

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS B. ROPER, JR.

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Location: CIE/CETL House at Kennesaw State University

TS: Tom, why don't you just begin by telling us a little bit about when and where you were born?

TR: I was born in Atlanta, so I'm a native—Emory University Hospital, as a matter of fact.

DY: One of the few natives left.

TR: One of the few; we're hard to come by. I'm a fifth-generation Georgian on my mother's side and third generation on my father's side, so long Georgia roots.

TS: Sounds like it.

DY: Were they Atlantans also?

TR: My father was born in Augusta. His dad passed away when he was three years old, and he moved to Atlanta, so he considers himself a native. My mom was born in Statham, Georgia, a small town between Winder and Athens. They then moved to Monroe and then into Athens. She actually went to a teacher's college in Athens and then graduate school.

TS: Oh, before women could get into University of Georgia?

TR: Yes. And then she actually got in the graduate program.

TS: Mary Swain [a former professor at Kennesaw] did that too.

DY: Now, that's not the [Georgia] Normal School, is it? Is that what they call it, Normal School?

TR: What it became is the Navy Supply [Corps] School. It was out on Prince Avenue in Athens, but it was a teachers college for women only. Then the Navy bought it, and I guess it's one of the bases that are being closed.

DY: Yes, I heard it was.

TR: So I'm not sure what will happen to it now, but she did get into the University of Georgia for graduate purposes, but she couldn't for the undergraduate.

TS: Mary Swain told a student who did an interview with her years ago that she would hide under her bed on Sunday morning to keep from having to march to church together with all the other girls. [laughter]

DY: Can't blame her for that!

TR: Since you brought it up, can I tell you something about them? My grandparents owned a boarding house in Athens.

TS: Grandparents on your mother's side?

TR: On my mother's side. My father went to Georgia Tech. He grew up here, and that was really his only alternative from a monetary standpoint since my grandmother was raising him by herself. When he graduated from Tech, he had a job with a department of the federal government which paid double what corporations paid in those days. So he was sent to Athens and moved into the boarding house and met my mom.

DY: Where was the boarding house?

TR: In downtown Athens.

DY: Do you know where?

TR: I don't know exactly what street it was on, but they also owned a bowling alley.

TS: Would this be back in the 1930s that we're talking about?

TR: Yes. He graduated from Tech in '35.

TS: So in the midst of the Depression, probably the best job was with the government.

TR: Exactly. So they met. The interesting part, because we were talking about the teachers . . . my mom had taken a teaching job outside of Athens in a small school that was first grade all the way through high school. My parents secretly married—which I never found out about until I was forty-something years old. They never told me, but they secretly married because she couldn't teach as a married woman in the school system. She not only had to go to a teacher's college but at the time was not allowed to get a job if she was married. I'm not sure what it would have been like in the city schools, but in the school she taught in, a little rural school, she wasn't allowed to.

So they snuck off and married. About a year and a half later, they had a formal wedding. And their whole life, to me, that was their anniversary. I never understood why they never took it very seriously because they were very, very close their whole lives—very loving couple. But [they] never paid much attention to their wedding anniversary. Right before their fiftieth, my mother finally actually told my wife; she was embarrassed to tell me. Isn't that funny?

DY: That's a sweet story.

TR: Yes, it is.

TS: So they celebrated the real event?

TR: Right, which was basically on January 1. They had run off with her brother and his wife-to-be as their witnesses, but none of them had ever told us the story until many years later. Everybody and the neighbors and all their friends thought it was that June date when they actually had the wedding. Yes, they never got into it; it always was a mystery to everyone.

TS: Well, you're Thomas B. Roper, Jr. so your father must be Thomas B. Roper, Sr.

TR: That's correct. In actuality, he was a junior when his dad died. He didn't want to be a junior, so he dropped it and put it on me! [laughter]

TS: So you're really the third then.

TR: Right, I should have been, but since he dropped it . . .

TS: What's your mother's name?

TR: She was Sarah Frances Henry.

TS: And you said that she continued to teach even after they let the world know that they were married?

TR: She did for awhile. Shortly after I was born, which was in '43, she quit teaching on a full-time basis but did supply teaching at the grammar school level. As a matter of fact, as I became a little older, like four or so, I used to go with her. So I got to sit in the back of the classroom and listen.

DY: Back before there was pre-K?

TR: There was no pre-K; there wasn't even kindergarten. I didn't go to kindergarten really so I didn't start till first grade. So at four or so, I was in the back of the room for first grade.

TS: Your father had an engineering degree; what kind of engineering degree did he have?

TR: He actually didn't, Tom. When he went to Tech, he started in the commerce school they had at the time. Two years into his program, they did away with it, and I guess that could have been the forerunner of what became Georgia State. Tech moved the commerce to maybe the early Georgia State, I'm not entirely sure, but out of Tech. My dad had two years in and didn't want to leave Tech, but he had to change to science and ended up getting a degree in the sciences. So for

- the last two years, which are supposed to be your fun times in your major, he was taking labs day after day and multiple science courses.
- TS: Physics, mainly?
- TR: Everything. Chemistry and some major and minor courses, too, but it was kind of a science degree at the time. I guess they didn't specialize in just chemistry or biology or whatever. But he was in ROTC and received a commission, and he wanted to stay in that program. He didn't want to make the change out of the Institute.
- TS: So what did he do for the government?
- TR: Well, he was also in the service; he was in World War II. For the government he ended up ultimately being a comptroller. He used part of that business background for the Atlanta Army [General] Depot at Ft. Gillem, which is also one of the bases that, I guess, are being hit right now. He stayed in the military in the reserves for a number of years. He was a full colonel and commanding officer of a transportation unit in the reserves. He did that during the same time he was working for the feds, so the U.S. government was stamped on his back.
- TS: Did you go to public schools?
- TR: I did. I grew up in Cascade Heights, southwest Atlanta—West End area. I went to Cascade Elementary and then Southwest High School. There was no middle school or junior high at that time, so one through seven and then eight through twelve in high school.
- DY: Yes, we didn't used to have middle schools.
- TR: But what's interesting is my father did. My father went to Brown, which is still a high school, but it was a junior high back when he was in school. That would have been in the '20s, because he finished Tech in '35.
- TS: So he went to Brown?
- TR: That was the junior high. He went to Tech High, you know, Tech High and Boy's High were the only two high schools basically [for white males] in Atlanta. They were in the same building, which became Grady High School.
- TS: Which was an excellent school.
- TR: Yes, it was a great school. He was raised by his mom who moved in with her sister, husband, and two sons. So they grew up as if they were brothers, but in reality they were first cousins. Two of them ended up at Tech High and one at Boy's High for some reason.
- DY: You know who else went to Boy's High? Tom [M. Thomson] Salter.

TR: Did you know that Tom was my eighth grade art teacher in Southwest High School? We've known each other all our lives. He lives right across the street from Jerry [D.] Sawyer. You know Jerry?

DY: Of course.

TR: They live directly across the street from each other. But, yes, Tom taught in the public school system for a long, long time before he came here.

DY: Wasn't the public system lucky?

