

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT KATHY STEWART SCHWAIG

CONDUCTED AND EDITED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

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Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
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Interview with President Kathy Stewart Schwaig
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
Part I – Monday, July 25, 2022
Location: Kennesaw Hall, President’s Board Room

TS: Why don’t we begin with your background. I know you grew up in Texas. You made some nice comments when you set up the scholarship in honor of your parents. Why don’t you talk about your family when you were growing up?

KS: Sure, very happy to. I did grow up in central Texas. My dad was a minister of the Baptist church. The little town is called Temple, Texas. There were about 35,000 residents there. I grew up there from the time that I was about eight until I graduated from high school. My dad was a real prominent figure in my life. He was a minister for his whole career, all of his life. I watched my dad a lot. I saw my dad in a pulpit a lot, and I watched my dad lead. Little did I know at that time that those things were really having an impact on me. Very often now when I’m speaking or when I’m trying to make decisions, I can really feel the presence of the legacy of my dad. But I grew up in, again, small town, Texas.

My mom was a stay-at-home mom. I was the youngest of four children. My closest sibling is seven years older than I am. I have a brother that’s twelve years older, a sister that’s nine, and then another sister that’s seven years older. So, I’m the youngest child, but I’m also somewhat of an only child because they were raised together, and then I was kind of the last kid at home. But I had a very good upbringing, very good family life. My dad was a quiet guy, but definitely a strong leader. Obviously, his faith was a very big part of who he was. My mom also kind of quiet, yet still a very powerful force in our family.

TS: And for the record Ed and Nola Stewart?

KS: Correct. My dad was Ed Stewart and my mom, Nola Muir Stewart.

TS: Why don’t you talk a little bit more about how your father influenced you. What characteristics did he have that you think have stuck with you?

KS: I think my dad was definitely a person who was led by his values, and he lived by his values. That was very important to him. He was somebody who always treated people fairly, and he wanted people to be treated fairly. He was a tall man, so he was kind of a dominant figure. Yet, at the same time, he was very gentle spirited and very kind. My dad has been gone about twenty-three years. He died in 1999. But through the years I’ve had a lot of people who’ve come to me and said, “Your dad had a big impact on my life.” A minister is there when the babies are born. They’re there for the baptism, and they’re there at the wedding, and at funerals. So, my dad played, I think, a dominant role in a lot of people’s lives.

Sometimes you don't realize the impact that somebody has until they're gone. I have always said that I feel my dad's legacy on my life probably much more now than even when he was alive. If you had something going on in your life, he wasn't going to be somebody who shared a lot of words with you. He wasn't going to overwhelm you with words, but he was just going to say those few sentences that would really be impactful. So, I'll tell you, there are a lot of times that I will go to speak, especially if I go to speak at a podium—and remember, I watched my dad preach from a pulpit for many, many years—and I'll feel him in that moment. Sometimes I'll even reach and hold the podium like I remember my dad holding it. It's not intentional. It's just there, but I'll feel that sense of him.

TS: How was he as a preacher? Dynamic in the pulpit? Scholarly? How would you describe him?

KS: He was very studious and took very, very seriously preparing for a sermon. He would prepare all week long, and he would spend a lot of time in his studies. I used to have people ask me, "What does your dad do all week? He preaches on Sunday. What does he do the rest of the week?" Obviously, he would spend a lot of time with church members, but he also spent a lot of time studying. That was a big part of who he was. He always hand wrote his sermons out. I can still see these white sheets of paper that had this scribble on them. In doing that, he would essentially memorize or write that sermon on his heart, so that he could deliver it.

My dad, again, was kind of a quiet guy. Now he had a sense of humor, and he'd be very, very playful with you. But when he preached, he'd raise his voice. He'd get a little excited. So, people that didn't know my dad outside the pulpit would often think, "Wow, your dad is really pretty intense." It was always funny to see that duality of him.

TS: You've said before that his parents wanted him to be a truck driver.

KS: They did.

TS: Did he come from a working-class background or farming background?

KS: He came from a working-class family. His dad was a locksmith, and his mom was a stay-at-home mom. He had two sisters, one older and one younger, raised in Fort Worth, Texas. There was really no going to school after high school. He was coming of age, I guess, in the late '40s, early '50s. The plan for him was to get a job. But I think he really felt a calling on his life. He was engaged as a young man very much in his church. The minister of that church had a big impact on him. My dad felt called to be a minister and called to preach and ultimately went to Hardin-Simmons University, graduated from there, and then ultimately went to seminary.

