ducks lined up. I think he wanted to get [Christopher M. "Chris"] Carr in there, so he could run as an incumbent in the next election for the AG [Attorney General] position. In any case, I think where I got even more validation of this [theory] was when some of the trustees [of the Board of Regents] began to speak out how they never agreed with the appointment of Olens. They didn't disagree with Sam; they disagreed with the process by which he was appointed. I think a couple of them didn't say it exactly this way, but were pretty much told to "keep quiet."

TS: I was going to ask, why didn't they speak up at the time?

RD: I think some of them tried. That's the backstory I heard in what came out in the churning around Sam's sudden departure [from the presidency of KSU after only fifteen and a half months]. That all made more sense to me then, because Sam himself had said he had asked to go through some sort of a search process. I don't think the chancellor did that all on his own.

TS: That's interesting.

RD: As I said, I think the most important factor is that while there were some issues that Dan had, I don't think any of them added up to the need to do what was done to him, unless you see this bigger picture of a governor wanting to move these pieces around and realizing that getting Dan out of the way would then open up this opportunity for him to move some other pieces and players around. It's also important to note that a number of people thought Dan intended to retire sometime in the near term, possibly as early as the end of the 2016-17 academic year.

TS: Sounds pretty sinister, doesn't it?

RD: Well, it does, but it's not the first time it has happened. Houston Davis came here fully believing that he was going to be at least a candidate for a search for the permanent presidency.

TS: Oh!

RD: Oh, yes. He told me that. He and I didn't talk a whole lot while he was here, but late in the day when he was here and getting ready to leave, he said he fully expected that he was going to have an opportunity to compete for the presidency.

TS: Yes, he would have been a good one.

RD: I think so. He never really had a chance here. But what we need in a president is decisiveness. I'm told that [Pamela] Whitten gives every indication that she can be that.

You don't want decisiveness without thoughtfulness, but in any case, I don't think Sam even saw that he was also [a pawn]. Dan was a pawn in this game. Whoever you think the puppet master is, Dan was a pawn, Houston was a pawn, and Sam was a pawn. Sam came in thinking that the BOR [Board of Regents] was going to have his back. He would get all of this support. He didn't realize that once he was out of the AG's office, he was just another man on the street, and he was just another "damn president." When he couldn't quite get his brain and really more his sensory stuff around the whole academic mission, there was never, I don't think, a hesitation on the part of the chancellor and company to get rid of him. They didn't make any promises. I think deep down, Sam is very hurt by that. I think he realized that he did not have any of the political cover that he fully expected to have because of his background and so on.

TS: He certainly didn't receive any cover, did he?

RD: No, no. [The unraveling of] political cover, such as it was, was certainly accelerated with the cheerleader crisis. With the controversial statements that Earl [Ehrhart] made, they had to find somebody else to blame.¹⁰

TS: Well, I appreciate you telling me that. It sounds like it could make a TV drama, doesn't it?

RD: Another funny story for you, maybe, I think I may have said that I had seven or eight auditions for *House of Cards*, and a few auditions for *Turn*, which is all about spies. I could do some on camera auditions. I didn't have time to make long-term theater commitments. The one that I did last summer with my wife, *Beauty and the Beast*, was just because it was a chance to get on stage with my wife again. In those auditions for *House of Cards*, I was having a great time because it was the year before last, and I kept coming back and telling colleagues, "I've got a great idea for a new show, *House of Cards: The Academy*." It got so bad last year that I said, "We wouldn't even need script writers. We're writing it ourselves [laughs]. You wouldn't have to make this stuff up. The only thing we're missing is a few more bodies, you know? [more laughs]"

TS: Well, hopefully we won't have any of those.

¹⁰ Earl Ehrhart represented parts of Cobb County in the Georgia House of Representatives for almost thirty years prior to his retirement in 2018. In addition to serving on the powerful House Rules Committee, he chaired the Appropriations Subcommittee for Higher Education. According to a story in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Rep. Earl Ehrhart and Cobb County Sheriff Neil Warren denounced as un-American the actions of several KSU cheerleaders in kneeling during the national anthem prior to a 2017 KSU home football game. In a text-message exchange, the two elected officials congratulated each other for forcing President Olens to keep the cheerleaders out of sight of spectators at future games until after the playing of the national anthem. Ehrhart bragged, "He had to be dragged there but with you and I pushing he had no choice." Olens denied that the change in cheerleader policy had anything to do with the protest or political pressure (Meris Lutz, "Cobb Sheriff, Lawmaker Pushed to Keep KSU Cheerleaders Off Field," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 17, 2017).

RD: All that said, with all those challenges and some of the things that I think were not very nice to some people, and were certainly not very well thought out by the people whom I think made the decisions, or at least were behind carrying out a lot of those decisions—they were not good, either the decisions in the first place, or people that had a chance to stand up and say, “No, we are not going to do this.” But despite all of that, this is still an incredibly great place. I do have every confidence that the dust will settle and things will move into the past. Absent the next unforeseen budget crisis and so on, I’m quite hopeful that Kennesaw State will maybe not get back to where it was—that might not be a very good idea anyway—but will find its new normal. I think it is going to find it around some of the really innovative things that we continue to do that aren’t always necessarily entrepreneurial, because that implies something in the revenue-generating or moneymaking side, but will be innovative in ways that we will take these skillsets that students need to have and help students build them for not just success while they are here, but success with what we were talking about a little while ago: the ability to adapt and change and take those skills and apply them in different problem-solving areas. I’m much more optimistic about a Kennesaw State doing that than even some of our sister and well-respected and highly renowned institutions of higher education.