TR: Yes, he's a wonderful guy.

TS: When I ran on the track team at the University of Tennessee, we had a quarter-miler that was from Southwest High School. I think he was a couple of years younger, maybe one year younger than I was.

TR: So I might know him. Do you remember his name?

TS: [David Selmer]. He was fantastic in high school. He never really reached his potential in college, but he ran forty-eight in the quarter-mile in high school. He was very military in appearance, I remember; real short hair. Of course, we all had short hair back then!

TR: We did, didn't we? In certain years, it was actually the flat top.

TS: Yes. That's right. I didn't know I had any curls in my hair until I was well into my twenties.

DY: It didn't grow out enough for you to see?

TS: No, it never grew out enough to see. They just used those clippers; they didn't even use scissors.

DY: What we call a buzz cut; that's what my brother always had, I remember.

TR: Now, I'm just looking for it! It's not working!

DY: Did you see your picture last night? We had the celebration for Betty [L.] Siegel—the Humanities and Social Science College did—and they had a PowerPoint with pictures from, I guess, the old yearbooks.

TS: Yes, they were.

DY: Did you see yours?

TS: Unfortunately.

DY: Everybody had huge heads of hair.

TS: Personally, I think we all look better now than we did then.

DY: Oh, I do, too.

TR: Oh, yes. You're talking about earlier pictures from here?

TS: Yes.

TR: My hair was down to about here, and it was blonde.

DY: Those were good old days.

TR: Yes, they were.

TS: You went to Georgia Tech [and studied] industrial management.

TR: I did.

TS: So you were kind of following in your father's shoes, I guess.

TR: I was. I started going to the Tech football games in the late '40s with my dad; he had season tickets.

TS: When they were really, really good.

TR: They were all through the '50s—you know, the Bobby Dodd era. So I kind of grew up, I guess, destined to be there. I looked at a couple of other places, but the pull was too strong. And I have never regretted it. Hands down it was the most difficult education I've ever had. Everything else since then paled in comparison, including law school and graduate school. It's a different sort of place.

TS: Having math and science and engineering.

TR: It is.

TS: You obviously didn't have to take that many engineering courses, though, did you?

TR: No, I took a few. But it was an interesting degree. I had five math classes, three physics classes, and three chemistry classes in an industrial management program. That was allegedly the easier way through the process. But it was a quarter school. If you remember [Kennesaw] under the quarter system, you typically took five-hour courses. With rare exceptions, like some of the early math and science classes, all the courses [at Tech] were three-hour courses. You had to have 220-something hours to graduate, so to graduate in four years, your quarters consisted of six to seven courses as opposed to three courses. So you took eighteen to twenty-one hours, basically, a quarter in three-hour courses. It was just a lot and very demanding.

TS: When I went to Tennessee, we had the quarter system. Everything was three-hour courses, so you had to take about six classes a semester.

DY: That was true at Agnes Scott, too.

TR: So that was kind of different from modern days, but it was the process of taking all of those. At the time, it wasn't a real close connection with some of the profs. I don't know how to define it, but it was a rite of passage, kind of. Even today, you meet people that went there, and there's sort of a camaraderie, almost like folks that went to [the U.S. Military Academy at] West Point.

TS: Yes, so you didn't have real mentors there on the part of the faculty?

TR: I guess not really. Maybe a little bit towards the end, but it was an intimidation factor. We love people to come talk to us here, but the last thing you ever thought of doing there was probably going by to chat with somebody. [chuckle] It was kind of a different approach, I'm sure, than it is today.

TS: It was a test of your character.

TR: It was. Yes, I'm very proud of having been there and wouldn't take anything for having gone there.

DY: I taught this dream class several years ago through continuing education, and one of the students who came to the dream class had graduated from Georgia Tech years ago. He was still having dreams about not having his work done! [laughter] There was intense anxiety. It's interesting because he was describing it as a culture very much like what you're saying, and he had just carried it with him. I don't know whether the dream class helped him to stop having his anxiety dreams about being prepared, but, yes, you're not the first person I've heard say that.

TS: I wonder if things are different nowadays in the way we teach because I don't remember having a close relationship with any of the faculty as an undergraduate. You were afraid of all of them.

TR: Exactly. That's what I'm saying; maybe the culture's just changed.

DY: Maybe it's a male experience because at a women's college, at Agnes Scott, there was a lot of mentoring. We were all women [students]. Certainly, not all of our professors were female, but there was a great deal of interaction with the faculty.

TR: Was it smaller, too, Dede? The classes were smaller?

DY: Oh, yes.

TR: Because we had, even back then, the big lecture hall. And it was literally that first day thing of "look to your left" and "look to your right" and "only one of you will be there . . . ."



TS: I think maybe math and science are different, too. I actually got my degree in zoology as an undergraduate.

DY: In the liberal arts?

TS: Because I had mentoring in graduate school. I just didn't have it in undergraduate.

DY: I think that's a good point. I think that maybe the male and the discipline has something to do with it.

TR: I had six English classes at Tech.

DY: You did?

TR: I did. I think when I finished, I ended up with fifty-some odd hours of social science classes. No one thinks of that; we just didn't have degrees. I guess it was the beginning of a psych degree when I was there but certainly nothing else in the liberal arts. They have some different degrees now. I had a niece that just graduated a year ago; she came down from New York. She used to come stay with us for the whole summer, and we started putting it in her mind. We took her down to the bookstore and bought her things! [laughter]

TS: The humanities people tend to be kind of frustrated, I guess, at Georgia Tech, but they have a Ph.D. program in the history of technology.

TR: They do, and she ended up graduating in their new international relations program. So they've got some new things for the first time.

DY: It's a wonderful school.

TS: So you graduated in '65?

TR: I did. I graduated in '65 and went straight to law school.

TS: That's right; you got your law degree in '68.

TR: I did. Actually, I finished [Tech] in the summer of '65 and started law school.

DY: Did you like doing law?

TR: I did. I enjoyed law school; I really did.

TS: Did you concentrate on a particular type of law?

TR: You know, Tom, the first year of law school, everybody does identically the same thing. The second year of law school, most of what we do is the same thing, but you get a little flexibility. So it's only the third year that you sort of have some degree of flexibility as to what you take. I don't know if they would really call it