TS: Which seminary?

KS: He went to Southwestern Baptist Seminary, which is in Fort Worth, and graduated there. I think it was a bachelor's from there as well as a bachelor's from Hardin-Simmons. My mom took some classes there. She was studying English. She did not graduate, had my brother when they were pretty young, about 21, and then my sister followed after that.

TS: I've heard horror stories about being a preacher's kid. What was your experience?

KS: It was kind of mixed feelings, I think. I'm grateful for the faith tradition that I grew up in. I'm grateful for the values that my parents instilled. There is certainly a fishbowl aspect of being a preacher's kid that I think is a little bit difficult. Growing up in the '70s, at that time there was a lot of scrutiny on minister's families and especially on their kids and their wives. I always felt like I had to behave, or my daddy could lose his job. So, that was always a bit of pressure in that way. So, I was a pretty good kid and didn't get into a lot of trouble. I wasn't super rebellious in any form whatsoever. But, as I reflect back on it, I think a lot of times the focus was on our behavior—maybe not so much our development, emotionally and socially and mentally, but on whether we were behaving. If we weren't, we might cost Daddy his job.

That's probably not the way I would want to raise my child. I'd rather it be more about those core values and why they matter and why they're important, not so much just to focus on the behavior. But I'm grateful, especially as I get older and I think more and more about the values that were instilled. I'm very, very grateful for that.

TS: How long did he stay as pastor in Temple, Texas?

KS: He started in 1970, and he retired in 1990. My dad was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at about, I guess, age 57 or 58—in that timeframe. His form of MS was very debilitating. It was painful on his limbs and ultimately was really impacting his mobility and ability to get around. Before that my dad had been extremely active. He was always working in the yard, always building something. I think his second love beyond being a minister was building things with his hands. He built a lot of furniture. We have a lot of that furniture in our home today. He had a lathe in his garage. He had a friend who had a cabinet shop. So, he learned how to use those tools to build things. But that became harder and harder to do as the MS took over. He continued though as best he could—always had a spirit of joy. But he retired probably about 60 or 61 or a little bit earlier, and then we lost him about a decade later. I think just the strain on his body. His type of MS was chronic—progressive is what they call it. It gets worse and worse. But he always had a good spirit.

TS: I know you've said before that your mother was a Sunday school teacher.

KS: She was, yes.

TS: You didn't have a chance, I guess, when your father was the pastor, and your mother was the Sunday school teacher.

KS: Yes. My mom was very much of an introvert, very, very quiet, but usually taught fifth grade Sunday school for years and years and years. Very sweet spirited, but again, very, very quiet, kind of timid. She still had a fun sense of humor, and so those of us in the family would get to see that a little bit more. But very gracious—certainly the pastor’s wife that stood by her husband and supported him and all that he did—very sweet spirit. We lost her about eight years ago, 2014.

TS: Well, growing up in a Baptist family in Texas, I guess nobody was pushing you toward the ministry. How did you grow interested in accounting, I guess is my next question, and then information systems, but accounting first, I guess?

KS: Yes. I went off to Baylor as a freshman and really did not have a clue as to what I wanted to do. At that time, one of the best degrees that you could get would be an accounting degree and an IS degree together. In the 1980s information systems and computer technology were being used a lot more, not only in business, but in home life as well. Accounting was, and I think still is, a good career path to go. Even if you don’t do a lot in accounting, just understanding accounting and understanding financial statements can be really helpful in business. But I’ll tell you there was no scientific way that I became an accounting major. I was really a little clueless as to what I was going to study.

Probably my sophomore year, I was talking to my mom. Mom said, “Why not business?” I said, “Sure, let’s do business.” Then I had a good friend of mine who was studying accounting. She and I ultimately became roommates and are still great friends to this day. I just kind of did what she was doing, so to speak. I didn’t do it as well as she did though. That’s the problem. I really, really struggled. It probably wasn’t the major I should have pursued. However, it’s had a lot of benefits throughout the years. I will tell you it has been a degree that has helped me in numerous ways throughout the years. But my time at Baylor, I was kind of lost, didn’t have a lot of direction at that time. Again, my parents—my dad had some higher education; my mom did not. But, certainly, I was on my own in terms of navigating the degree path forward.

TS: Let’s see, you graduated in ’84, I believe.

KS: I did.

TS: I was trying to think how big was Baylor at that time?