TS: Well, if I write an update to the history of Kennesaw State, I think you have changed my outlook on a number of things that will influence the ways I have to research things. Let me just ask you, as we kind of wind up today, what are you proudest of in your six years at KSU?

RD: [Pause]. It’s really hard to disaggregate it, Tom. I mean, there are several things I’m not very proud of. But I think just where we have come with and within this college. I could point to some of the things I was citing before: increases in scholarships and innovative new programming and things like that. But I think more than anything else, with the exception of certain issues around equity, salary, and small pockets of lingering consolidation problems, the interaction among our faculty in this college is so much more positive, collegial, and collaborative. When I arrived, there was a parade of people to my office about who was saying what about whom, and a lot of chatter behind people’s backs. I would get into my office, and I know there was a lot of chatter about me behind my back. A lot of rumors were circulating about this, that, and other things. There was just a lot of energy being sucked away from what we should have been focused on, which is our students, and there was not enough [focus] on the students and the student experience.

We still have a ways to go, I think, in that some faculty still focus too much on what is convenient for them and what is not really a learning experience for the students. Some of the course syllabi had what I call the nuclear clause, where you do “A” work through the whole semester, and the last assignment in the course is to turn a paper in by 5:00 o’clock, one hard copy and one electronic, and if it is not in by 5:00 o’clock, you fail the course. I’m sitting there going, if you do the math, and even if it is 20 percent of your assignment, if 80 percent of your assignment were “A’s,” why in the world would you fail the whole course because your last assignment was in late? Have something that deducts a certain percentage if it’s this late, that late, and so on. If it’s a zero, it’s a zero.

But give them credit for all the work they do up until that point. I know it resides somewhere back in history when perhaps somebody was waiting around too long at the end of the semester and didn't get a student's completed paper on time, so now they decide to put the "hammer down." Here we are years later, and some of that hasn't changed.

Yet generally speaking, a lot of the things that are focused on student experience and professionalism within and across the college are what I'm really proud of. I am [proud of] the schools [we have created]. We started new things. We brought in additional support for students and for faculty. The new faculty hires are just amazing. We are obviously doing some things that are right enough to attract good, young people. I would like to think that more people than not will look back [positively] on my six years here, and at the three associate deans that are working in here now, and all of the staff. It took us a couple of years before we got Marshal [Chaifetz, grants and contracts coordinator] in to help with grants and things like that. I'm very proud that at least I had some role to play in trying to help get the people in here. I hope that more people than not in the college and across the university will look back and be able to say that, "Whatever else he did, it seems like it is a better place with a better mood than when he landed here."

TS: Well, you talked in the first interview about some of the exciting things that are going on at Plymouth State that attracted you there. How did the job come about? Did they ask you to apply? Were you looking around?

RD: I was not looking around. I alluded to it earlier. You get to that point, probably about three years into a dean's position at a fairly large university, and you get asked a lot. I had agreed to be considered for a couple of positions. Colorado College, my alma mater, created a provost position this year. Colorado College had never had a provost. They had a dean of students and a dean of academics, but never a provost. I was nominated for that, and I did submit for that. I didn't make it very far. I don't think they particularly wanted an alumnus, but that is neither here nor there. Plymouth State was one I was nominated for. I had heard about it, but paid no attention to it. There was an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* about what they were doing, and I glanced at it, but I didn't read it very carefully. Then I got a call that I had been nominated and was I interested in applying. They didn't have a formal search firm working with them, but I recognized the name of a woman who runs a small search firm from that area and was helping them to make sure that they got a decent pool for this position. She had been the president of Gettysburg College when my oldest son graduated from there. Anyway, I had a conversation with her. I had heard about these clusters that they were doing, but she was the first one to talk to me a little bit more about what was going on at Plymouth State and got me to take a closer look. She explained that they were not just doing these clusters, but they were reorganizing the entire university around this new model. I think we talked about that earlier.

TS: Yes.

RD: The thing that really convinced me to apply was that I could see in the cluster idea things that we are working on here. I had been in a conversation at a national conference, the Council on Colleges of Arts and Sciences, just last October. We got into a discussion with some people about [clusters]. That is maybe where my nomination came from. To this day, I don't know who nominated me, but it was when I learned that they were going all in on this. They were really going to reorganize around it. The strategy, organization, leadership piece interested me, and so I applied. I still didn't know that I would [accept] it, if it were offered. Going back to what I have said about being here, it was a tough decision. That was the biggest difference. I had interviewed and been a finalist for a couple of other positions. I am not sure, had those been offered, whether I would have taken them or not. This one was that much different. Another thing that played a role—people who know me and Carolyn know we ski every winter when we're healthy enough. In winter, we go out to Colorado or Nevada. We're also canoers. We're hikers. We're fly fishers. All of that is right in the backyard there. So there was something about saying, "This could be the best last job for me." I could spend a few more years slogging away at things here, and I would be happy to do that because there are still some things to work through, and I think I could help with them. But this is an opportunity where I think I could go somewhere and make a difference and make a contribution to higher education along the way.

TS: Well, that sounds like a good way to end the interview.

RD: Well, thank you.

TS: Thank you.

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