- a major, but they did. You could do sort of little concentration areas, and it was primarily in corporate law.
- TS: You found Emory Law School easier than the undergraduate program at Georgia Tech?
- TR: I did. That's interesting.
- TS: Yes, it is.
- TR: It's a totally different educational approach, law school versus the undergrad. It's 100 percent Socratic. I guess the frightening part about law school in general is that you have virtually no feedback in a course. You don't have exams until the end of the semester or course, at which point you have a huge exam. And that's the entirety of your grade, for all practical purposes. You might have one or two exceptions from that in the whole three years of law school.
- TS: Why do they do it that way in law school?
- TR: It's beyond me! [laughter] I'm not sure why they do it that way. The first year we had a practice exam in maybe one of the classes, so that you could get some feedback. And it's very, very subjective. In the entire three years of law school I had one exam that had a single objective question on it. Everything is basically hypothetical, and you're just writing for three hours.
- DY: Who prepared you for law school, do you think?
- TR: I do a lot of advising and talk to students all the time and have students coming all the time about law school. Basically, law school could care less what your undergraduate is. What typically happens if somebody shows up at the front door of an undergrad and says I want to go to law school, they are put in a pre-law program, which oftentimes is in political science. This is great if you have an interest in political science. But law school doesn't care. What I honestly tell folks, number one, is do what you like doing because you're going to do better. Plus, you may decide you don't like law school or you might not get in. There are a lot of factors like that. But your question was what do you tell people to do to prepare, and I tell them to take anything you can that forces you to write. Take English classes; take liberal arts classes that require writing—not necessarily for your degree, but for your electives. The more you write, the better off you'll be.
- DY: I guess that and critical thinking; that's what you have to do.
- TR: You do. I mean, that's what it's about. There's never a spoon-fed [course].
- TS: Dede and I do a course together on Georgia History, Georgia Literature, and we're really using WebCT for the first time this year. We've got all these discussion groups, and the students are writing more than we've ever had them write.

DY: That's right. They'll post essay length postings and respond to each other.

TR: That's great.

TS: It's really a pretty high level of sophistication, I think, with writing. But they are getting practice.

TR: And that's great.

TS: And they're responding to each other on their postings. I've never been a fan of technology, but, I guess, I've been won over a little bit this semester.

TR: I've had trouble getting into [technology] also.

DY: I guess we all did. Once you're there you say, "Well, I'm here, but I sure didn't want to step on a train."

TR: Right. I miss, on occasion, being able to talk to people, just in the world we live in now, trying to call somebody on the phone and can't. Everybody is so into the e-mails. It's hard to find people on the phone anymore, and I miss that. I like talking to people. I still do hypotheticals. I do hypotheticals on all my exams in my 2200 class because I think that's important.

DY: What is your 2200 class?

TR: That's the basic business law that everybody in the business school is required to take. We have entrance [requirements] to get into the upper level. They have a number of courses they have to take and make certain grades in those courses in order to be able to take upper-level courses.

TS: So this is your general education course for business.

TR: It is. It's the only one of the courses that is an intro into the business school that's not primarily quantitative. There are the two accountings and micro and macro econ and for new people now a lower-level stat course. It also includes calculus and business information systems. But the classes are huge, and lots of folks that are teaching it have gone to 100 percent objective questions. I just think in a law course you ought to write something! [laughter] I always have some short answer hypotheticals.

TS: When you say huge, how huge? How big are the classes?

TR: Oh, 100, 120.

DY: Well, you're a brave man. Good for you. I applaud you.

TR: Not really. I think Alan [Schlact] does that, too. I think Alan still uses hypotheticals, too. There are a lot of upper-level courses, and, of course, we can do more there. But even the upper-level courses typically have fifty students.

DY: How come you all haven't risen up over there in the business school against that, Tom? Is the culture not at all open to any kind of [enrollment adjustment]?

TR: Well, it's the numbers, as the school grows. It wasn't that way from the beginning. When I first started, the same classes were thirty or forty people. But the funding hasn't kept up with [the number of] majors. Or a lot of people that perceive they're going to be [majors] for the lower-level courses. They might not meet the requirements to get upper [level courses], but they start the process there.

TS: It sounds like you need more faculty members in business law.

TR: Well, we do. And it's gone the other way. We had at one point four full-time business law faculty. As the first two left those positions—you know, they made choices of going other places—we have lots of folks that teach that are not full-time folks. We have several people in the department that have law degrees that teach accounting but also teach some law course for us. So we've just filled it that way; it's just been a decision.

TS: Well, you graduated from law school in '68. Is this when you went to work for Goodbody and Company?

TR: It is. In a matter of days, like two. [laughter] I finished Emory, and two days later I started with them. I have this thing about instantly doing something. Yes, I did.

TS: So they're an investment industry, but you're in the law office for them, I guess? Right?

TR: No, not really. I didn't practice law at all.

TS: Oh, you didn't.

TR: No, I was a stockbroker. I went to Goodbody and was a broker for a few years with them. Then I ended up with what has now become INVESCO, which is an incredibly huge investment counseling firm. I was with them in their initial beginning; another fellow and I were the new business people for INVESCO in the early '70s.

TS: Why did you make that choice to go toward stock broking as opposed to practicing law?

TR: A couple of reasons. During the three years that I was in law school, I worked. I actually had a full-time job the first part of the first year and then I had multiple

- part time jobs: I coached for the Y; I think it was \$40 a week then! I tutored math, and I clerked in a small law firm.
- DY: Where did you clerk?
- TR: A person that I knew in downtown Atlanta, his name was Charles Willis, and he had a general practice. He allowed me to do basically almost everything you do in the practice of law without, of course, the obvious things I couldn't do, like going to the courtroom. But I wrote wills, formed corporations, did all of that. I had keys to the office and could go in in the middle of the night and bill hours. All of those jobs were flexible with schedules because you didn't have much flexibility with schedules; you took classes when they told you to take them in the law school process. I did not enjoy what a lot of the practice of law is, which is grinding out time deadlines paperwork. I like people, you know; I'm kind of a "people person." I enjoy talking to people and being around people, which to some degree litigation might be.
- DY: It kind of depends on the kind of talking you do.
- TR: Very much so. And a more aggressive kind of thing that's not necessarily my personality. I absolutely loved the law school experience in terms of the educational process; I never regretted having done it. Interestingly, it made me different than other people in the industry I chose to be in at that time and opened doors. People just kind of wanted to find out what is this person about that has a law degree that's doing this as opposed to an MBA in finance. So it was a plus for the career actually.
- TS: But you're like Betty Siegel's description of her husband, Joel—that he liked the study of law better than the practice.
- TR: Exactly. That's very true. So I can't say that I actually practiced, but I did what you do to practice in those two and a half years doing the clerking, enough to know that I didn't want to do that for a lifetime.
- TS: So did you ever pass the bar?
- TR: I didn't, because I left before the bar exam was given and went to New York. I was in New York with Goodbody for awhile before I came back to Atlanta.
- DY: How did you like New York?
- TR: I loved New York! It was fun. I knew I wasn't going to be there forever, so I loved it. I lived with two other fellows in the Village in New York in the '60s. We were the only people—I dare to say; obviously, I don't know this for a fact—that lived in the Village and worked on Wall Street. The reason I can say that is because we had the entire subway to ourselves! Everybody on Wall Street was living on the Upper East Side taking the Lexington. On occasion we would decide to go up there in the afternoon.

TS: You didn't have long hair at that time, did you?

TR: No, a little longish, but not outlandish.

TS: But you were respectable and wore suits.

TR: Oh, absolutely.

DY: You were there for ten years?

TR: Oh, no. I was there for part of a year and then back to Atlanta. It was part of the process of going to work in the brokerage business at that time with the big firms. So you spent some time in New York first before you ended up back here.

DY: Did you go up there for training?

TR: Yes.