KS: That’s a great question. I may not get this exactly right, but I want to say it was around 10,000 or 11,000. Now they’re [20,709 in fall 2022]. They’ve controlled their growth. Their intent is to be around that size, I think. They’ve certainly grown, but they’ve not grown exponentially.

TS: Was it very selective at that time?

KS: Probably not as selective as it is now. I’m not sure I could get in there now. But my sisters had both gone to Baylor before me, and so I just never thought about going

anywhere else. I applied and always assumed I would get in, and I did get in, and loved the time there. When I think about my time at Baylor, and I think about being in this role now as president of Kennesaw, as I mentioned earlier, I struggled as an undergrad a whole lot. I struggled just with having the confidence I needed to have, with having emotional maturity to know how to navigate life at that stage. And then being in a major that probably wasn't the best fit for me. I think about that now. I think about, what can we do to help support our students? A lot of our students are first generation students. How can we help them make these decisions that are so important for their lives? I will tell you; I loved my time at Baylor. I reflect back on that time and just such a tremendous, tremendous growth. But, again, it was a time of struggling. I flunked out of a couple of classes, almost didn't graduate, had to retake a lot of my classes.

TS: That's hard to believe.

KS: It's absolutely true. A few years ago, I did a graduation speech not long after I became dean [of the Coles College of Business], and that was kind of the focus of that. In that timeframe in my life, I would've never thought I would be in a position like this. But I think it gives me some empathy, especially when I remember the struggles that I had.

TS: What do you think the right major for you would've been?

KS: Wow, that's a great question. That's a wonderful question. Like so many students at the undergrad level—they like psychology. We have a huge Psychological Science Department here. I'm reflecting back now, what I know now. I think psychology, coupled with management, you get into the organizational behavior area. I think that would've been really fun, but I'm reflecting back on that.

TS: When I think of Baylor, I think of the great women's basketball teams they've had.

KS: When I was at Baylor, athletics were not positive. That was part of a strategic plan that came out, I want to say in the '90s, that transformed that campus to what it is today, from a research perspective, an athletic perspective, a foundations perspective. When I was at Baylor, Baylor struggled athletically. With football, I think we won a championship [Southwest Conference champions in 1980 and 1994] one of the years that I was there, but really struggled athletically. But they turned that around and made excellence a priority across all dimensions and had a strategic plan that just incrementally over the years they executed.

TS: Did you engage in any extracurricular activities while you were going through?

KS: I was in a co-ed fraternity called Alpha Phi Omega. Alpha Phi Omega is a service organization. I was part of the founding group of students that started that chapter at Baylor. It's still there today. I loved that time, loved the people that I got to meet there. I got to be the vice president of service during my tenure. It was an organization that did provide some social opportunities, but the real focus was on the different service projects we did.

TS: Did you go straight into the master's program after you graduated?

KS: Well, if you remember, I wasn't a very good student, right?

TS: I wondered about that.

KS: I wasn't a very good student, but I was also real stubborn. I had this Accounting/IS degree and graduated just a semester of summer school late. But I was stubborn. I told you that Accounting/IS was one of the best degrees that you could get. Well, another great degree that you could get would be a Master of Taxation. I decided, "I'm going to get a Master of Taxation. That'll be a good thing to do." The problem was whenever I was applying for that degree—and I'll never forget this conversation; it was a pivotal conversation to me because sometimes when you're lost and you don't have the confidence that you should have, you just stay in a path, and you need somebody to counsel you out of that path.

So, I was on the phone with an admissions counselor for this Master of Taxation program, and she was looking at my grades. She had them right before her. And she said, "I'm not sure that you need to continue in the accounting path given where you've been." I needed to hear that. I needed to hear that another path that I was trying to go down was not what I needed to do. She said, "You don't need to pursue tax. You might want to think about an MBA, which would be a more general degree, but you've got to get your grades up in order to be admitted." So, I graduated in '84, and I spent that whole next year taking classes to get my grades up so I could get admitted. So, I was a post baccalaureate student and had to make all A's. I think I took about 24 hours and had to make all A's, which was a big task, because I hadn't made any A's in my undergraduate.

TS: Oh, my goodness. I can't believe that.