DY: My father-in-law did that. I know that little gig. You went and got an MBA too, didn't you?

TR: Yes. That was at the point I decided that I wanted to teach. Interestingly; I never thought about teaching law, for which I already had the doctorate. I hadn't done it from a pragmatic standpoint; I had been in the investment business as opposed to the other. I thought that teaching necessitated going into the Ph.D. program; so I was in a Ph.D. program at Georgia State. I picked up an MBA in the process of doing the Ph.D. I did all of the coursework for the Ph.D. in labor relations as opposed to finance, which is interesting, but it was something I had an interest in. Again, people as opposed to number-crunching, I guess. So in the process, I kind of picked up the MBA, and while I was there, someone made a suggestion: "You've got the law degree"—I was doing a research assistantship and looking for a teaching assistantship—"we need some folks in the law area." So I started teaching in it and absolutely loved doing it. Then the opportunity came at Kennesaw to move from the junior to the four-year school, and they were looking for the first person to be the law person here. I didn't want to leave Atlanta. I was going through the interview process then. I was talking to Virginia Tech, the University of Kentucky, and a couple of different places. My children were here; I didn't want to leave them. So I had the opportunity to come here to teach law and ended up teaching law for all these many years.

TS: So in '78 you got your MBA from Georgia State, and in '78 you started at Kennesaw.

TR: I started here. I had already done what was necessary for the MBA; I just didn't apply for it because I was in the Ph.D. program. I didn't enroll in an MBA program. I enrolled in the Ph.D. program. But I had taken the Ph.D. level quantitative methods courses and all of that and just went back after the fact and substituted those for the things that would fit for the MBA.

TS: Did you keep taking any courses after you came here?

TR: I did not take any more. I think I had had my last courses that I was doing there. When I originally started and was teaching law, Dr. [Horace W.] Sturgis had a different approach than most schools in the country did about the law degree being the terminal degree, which it is, for teaching law courses and tax courses. So I kind of came [in] still under the Ph.D. program. Then as soon as he retired and Betty came, they changed that.

DY: He didn't see that as a terminal degree?

TR: No.

DY: That was the same thing with the MFA [master of fine arts], wasn't it?

TS: I think so.

DY: I know George [H.] Beggs didn't consider the MFA terminal, but it is, obviously.

TR: But at any rate, it worked out fine. The point is, I didn't continue with the Ph.D. and do the dissertation and all of that after I decided I was going to teach in the law area and had the opportunity to do that. Had that not happened, I probably would have continued with that and maybe taught in a little bit different area.

TS: One thing that we've asked everybody is about mentors along the way—how you got into your field. Yours is a little different than everybody else that we've interviewed, though, in a way with your background. You've already told us you didn't have any mentors at the undergraduate level. Were there any either at Georgia State or at Emory that stand out?

TR: I did have somebody at Emory I've never forgotten who happened to be the person in the first year of law school that taught contracts. I don't know if you ever saw *The Paper Chase*, but he was Kingsfield. [chuckle] He was Kingsfield. I had a lot of respect for him. This was in the old law school at Emory before they built the new school, and we were in one of the old buildings on the quad. We had a big downstairs rec area. He was a contract bridge player and quite good at it, and he was the only professor who ultimately came down into the basement with students, and we actually used to play bridge together. Not during the first year, but after we'd gotten past the first year. I had him in a constitutional law class later, too. So he had an impact, I would say.

TS: What was his name?

TR: Al Witte.

TS: What was it about him that was memorable do you think or that influenced you?

TR: Good question. There was a fear factor there, but that's because of the first year in law school. [chuckle] He was just somebody that for some reason I had more respect for than anybody else.

TS: Was it his teaching style?

TR: I guess it was, but everybody was Socratic, and so it wasn't like it was totally different from the other people.

DY: Did you sense that he cared about the students?

TR: He just had a flair for doing it, and I'm sure that was part of it, too; yes. And there was a sense that he loved what he was doing and was able to impart the love of learning to you, too. It didn't always come smoothly, but again, that's the process of teaching.

DY: Do you feel like you emulated him or took on some of his qualities in your own teaching?

TR: If I did any of them, I would hope it was the caring part because I teach very differently than law school. I would not be comfortable teaching in law school because it's a combative sort of thing. That's not me; I'm not comfortable with that process. But I do care very much about doing it and about the students. So, if that came from that, the answer would be yes, I guess.

TS: Who interviewed you when you came to Kennesaw, when you applied?

TR: I'm sure it was Dr. Thompson.

TS: Bill [William P.] Thompson?

TR: Yes. I know I had to have met Dr. Beggs. Dr. Beggs was the head of our division. It was not a business school; we were a department in social science. The degree was a B.S., a bachelor of science in business administration initially.

DY: Wasn't Mildred in that?

TR: She was. Mildred and Fay [H.] Rodgers.

TS: Mildred Landrum.

TR: And Jerry Sawyer. I had the connection to come here because of Jerry.

TS: Jerry had an engineering degree at one time, didn't he?

TR: Yes, he had a civil engineering degree from Tech. Jerry has two master's degrees, one in computer science, and I think his other was in finance or something. Then he got his Ph.D. in management; so he has a very wide background. But he was finishing up his Ph.D. program in management. The



Ph.D. program that I was in was kind of a joint program between econ and management with a little insurance. So it was covering some different bases. Our research assistantship was with some folks in the management department, so I knew Jerry through the Ph.D. program. He came [to Kennesaw] two years before when it was still the junior college, so he was teaching here while working on his dissertation and finishing up the Ph.D. process at Georgia State. He's the one that told me about the potential opportunity for the law course. He was there as part of that process, too. I can't honestly remember meeting Dr. Beggs that day, but I'm sure I had to. I also had an interview with Dr. Sturgis as part of the interview process.

TS: In '78 probably Gene [Eugene R.] Huck, too.

TR: Yes, Dr. Huck was the academic dean at the time. Wonderful guy.

TS: So there wasn't a committee in other words.

TR: There might have been a relatively small one. [chuckle]

TS: [S.] Alan Schlact, I think, said that just about everybody in the department interviewed him when he came in, but that was a few years later.

TR: It was two years later. Alan was the second person that came in to teach law so I was a part of that also, that committee.

TS: That's the way it was when I came in. I met with Beggs, and after I passed that hurdle, he took me to see the academic dean and the president in the president's office. Those three were the only people I saw on campus before I accepted the job.

DY: That's, I guess, pre-Betty when you just met with the administrators.

TS: I can't remember. It seems like when Linda [M.] Pappageorge came [in 1978], we must have had, if it wasn't a committee, it was at least the historians informally met with her, or something.

DY: I don't remember meeting with anybody except John [C.] Greider [the Humanities Division chair] in '81.

TS: Well, we weren't very organized in terms of faculty committees at that time.

DY: No, there weren't search committees is my guess.

TS: No, there weren't search committees, so there probably wasn't a search committee in your case.

TR: I don't think there was. I think in those first few years, it was more of who can we catch to come in and meet the candidate—except for the formal part of definitely going to see the [top administrators].

TS: Right. Well, what was your impression of Kennesaw when you came out here in '78, when you started teaching here?

TR: I had a great impression. I thought this was a great opportunity to be at the beginning of the four-year process.

TS: That's right; '78 was the first year of junior-senior level courses.

TR: It absolutely was. And we introduced the business law course at that time. It was a 300-level course, and then we added the senior course the next year. Those are the courses I had been teaching at Georgia State.

TS: Yes, that first year we could only do 300-level courses.

TR: Exactly. It was a first for Kennesaw, and it was clearly an opportunity to come in at the beginning instead of going to a place like Virginia Tech or University of Kentucky—which are great places, but [the programs were] already in place.

TS: Where you would have been the very junior faculty member whereas here you were creating a program.

TR: Exactly right. And it was exciting for a lot of reasons. I didn't want to leave Atlanta. As you know, it's sometimes difficult to go teach in a place that you attended, like Georgia State or Tech. I saw it as a great opportunity. I was really excited. I received a contract as assistant professor, but because of what we talked about before, it was changed to an [instructorship.]

TS: Oh, because of Dr. Sturgis . . .

TR: Dr. Sturgis not considering [the Juris Doctor] a terminal degree, which is pretty interesting. I made the choice because I really wanted to be here to accept that.

TS: Did they cut your salary when they changed it around?

TR: I don't remember. They might have, but I had a signed contract for the next year.

TS: You had a signed contract as an assistant professor?

TR: Yes. Then they came back and changed that, and I agreed to the change because I wanted to be here. What I'm saying is I did it because I wanted to be here for the long run. My thought was, "Let's win this battle later." [We] started giving Dr. Huck the documentation as to how it was treated around the country, at Harvard and all the schools. We have a big national organization, and they were trying to fight that battle around the country, too, to have it recognized.

TS: Well, it is a JD degree.

TR: It is, and that's considered a terminal degree to teach in law school. There really are advanced degrees past [that], but [they're] typically for specialized things. Like an LL.M, which is a master's, is past a JD.

DY: I always thought that was so odd.

TR: It is odd, but it's for tax or some very specialized kind of thing.

TS: Well, it's interesting, too, that whenever they would send a letter down to the Board of Regents, it was always to "Dr. Neal." Henry Neal was the attorney for the Board of Regents. He had a JD, and they called him Dr. Neal.

TR: And they do. They don't if you are out practicing law, but if you went to teach at Emory Law School, you immediately become "doctor." And also in all the university systems . . . it just was something that Dr. Sturgis felt very strongly about. But I made, I think, what was a good choice at the time.

TS: Let's talk about who was here at that time. You had mentioned Mildred Landrum earlier, who did business communications, and Fay Rodgers. I can't remember what Fay taught, now.

TR: Fay was accounting.

TS: Accounting.

TR: Yes, she was an accounting person.

TS: Of course, Bill Thompson was the first chair, and was Charlie [Charles F.] Martin teaching economics?

TR: Charlie Martin was teaching econ.

TS: And Jerry Sawyer was teaching economics.

TR: Jerry was teaching a little bit of everything because he had such a wide background. I mean, he got a Ph.D. in management, and he started teaching some management because we rolled into the 300-level that year. But he taught accounting, and I think he might have snuck an econ course in now and then. I know he taught accounting some.

TS: Was Charlie [Charles S.] Garrett here that early?

TR: I'm pretty sure he was. [He started in 1975].

TS: But he was teaching accounting.

TR: He would have been teaching accounting also.

TS: Who else do we have? Was that pretty much it?

TR: That might have been. I'm remembering some people from the first few years, but I'm not entirely sure they were here. Bill Whitten [William O. Whitten, Jr.] came for a short time and taught accounting also. I'll tell you who came in with me in the same year to teach econ was Don [M.] Sabbarese. Don and I are now presently the two longest folks in the business school.

DY: Are you?

TS: Is that right?

TR: Yes.

DY: Well, with Jerry in retirement, I guess so.

TR: After Jerry retired, we were the longest.

TS: I guess Don's field is economics?

TR: Yes. So he came in at the same time. I was trying to remember who was actually there, and I'm not sure there was more than we named.

TS: Paula [H.] Morris came later?

TR: Yes, she came later [1981].

TS: So a tiny department but you obviously knew you were going to grow.

TR: Or we hoped so! [laughter] It turns out we did, didn't we?

TS: And Harry [J.] Lasher, when did he come in? Was that before Betty or after?

TR: Betty came in '81, right? I think Harry came after, Tom [1984]. I was on the search committee.

TS: By that time, he would have been coming in as a dean.

TR: He did. And Betty had been here for a few years before we actually created the schools and had somebody come in as a dean, so Dr. Thompson was still in place. There was a one-year time period before Harry that Alan actually did an acting . . .

TS: Alan Schlact?

TR: Yes, the acting dean or whatever for just a one-year period. While we were doing the search, between Dr. Thompson and Harry becoming the dean.

TS: So you were teaching three classes a quarter back then and [doing] lots of committee work.

TR: I was. I did. The record, I think, was one year in which I was on fourteen different committees at the same time. Fortunately, all of them weren't ones that were incredibly busy, but we did do a good bit of service. And when we initially started, of course, you would remember this for sure, Tom—I'm not sure, [Dede], you came in '81?

DY: In '82.

TR: So I'm not sure it was the same then, maybe, but those first few years there was a philosophy of when you taught, if you remember. We all taught five days a week, day classes and then night classes. Jerry did an enormous amount of work for years showing how the space utilization was better [when you held classes on] alternate days . . . but it took a long time to convince everyone.

DY: I remember that astounded me because I had that year of lectureship at University of Georgia. I came here and I saw that everybody taught at night. I think there was a 7:45 [a.m.] class, and I thought, "Good grief, this is really interesting." But what amazed me is that everybody did it.

TR: Yes. And we had fun doing it. [laughter]

TS: I remember when I started, we had to sometimes do back-to-back night classes. You'd go from 6:00 to 10:45 [p.m.]. That way you only had one in the day time.

DY: It's hard to crawl out the next morning, too.

TR: It was.

DY: You were beat.

TS: Well, they were pretty good usually about giving you a later morning or afternoon, oftentimes an afternoon class after two night classes.

DY: After you had one of those?

TR: Yes.

TS: But it was a tough schedule.

DY: Fortunately, we were young then and we could do it.

TR: That's right.

TS: Where was your office at that time, which building?

TR: We were in the [the old] Humanities [presently, Willingham Hall] from when I started because I was on the second floor. Remember we had the trailers in the back? Some of the faculty ended up with offices in the trailers until we moved over to the Burruss Building.

DY: When was that building built?

TR: The Burruss Building? We moved in there about late '90 or '91.

TS: I think '91 is the date for the Burruss Building.

DY: Is Burruss the biggest building we had on campus?

TS: Yes, well, other than the library.

DY: Right because it towered over everything.

TS: People referred to it as the suburbs, compared to Social Science as the inner city.

TR: Right. [chuckle]

TS: Well, you won the Distinguished Teaching Award in '83. Why don't you just talk a little bit about your teaching and philosophy of teaching and maybe a little bit about why you think you won that award?