KS: No, it's very true. It's why I say I understand an academic struggle. A lot of that again was about confidence, was about finding myself. But that was a pivotal time in my life because I had to pay for my poor performance as an undergrad, and I spent a year. I remember calling my dad. This is something—the woman on the phone saying, "You don't need to do that; you can think about this; but even to do this, you're going to pay some penance." Baylor wasn't cheap. It's not cheap now. It wasn't inexpensive then. I called my dad, and I was crying. I said, "I'm not going to make it into the master's program. In order for me to get into the bachelor's program, I've got to take 24 hours of coursework and make all A's."

I remember my dad saying—it was a pivotal moment in my life—he said, "Well, Kat, if that's what we have got to do, that's what we have got to do." It was a moment where my dad didn't say, "Well, that's what YOU have to do." He said, "That's what WE have to do." He could have been mad at me for all those bad grades. He could have lectured me, but instead he came alongside me. I remember, that was a moment where I picked my chin up, and I thought, "If he can believe in me at that level, then I'll believe in myself." So, I did. I got a job. I think I had a job on campus that year. Then I was

admitted into the MBA program. Ever since then, I've not struggled academically. But I will tell you, those bad accounting grades will sneak up on me every now and then still.

TS: You got an MBA in information systems. How did you get to information systems? Is that what your counselor recommended?

KS: I had accounting, and I'd coupled it with a minor in IS. I always liked the IS. While I struggled in accounting, I always liked the IS. It was a very different time in information systems than what it is today. During that time, businesses were embracing personal computing and different applications that they weren't using before.

TS: Personal computers were just coming in.

KS: Correct, 1981 for the IBM PC. So, all that was just happening. I was good at it. It was something that I felt confidence in. I liked the IS part, which was taking the business and the development angle and applying it to some problem and some solution. That was more intuitive to me and something that I embraced. I did a good job at it, and it came easier to me. It is a general MBA with a concentration in information systems. I was a graduate student at that time, worked with some faculty, and had a graduate assistantship. Eventually, I did get another job. While I was getting my MBA, I worked at an oil company in Waco and did accounting for them. So, I worked in their accounting and in their systems area for a period of time. It was a small, independent producer, who had oil fields out in west Texas. So, I worked for him for a number of years.

TS: Were you good at math?

KS: I was always okay at math, and I got better at it as I went into my doctoral program and did more statistics and analytical, but not naturally. I've always been okay. Good enough at it.

TS: I was just thinking with accounting, you're dealing with figures all the time.

KS: Yes. Yes.

TS: So, you got a master's in '86, and then you were a lecturer there for a while, weren't you?

KS: I was.

TS: How did that happen?

KS: Nobody was more surprised than me, the kid that almost flunked out. I had a good friend whom I met at church, but she was, ironically, an accounting faculty member at Baylor as I was getting my master's. She loved teaching. She just finished her PhD and came to Baylor as an assistant professor. She loved teaching, loved the academic life. And one day, she said, "Have you ever thought about being a professor?" I laughed. I said, "No," because I was still carrying around with me the negativity from being an undergrad. And

I said, "Absolutely not!" She said, "You should think about it. Go to the chair of the IS Department and tell him that you would like to teach a class for him if he ever has any vacancies." So, I did as I was told, and I went and talked to a man by the name of Reagan [M.] Ramsower. He was the department chair in IS at that time. He said, "Okay." Then a few weeks later he had somebody leave, and he said, "Not only do I have one class for you; I have four. So will you come teach for me in the fall?" So, I became a lecturer there. It was somebody just saying something to me that put me on a path because they saw something in me that I didn't see. And I was very grateful for that.

TS: You had never thought about being an education major?

KS: Never.

TS: So, this was just brand new out of the blue?

KS: Yes. And it was because she was speaking out of something that she loved. To this day she still teaches accounting at Baylor and absolutely loves the classroom, I think, probably more now than she did even at that time.

TS: And what was her name?

KS: Her name is Jane Baldwin, Professor Baldwin, and she teaches accounting at Baylor. She loved it. She thought I'd be good at it, spoke it into me. So, I taught there for a couple years. And if you're going to be in this field, it's a good idea to get the doctorate. So, I began thinking about how and at what point I would leave. I decided I'd stay and do that for three years. I'd completed my masters. I was no longer working at the oil company, and I'd stay at Baylor for three years. So, I was a lecturer and taught information systems introduction. I taught some statistics during that time, taught some application courses, and then knew that by 1990, I was going to go off and get my PhD.

TS: You must have enjoyed teaching.