TR: I'm not sure if I ever understood why I won the award, Tom, to be honest. I felt like I was an apprentice in a master's workshop. I don't know how it happened. There were so many great teachers on campus at that time.

TS: You were the second to win in '83.

TR: I was. Steve [Stephen E.] Scherer was the first.

TS: You were a finalist in '82, weren't you?

TR: I was. I was the first runner-up or something in that first year. But to this day, I'm still amazed at the choice. It was greatly appreciated.

TS: Well, talk a little bit about your teaching philosophy or what you did with classes.

TR: I guess that my style was sort of a modified Socratic, if that makes any sense at all. By no stretch is it totally Socratic—so a combination of outright lecture and Socratic. The beauty of teaching law is that for students it's easy to participate. All you have to do is say, "Well, what if?" Change the facts a little bit. So we were talking about being brought into the technology . . . I still write on the board. It's still my style. I'm uncomfortable feeling like I'm stuck in a spot. I walk around a lot while I'm teaching, and things come out that weren't necessarily a part of the plan. So we can go to the board and head from there; that's how I'm most comfortable. I believe in attempting to try to engage students and have them participate as opposed to it being just a pure lecture process. I never mind questions. There are never any bad questions in my mind. I never mind repeating what we've said. I don't know if that's answering the style [question]. I never had an education class in my life, so I guess I've always felt

- intimidated being around folks who I perceive are great educators who obviously know all about the different styles and what they're doing.
- DY: I think what you said about your mentor, the fellow that you felt was the best teacher that you had: You said it was a passion for the subject. That sounds like what you have, as well as your connection with your students.
- TR: Well, I think that I do that. And I think I have a passion for people and the students and all, too. I really do honestly care about them. I want them to love learning, and I want them to succeed. What's made me the happiest about doing it is hearing somebody say, "You made me want to come back the next semester."
- DY: You heard that from your students, Tom? I'm sure you do.
- TR: Yes. That's my biggest reward in doing this is to have that. As you know, we're a nontraditional school, and we get a lot of folks coming back that are afraid to come back. I try to have a non-threatening classroom environment, which is opposed to the law school process and, interestingly, to some degree the Tech process. I mean, there were some folks that felt very comfortable being in the class, but it was more like the law school process; and I've tried to be opposite that.
- DY: Well, we learn by looking at opposites, too.
- TR: Absolutely.
- DY: I think you can define your teaching philosophy just as you're doing. "While it is not this: I saw that, I felt that, I knew that I didn't want to have that kind of classroom."
- TR: Right. So I guess that's been part of that process to purposely try to not have that.
- TS: I've asked a number of people how they would define a master teacher.
- TR: Well, I guess for me it would be somebody that does have great passion for not only their subject, but for teaching and for learning and for the students' well-being.
- TS: Did you get any of this from your mother?
- TR: I'm sure.
- TS: Since she was a teacher.
- TR: I'm sure.
- TS: Did you all talk about teaching strategies or anything?

TR: We did. We didn't talk about strategies, but we did talk about teaching. She talked about that I should be one, interestingly.

DY: She saw that in you.

TR: Apparently she did. She talked about it early and was thrilled when it ultimately happened much later. Also, interestingly, at different stages of your life when you go through some of your own career planning or looking at what you might like to do, we do some of the exams and psych tests and things like that. At different stages I did a couple of those, and they came back teaching

DY: That's very interesting. I remember when I went to high school, and it came out that I was suited to be a forest ranger.

TS: A forest ranger?

TR: That's interesting. I wanted to do that at one time. I thought it would be fun.

DY: There's a connection between teaching and that!

TS: Well, you have a passion for the environment.

DY: Yes, I do! I think there must be some connection between teaching and being a forest ranger! You are sort of free out there, aren't you? I mean, you've got your own environment that you can nurture as you wish.

TR: [But] we were asking about my mother. Yes, we did talk about [teaching]. Not so much strategies other than just for some reason she perceived me as being one.

TS: You had talked about early on you were taken to her class.

TR: I was. And I loved doing that. So I think I always liked school. I don't remember not liking it.

DY: Girls will tell you stories, and this is one of my stories about playing with dolls. I would play with dolls or teddy bears and all my creatures; I would line them up and lecture to them and give them tests.

TR: Isn't that interesting.

DY: It really is. And there would be some that wouldn't do so well, and I'd have to talk to them. [chuckle] My brother thought I was nuts. He ended up going to Georgia Tech.

TR: Turned out he was the one that was nuts!

DY: That's right, Tom! [laughter]



- DY: Did you find the environment at Kennesaw when you came here compatible with what you wanted to do in a classroom?
- TR: Yes, very much so because it was, again, opposite from that other process. I always felt like it was an open-door atmosphere, and that students recognized that, which is what I loved. I want people to feel comfortable to come talk and ask questions. I want everybody to know on the first day of class that I want them to do well. If they're not doing well, I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to come to them and say, "I don't think you're doing well; come talk to me," because I don't know what all is happening in their life—where they are and what is success to them. But if they're not happy with what they're doing, bring the notes and we'll look at them. We'll do whatever we need to do to get there, which is not the environment I went through.
- TS: But you found that the environment at Kennesaw was supportive of teaching?
- TR: Very much so. Not only supportive of it, I felt like it was rewarded and considered to be primary.
- TS: If you wanted to get tenured and promoted . . .
- TR: You had to teach, and you had to teach well.
- TS: Right.
- TR: I'm not sure whether that's 100 percent the same today, but that's something we might talk about later.
- TS: Well, that's certainly something we want to talk about.
- TR: But I certainly thought it was then.
- DY: Yes, you've had a long tenure here. When you look back to changes in the culture of the institution, from your perspective—where has that happened, and how has it affected teaching?
- TR: I guess we've had some obvious changes in regard to sheer size; we've had such growth in terms of the numbers of students. As we were talking earlier, rightly or wrongly, in terms of how the whole funding works for the university system—when you start low, there really isn't a catch-up ever. So as a result, we all work harder and do more. It's made a difference in classes, at least for us, in terms of the size of the classes. So I think it's harder to make all the connections that you used to make with all the students when you've got large classes. In a given semester, I'm teaching 300 or 400 students. So that's not going to make all those one-to-one connections.
- TS: You can't possibly know everybody's name.

- TR: It's very, very difficult to do.
- DY: Keeping up with them is hard.
- TR: I make an effort to do that, but it's difficult.
- TS: You do learn all their names?
- TR: I try to. But it's very difficult. I've spent an awful lot of time the last seven or eight years doing advising; you know, we have an advising team in the business school. As a matter of fact, I'm negotiating to come back and do advising as opposed to coming back to teach. To me it's one-on-one teaching. So it's all that I used to love that's more difficult to do now because of the size factor. I think the other thing that's obvious, too, that is interesting—and I don't know how this will all play out—is that not only are we larger, but we're becoming a different student body than we were before. We're becoming more traditional. I guess in the last year or so, for the first time ever the incoming freshman class had slightly more traditional than nontraditional students.
- TS: The residence halls are a factor, but I guess we're getting more students, straight out of high school, who think of Kennesaw as the first choice of where they want to go.
- TR: Exactly. Which before, Kennesaw's first choice was more the nontraditional student; the traditional students we were getting were folks who were coming here thinking, "I might go elsewhere."
- TS: Which we all used to really like, I think, having all those nontraditional students.
- TR: It's different, isn't it? It changes the classroom environment a lot.
- TS: A number of the business folks that we've interviewed have talked about how great it is to have people that have real life experiences. When you're talking about a business problem, they experienced it yesterday at the office.
- TR: Absolutely. And, fortunately, I think we still have the nontraditional student; even in the day classes, we still have mixes. It also depends on the class you're teaching. Our Business Law 2200 class is a lower-level [course needed] to get into the business school, and it also has the distinction of having zero prereqs. So when you get the onslaught of the new freshmen coming in with all the numbers, it's very difficult to find classes for them—the Accounting 2100s and the economics classes have math prereqs. So they're not typically getting in those the first semester. But we're getting a lot of not only traditional students, but first time on-campus traditional students, straight from high school. So that's changed. I'm not saying it's a negative change, but the reality is that it's changed.
- TS: So what used to be the 300 level is now your 2200 course?

TR: Yes, it changed numbers. It's the same course, just moved to a lower level.

TS: You mentioned the advisement; why don't you talk a little bit about how you handle that in the business college? You have a team of advisors. Does the average faculty member not advise; is that the way it works? You've got just a few who do all the advising?

TR: That is correct. That's how it works. We have full-time staff that are a part of our associate dean of undergraduate studies, Dr. Gilliam's office.

TS: Ken [Kenneth P.] Gilliam?

TR: Yes. Linda [M.] Gossett is a full-time staff person who works there with a number of student assistants, and that office does many things—not just advising, but it also oversees the advising process. Then we have a team of folks in the business school that have made the choices of making one of their major service commitments advising. So we have advisors from all of the different departments, but we are all capable of advising for anybody in the business school.

TS: How many people are we talking about who are the advisors?

TR: I don't know the exact number right this moment, Tom. It's not an enormous amount, but I'd say a couple or so from each department. We're probably talking ten, eleven or twelve or something like that. In that ballpark. Certainly not huge.

TS: Not a hundred in the college?

TR: It's a relatively small percentage of the folks. Basically, the way we do that is we have a walk-in, call-in process. I happen to be right down the hall from where the central area is for the full-time staff folks.

DY: What do you call that full time area, Ken's area?

TR: That's Ken's office, yes. He's the associate dean for undergraduate programs.

TS: And Rodney [G.] Alsup is the associate dean for graduate business programs?

TR: Exactly. But part of the undergraduate is doing the advising and doing the scheduling of classes for undergrad and all sorts of things. But what happens in regard to the advising process is we all give certain numbers of hours a week. We do schedules so that on any given day, anybody that walks into the area for assistance can determine who is advising. So you can come any day of the week and find somebody that's on and go talk to that person. In other words, I'm not doing it 100 percent of the time I'm there. I have my set hours that are devoted to advising.

What we have found happening through the years, those of us who like doing it and have been there for awhile, end up having folks that, having talked to you once, want to talk [again]. So I find myself, if I'm there, doing advising outside my scheduled hours. And a lot of us do that. But we have a set schedule so that we know that at least pretty much every day—it may not be every hour every day—but there will be some time slots in which people can know that they can come find an advisor.

DY: It's understandable that students would want to have that. It's really important mentoring.

TR: It's worked very well, I think. I think it's a great program.

DY: For the students?

TR: Yes, for the students. I really think it is. And it's good for the faculty from the standpoint that those of us that do it try to be committed to learning what we're doing as opposed to everybody in the faculty—saying, “Okay, you've got to advise these twenty people.” There are a lot of things you need to know. These aren't just about what you're teaching in Accounting 4100. If someone asks that, you send them to an accounting professor. But people don't know what the prereqs are for this, and they don't understand all the details of how this really works—of getting into the upper level. You don't want people getting mixed signals and mixed advice.

So by keeping it relatively small, the new folks that come in go through a training process. The folks who do this full time have done a great job of preparing information for students. Any student that walks in our office, we can instantly find out when they started and know what catalog they're under. Then we have color-coded sheets that are their entire four-year requirements.

But I've had a lot of relationships in advising with students that are almost stronger than classroom [experiences]. Interestingly. I have some students that come for advice throughout their entire undergraduate program and also contact me after graduation.

DY: That's wonderful, Tom.

TR: And some of those folks, especially some that are reluctant or aren't doing well, if you can help them get on the right track, you get the feedback that we all want or hope to hear, which is that it's been a great experience.

DY: Do you feel like the institution values that kind of work? I ask that because I've written an article on mentoring, and I'm interested in mentoring. I think Betty would like for it to be acknowledged in ways that maybe it's not.

TR: Well, all I can say is from our perspective, and definitely from Tim [Timothy S. Mescon] down, it's been appreciated and considered to be a major service

- commitment. You know, we have different tracks for our faculty. As you would imagine, I'm in a teaching-service track.
- TS: Well, we've talked about that in a few of our interviews. When Tim Mescon came in, he instituted that track. I guess some people like Dana [R.] Hermanson, whom we've interviewed, went the scholarship route. So I guess he doesn't do any advising probably.
- TR: Well, he's not on the advising team. But, everybody, no matter what track you're in, has some commitments to do something in all areas. It's just depends on your emphasis. So Dana does a lot of service; it's just a different type.
- TS: Oh, yes; he won a service award as well as scholarship.
- TR: Exactly. He's a wonderful guy, a tremendous guy. He and Heather [M. Hermanson] are just the nicest folks in the world. He's absolutely a superstar, literally; heavy-duty publication time. He's one of the top published accounting professors at his age in the country, literally.
- TS: So the tracks are the teaching-scholarship track, then kind of a balanced track, and then almost entirely teaching-and-service track. Is that the way it works?
- TR: That's correct, although everything requires something of the other. So somebody committing to teaching-service is not expected to be publishing in refereed journals or anything like that; so you can do different kinds of things, different types of presentations.
- TS: Is that the track that you're in?
- TR: That is, yes. I have been since the first. With every new department chair, when we first talk, basically I told everybody from the beginning, "I'm here because I love teaching. If I didn't love teaching, I wouldn't be here." That's my commitment, and that's what I'm here to do. I'm happy we've had those choices. I would probably not have stayed the length of time that I have if it had been an environment where everybody was required to do some of the other things.
- TS: What kind of a teaching load do you have now?
- TR: I have a teaching load of four classes a semester. What has happened in the last few years is, because of the large sizes of the classes, three classes may qualify as four.
- TS: So you're teaching three-three, but . . .
- TR: I physically would have three classes.
- TS: But it's the equivalent of four.

TR: It's the equivalent of four due to the large class sizes. There have been times that I have taught four, too; I have definitely taught four many times. I'm teaching two this semester on my last semester.