KS: I love teaching. One of the things that is a theme for me is that I'm actually very afraid to speak. Public speaking terrifies me. So, teaching has been a way of learning how to do that. I was very, very nervous. I still remember the first class I ever taught, standing by the podium, my knees are knocking together. I was nervous, and I'll still get nervous to this day. Of course, after a number of years, you learn how to deal with that and how to address that. But I loved the classroom, loved interacting with the students. At that time, I was 25, and they were 19, so I was not that much older than they were. But I just loved the interaction with them and the ability to see lights come on. I also was a staff member at Baylor and ran their computer labs for a number of years. That was before I became a faculty member. So, I interacted with students in that capacity as well.

TS: I used to wonder when I was in graduate school, why they were preparing us so much in terms of a knowledge base and not teaching us how to teach.

KS: Right. Right. That was really the case. I was never taught how to teach.

TS: So how did you learn how to teach? Just by trial and error?

KS: Well, the good thing is you have colleagues. Colleagues can help you. “How do you put a syllabus together?” And they help you with that. “How do you teach certain types of material?” And they help you with that. Baylor had a new teacher orientation. That was something that I went through. That was pretty pivotal for me. I still remember, there was a master teacher at Baylor. Her name was Ann [Vardaman] Miller. She taught English. She is no longer alive today [died 12 August 2006], but she was a master teacher, legendary at Baylor. You remember, I said, I was scared to teach. Ann Miller taught this orientation to new teachers. I remember her sitting on the edge of the desk. It’s vivid in my mind to this day. She was talking from her experience. And Ann Miller, a master teacher, beautiful, eloquent teacher, said, “Every first class, I feel exactly the same.” The way she described it, she said, “I’m always afraid. Raw fear grips my breast.” Only an English teacher could say it that eloquently. But I thought if Ann Miller feels that way, and she can do it, then I can do it too. So, there’s that kind of mentoring that comes alongside you and makes all the difference.

TS: A nice thing about teaching is you have multiple chances to start over.

KS: You do.

TS: So why South Carolina? How did you get to the PhD program there?

KS: I knew I wanted to go somewhere where it was warm. I didn’t want to go anywhere that it was cold. So, I requested information. At that time, you didn’t go online and look at a school on a website because there wasn’t such a thing. But what I did was request brochures and information from a lot of different schools throughout the country, especially if it was in a warmer climate. I lived in Texas most of my life. I wanted to go somewhere different. This was a moment in time—it was in my late 20s—that I wanted to do that. I always planned to go back to Baylor, always planned to go back to Texas. So, I had a bunch of brochures, and I would go through those brochures and look at them. I remember I’d talk to friends about them. Lots of academic colleagues that were at Baylor and I would sit and talk, and they’d make recommendations, especially in the IS field. They’d talk about people that they knew.

But ultimately, I took the brochures to a local restaurant one night, got a cup of coffee and a piece of pie, and started going through them. I narrowed it down, I think, to five or six. When I got to the South Carolina one, I don’t know what it was, but I said, “That’s it. That’s the one I’m going to go to.” I had a good friend of mine that was in North Carolina at the time, so I knew somebody in the area. I got accepted to several different programs, but felt it was between South Carolina and the University of Arkansas. I just felt like I wanted to move to Columbia. I had never been to South Carolina, never been to Columbia. Columbia was the big city for me compared to Temple, which is funny

now when I think about it. But that was how I got there. It ended up being a very small group of us. There were just about three of us that started together that year.

TS: You got your doctorate in '96.

KS: Yes.

TS: And you started there in '90?

KS: Correct. I crammed that four-year program into about five and a half.

TS: I think that's probably par for the course, isn't it?

KS: Yes. I stayed there for five years, so I went in '90 and left in '95.

TS: The title of your dissertation is a mouthful, I think: "The Investigation of Individual Attitude toward an Information Technology-Enabled Information Practice."

KS: Boy, that is a mouthful!

TS: And then after a colon, "A Prescription for Corporate Information Policy." To me, the last part is clearer than the first part.

KS: Sure, sure. That isn't a mouthful.

TS: But I looked at your dissertation last night.

KS: Sorry.

TS: Why don't you talk about it and maybe mentors, Varun Grover, one of your dissertation co-chairmen, for instance.

KS: Sure, sure, sure. Dr. Grover was at South Carolina for a number of years [1989-2001] and went to Clemson [2002-2017]. He's at the University Arkansas right now [since 2017 as David D. Glass Endowed Chair and Distinguished Professor in the Walton College of Business]. He was an incredible mentor, an incredible example of what it means to be a great academic, especially in the research space. Very, very accomplished scholar and just a good person! He was very young in his career at that time [PhD in MIS, University of Pittsburgh, 1990]. Obviously, I was young. He had just been at South Carolina for a few years, but was very, very accomplished. He started out being a great researcher and publisher very early on. He primarily impacted me by example, by just watching him. It was classic dissertation leadership where you present something, and he looks at it, gives you feedback. You go back and you do it again, and over and over and over again.

The topic that I did—I don’t advise people to do a dissertation like I did mine. I was not very holistic in my doctoral career. I did things very incrementally. I would take the classwork, I did the comprehensive exams, and then I got to the dissertation. It would be a lot better to think about that dissertation early on. But when I was studying for my comprehensive exams, a new edition of our lead journal [*MIS Quarterly*] came out, and it had an article in there by a woman by the name of Mary [J.] Culnan. The article was called, “‘How Did They Get My Name?’: [An Exploratory Investigation of Consumer Attitudes toward Secondary Information Use,” Vol. 17, No. 3, Sept. 1993]. At that time, if you went to your mailbox, you’d get some kind of marketing material. We’re talking about 1992-93. You’d get marketing material, and you would go, “How did this company get my name?”

We don’t think a thing about it now because we know our information is shared all the time. But at that time there was this notion about, “Do we have any privacy and especially information privacy?” If I go to a car dealer, and I give them information about me in order to secure that loan, what are they doing with that information? Are they using it just for the primary purpose of giving me a loan for that car? Or are they selling it for secondary purposes? And how do I feel about it? So, that was the focus of what my dissertation was. The thing was Mary Culnan was very much of a pioneer in looking at privacy as an ethical issue in IT and in the IS field. So, I wanted to do my work in the area of information privacy.

Now, when we think about privacy, it’s everywhere. There are discussions about privacy. There are all kinds of laws and regulation about privacy, whether it’s in the healthcare arena or in the banking arena or wherever. Not the case back then, because the uses of the technology were preceding our discussions about whether we like those uses or not. So, I decided to pursue this idea of privacy, but I had to convince my committee that it was a strategic topic. They didn’t think it was.

TS: Really?

KS: Oh, yes. Remember, 1992 was when Congress said that we could use the internet for commercial purposes. Prior to that time, we weren’t on the internet.

TS: Well, the World Wide Web was coming in right about that time.

KS: Right about that time, yes, sir. Right about that time.

TS: So, your committee was old school then?

KS: Well, they were trying to make me ask, “Why is this strategic for a company to care about privacy?” We know today companies talk about privacy all the time. I’ll see commercials, and you’ve got companies that their job as a third-party vendor is to help a company protect the privacy of information. In higher ed we have FERPA [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act]. It’s very, very important that we are protecting the privacy of our students. But we weren’t having those conversations back then like we do

now. So, I chuckle every time I see there'll be a new mandate. Even in the USG [University System of Georgia], we'll have a new mandate for protection of employee privacy or of consumer privacy. It's not physical privacy, although that's always important, but it's information privacy. My study looked at how consumers think about information privacy, and are they concerned about it? I developed a model that examined that.

TS: I remember probably about that time that there was a big concern on this campus about the administration wanting to know what we were doing with our phones. Maybe even before emails, how much we were using our phones for college purposes, as opposed to private purposes.

KS: Private purposes, right.

TS: And it raised a real question in some people's mind about how private our calls were.

KS: Sure, sure, sure. Those are issues that have evolved over time. We all have our laptops, and we have our phones and different uses of them.

TS: So, you were really cutting edge in the 1990s.

KS: Well, there certainly were academic scholars in the IS field that were looking at ethical issues of the information age, and privacy was one of them. It just began to take off, and it makes sense that it took off at that time because, as you mentioned, the World Wide Web was coming in. And the fundamental issue at that time: was our information secure? And to what extent was it being shared? We now know it's shared a great deal, and credit card companies and corporations are going to do everything they can to protect your information. Sometimes that fails, but they're very motivated to protect it because that is going to encourage you to buy.

TS: Okay, you sent out surveys to whom? Consumers you said in your dissertation. What does that mean?

KS: I used what was called a mall intercept, a modified mall intercept program. I would have incentives that I would offer to individuals, but I would set up in places like a mall so that people would come by.

TS: Oh.

KS: Yes, they could register. They had to give up some of their privacy to do my survey, but they were willing to do so. And so that's how I gathered my data.

TS: So, you had four hundred people that agreed to do it?