DY: This is your last semester?

TR: Yes, I'm leaving at the end of this semester.

TS: But maybe coming back to advise.

TR: I'm hoping to. We're in heavy-duty negotiation. [chuckle]

TS: Do you still do consulting work?

TR: Not as much as I used to, but I do a good bit. It's primarily been totally unrelated to what I do teaching, and that's been in the investment area. It's more in the real estate area than anything else.

DY: You've been here to see a lot of changes. How would you characterize the intellectual climate here at Kennesaw from the perspective of when you came to now? Have you seen a shift or a change?

TR: I have seen a change. In regard to faculty changes, there has certainly been a change in our school in terms of expectations from the new people that are coming on board. My sense has been in the last few years that we've been hiring the new folks that have come—not in its entirety but percentage-wise—with more of an emphasis on heavier publications and more intellectual pursuits as opposed to the past.

I think initially, as we talked about earlier, teaching was the focal point. The others were not unimportant, but they were not the most important. I can sense, at any rate, that there's more of a move in that direction within the business school. I don't know if that's part of the national accreditation process or where the business school wants to be in the future. There are still people being brought in to do some teaching.

And I think there's a new thing that's happening in the university system. Apparently we're going to have some alternatives to tenure-position jobs. There's an alternative to have some lectureships that would be year-by-year contracts. Apparently, you can do them for a six-year period of time and then re-up another six. I think we may see some of that to fill some of the roles of what I've been doing maybe. The people that have been on the teaching-service track might see more of that. But I have seen a change that way.

As far as the students are concerned, it's a really mixed bag. I think we have some great students that would be great no matter where they went. But I think we've sort of had from early on some students that, for whatever reason, the economics or where they were in life because of being nontraditional, that this

- was the place for them to come [even though they] would have been capable of going anywhere they wished. I certainly think we have continued to have many of those, but I also think we are seeing some students that are having difficulty succeeding.
- DY: You mean ill-prepared?
- TR: Yes, or not willing. They don't come to class; they don't do well. We're seeing lower scores on exams. I want an environment where people have a chance to succeed and feed off of that for other success, and it's very frustrating. I've had a lot of conversation about it with other professors, and everybody I've talked with seems to have similar experiences.
- TS: Do you attribute this to the trend toward more and more traditional-aged students?
- TR: It's what I think, but I don't know whether that's realistic or not, but it would be my guess. That's casual empiricism, right. [chuckle]
- DY: Maybe the traditional students coming in, it might be a cultural, generational thing with a real sense of entitlement?
- TR: Oh, I think so. It's a different atmosphere in the class. The cell phones ring and the hats never come off, and the people just get up and walk out of class, even in the middle of class. They decide it's time to go now, and they get up and leave.
- DY: Well, I guess in big classes that can happen.
- TR: Oh, absolutely. And you know, on a given day, if you've got 100 or 120 people in a class, there might be 70 or 75 there. There's been a change. I think it's the culture of the moment so I'm not sure what to do to overcome that, to be honest.
- TS: Let me ask something that could be somewhat controversial. Do you think that the increased focus on scholarship has, to any degree, caused faculty to value what happens in the classroom less?
- TR: I hope not. I certainly hope not. I don't know the answer to that though. The people I know from my own department that are the heaviest in publication are wonderful in the classroom also. But they happen to be wonderful at everything, which is unusual, you know. Most of us have our niches. But I wouldn't say that it isn't a possibility because I've certainly seen that in the higher-level universities, and I'm sure you have, too. It's for some folks there, I think, a curse to have to go teach the classes that they have. That's what I've always loved about Kennesaw, the teaching being primary no matter what else you were doing. But I'm not sure there isn't to some degree a shift from that.
- TS: We've asked, I guess most everybody, what you're proudest of about your career at Kennesaw?

TR: I'm proudest of the folks who have come back and said, "You made a difference. I wouldn't have stayed if I hadn't had you the first semester; I was afraid to be here and I succeeded." And then they graduated, and now they're going to grad school or they did well or whatever. Unquestionably.

TS: You were talking about advisement a little bit earlier, and I wondered if you wanted to say a little bit more about that.

TR: I did. Let me tell you two funny stories; they're going to be hard for you both to believe. [laughter] It was for me. This happened twice, now; once fairly recently and once about a year and a half or so ago—because I've been here a long time. You know at Kennesaw, we still allow people to graduate under the catalogs in which they entered, regardless of when that catalog was. So even though we changed to semesters, we still have people that graduate under the quarter requirements. Because of being here back then, Linda Gossett, our full-time person, will funnel them to me, because we kind of remember the courses enough to know what they took. [laughter] So both of us [have been] involved with students like that.

The first one was a young man that came back in, and before he started [classes again], he came in to do advising. He had been out of school for thirteen years, and his first words to me were, "I was very close to graduating. I don't know what I'm going to have to do now, but I've kind of reached that point where I need to get the degree as far as careers are concerned. I was literally in the last semester or towards the end, and I was on a flight and I met a young lady. We fell in love, got married; we've been married the last thirteen years. We have several children, and I never came back to school." So we started working through the process, and I discovered that he *had* graduated; he just hadn't bothered to put in his petition to graduate.

TS: Oh!

TR: So literally for thirteen years he had perceived he didn't have a degree and was now coming back to finish one. Obviously, at the time he had just not been following the process and not paying attention. He perceived he had a few more classes to go, and when he dropped out that last semester he perceived he didn't finish.

DY: I bet you were his hero when he walked out of there!

TR: [laughter] And then within the last few months, I had the exact same thing happen again. But this person had gone a long time ago and was embarrassed that he didn't finish. He has been coming here for the last two or three years; he had gone back and started taking courses under the semester program because he assumed that's what he had to do. He never had an idea that he could do the other, but for some strange reason on this particular day, he decided he needed to finally go talk to somebody. This poor guy had 160 or 170 hours—way more



than enough hours, and we were able to do the exact same thing. We were able to go back and find out that all he had to do was petition to graduate.

DY: It makes me wonder, who's paying for this?

TR: Well, both of these folks obviously were. It wasn't like a young student.

DY: Isn't that funny that they didn't pay more attention?

TR: It is.

DY: That's a pretty good story. That's a great story.

TR: That's a kind of fun story to tell somebody: "You graduated and you don't have to take a single other course."

DY: That's like a good dream.

TR: You need that one in your dream. "You've graduated. Get on with it!"

DY: Exactly. Dream that you're finished!

TR: Do you guys still have the dreams that something happened and you can't get to your class? Do you ever have those?

DY: Oh, yeah! Or there's a test—you're going to have a test in class, and you're not prepared for it.

TR: Yes, I still have those!

DY: Well, usually what's gone on is you probably have preparation to do that you haven't done, and it's just weighing down on you!

TS: Well, I'm just about out of questions.

DY: I don't think I have anything. I asked my intellectual climate questions and heard good stories, so I'm good, too.

TR: I've enjoyed it.

DY: Do you have anything else to say?

TR: Not a thing. I appreciate ya'll taking the time. Thank you for your time.

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