KS: Yes, a stratified sample.

- TS: What were some of the conclusions that you reached?
- KS: The model predicted concerns that people would have. My goodness, I haven't looked at this in a long time, but there was an instrument that another scholar had created that measured concern for information privacy. It had dimensions such as collection: "Are you concerned about people collecting information about you?" It had concerns about access: "Who has access to the information that you have?" And secondary use: "Are they taking that information and using it for another purpose?" And there was another one that I'm not going to be able to pull out. So, I used that tool to predict whether people had concerns about a given practice. Overall, you would see that people had concerns, but then it was very dependent upon what that particular practice was.
- TS: So, you finished that in '96 and then went straight to Georgia State from there?
- KS: I did. Yes.
- TS: How did that come about?
- KS: I loved my time at Georgia State. When I was graduating from South Carolina, I had to make a decision as to whether I'd go back home to Texas and back to Baylor, or if I wanted to stay out in the Southeast. I really had grown to love the Southeast during that time, and so chose to stay here. I still thought that at some point I would migrate back to Texas but ended up not doing that. I loved my time at Georgia State. Georgia State at that time was coming into its own as a research institution. The department that I went into, the Information Systems Department, had hired some of the best researchers in the IS field in the nation. So, I got to work with those individuals. As a freshly minted naive PhD, I was able to work with people like Detmar [W.] Straub and Dan Robey and Ephraim [R.] McLean, fathers in the IS field, those that had created the field and were the groundwork and the foundation of research in that field. It was just a wonderful time for me to get to work with those individuals, to learn what it is to be at a research institution and what that means. So, I cherish those times and the relationships that I made there. I have a good friend of mine who's still there. Her name is Veda [C.] Storey, and Veda is renowned in the area of database and data science. It's fun now because she knew me as a young freshly minted PhD, and I still watch her career and see all the great things that she's doing. We got together just a few weeks ago and got to play catch up a little bit.
- TS: You actually joined the faculty there in 1995 before you got your doctorate, but after you had done all your work?
- KS: I did. I started there in '95, and I had not finished my dissertation at that time. I finished in probably about a year later and graduated in 1996. So, I did leave South Carolina having not finished my doctorate. That's a hard way to start a new job.
- TS: And you came in as an assistant professor as an ABD?
- KS: I did. Right. I came in as ABD.

TS: I guess you had done all the research at that time.

KS: I had, but you know what they always say, “If you leave, it’s going to take you much longer than it would.” So, I guess I started in fall 1995, and I had it finished in time to graduate in ’96. But man, it was a lot of hard work. It’s hard work starting a new job, moving to a new city, and finishing up that dissertation.

TS: I’m sure. By the way, before we leave South Carolina, I was noticing that there was at least one woman on your committee, Kathleen Whitcomb, and the dean [of the Graduate School] was female, Carol [Z.] Garrison?

KS: Yes. I did not know the dean at that time.

TS: Was it predominantly a male faculty?

KS: Very much so. I think of the PhD students that came in that year [1990], I was the only female in this department. There were three of us that were IS; the other two were male. Then the other two gentlemen that came in were in operations research. So very, very male dominated. I think Kathleen may have been the only female in that department at that time. Maybe there was one other, probably out of eighteen or nineteen.

TS: Wow. What about at Georgia State when you got there?

KS: Very much the same. The IS field is not a field to this day where there are a lot of women. I think probably a faculty of twenty or twenty-five at Georgia State, and there were three maybe four of us that were female. It is maybe a little better now than it was then in terms of more women in the field.

TS: But not much?

KS: Not much. IS is technically a STEM field, and we struggle with getting enough women into the STEM area.

TS: You were at Georgia State for seven years, 1995 to 2002. Were you an associate professor by that time, I guess?

KS: No, I was an assistant professor when I left. Georgia State was very much of a research institution. I love what I learned there, but I didn’t always feel like I fit there. The way I’ve described it is I was somewhat of a fish swimming upstream, but not only that, I was in the wrong stream. So, I began to look for a place that would be a better fit for me. At that time, I started thinking about going back to Texas, going back to Waco, but I had this opportunity at Kennesaw. Kennesaw had a position, ironically, in the Accounting Department. Remember how I said that accounting would come out and help me every now and then? So, it was in the Accounting Department here at KSU. And Accounting in the business school at that time had IS in that department. They had just a few faculty that were teaching in the Accounting Department that would teach some basic IS courses.

I think there were three or four of us. So, I applied for that position. That's how I got here to Kennesaw. And that position was really designed. They wanted somebody who knew something about accounting, so that they could develop some accounting information systems courses. So, that old accounting degree that I had was coming in handy. That was what got me in the door here at KSU.

TS: Who was the department chair at that time?

KS: John [P.] McAllister was the department chair at that time. Yes, yes, good guy.

TS: So, in 2002, you come to Kennesaw because it's a better fit. Tim [Timothy S.] Mescon was the dean [of the Michael J. Coles College of Business].

KS: Yes, he sure was.

TS: By the way, before I forget it all together, I meant to ask you when we were still back at Baylor, you got an award as an outstanding teacher, I believe that a fraternity gave, Alpha Kappa Psi?

KS: Right, right, right.

TS: Talk about that.

KS: I was extremely honored by that. Oftentimes you will have students in your classes that are also in these business fraternities. Alpha Kappa Psi is a business fraternity. They will nominate you if they feel like you've had an impact on them. I was greatly honored by that and grateful for that opportunity, grateful that students connected with the teaching.

TS: Fabulous.

KS: Yes.

TS: So, you came to Kennesaw, and it wasn't long before you got into administration. How did that happen?

KS: Please know I never intended to get into administration. I came to Kennesaw to teach, to be a researcher, to do service. That was why I came here. I developed a lot of different classes while I was here. I think I developed nine different classes just during the few years, a lot of undergrad classes, but also several master's classes at the MBA level. I taught in the MAcc program, the Master of Accounting program. I was doing an IS audit and control class, which was a lot of fun. I did that at the undergrad level. So, I was doing a lot of teaching and a lot of course development. I was one of three or four IS faculty in the bigger Accounting Department. The Accounting Department at that time probably had twenty-five or twenty-six people in it.

John McAllister, who was the chair, took a deanship [in 2005] in Jacksonville, Florida, at the University of North Florida. He and I were going into a meeting to meet with the dean about an IS topic. I still remember him putting his hand on the door, going into the dean's suite. He said, "Hey, I'm going to get that dean's job. Do you know who they think should be the interim chair?" I had no concept at all of it being me. And he said, "You." I said, "That seems highly unlikely." I was a little floored, like, stepped back because I had no aspirations. I didn't see myself in that type of role at all. Another faculty member, Dana [R.] Hermanson, said something similar to me.

I had taught by that point for a number of years and had enjoyed it, but I was looking for other opportunities. I wasn't thinking administrative. I was thinking more, what could I do to elevate my research and take that up a few notches? Tim probably wouldn't have known me from Adam. And if he did—I think a couple of faculty had said, "You should have her be the interim"—and I think he would've thought, "That quiet one? The one that never says anything?" So, he gave me a chance. I served as interim chair in 2005. That was the year [2005-2006] that they recruited [W.] Ken Harmon to come into that role [as permanent chair]. I enjoyed it. I found out that I liked being in meetings, which is weird. I liked figuring out how to solve problems. I was also as green as you could be and didn't understand a lot of the processes and the way that things needed to be done. So, I was on a really, really steep learning curve.

But Dr. Mescon and I worked well together. I think he liked that I wanted to get in and make things better and solve some problems. So, we hired Ken Harmon in during that year, and I went back to faculty for a few months, I think for a semester. Then, Tim Mescon asked me to be an associate dean [for administration]. So, I went up into the dean's office. I was able to get this opportunity to see how a department worked, which is so important, I think, in an administrative career. Then as an associate dean, I was responsible for the operations of the college, both the academic affairs side, and was really kind of his number two. Very quickly I began learning from him what he was doing. He would give me different projects. So, it was a great learning opportunity with a big learning curve.

TS: Talk about what Kennesaw was like from your perspective when you came here in 2002. Not so much research; we weren't an R1. But what was your impression of Kennesaw? You said it was a better fit for you.

KS: Right. Well, there was obviously a big focus on the classroom. I think the people, especially the people that I interacted with in the business school, certainly the folks in accounting, had a real passion for the classroom. The Accounting Department was very focused on students being prepared for the marketplace, being prepared in an exceptional way, both as professionals in the accounting firm, but also technically prepared that they could do it. So, you could really feel that. You could sense that. The big difference that I felt; remember that I was coming from a department that was purely an IS department, and everything was about IS. Now, I was in a department that was predominantly an accounting department with some IS. That was a big difference. I had to change gears, and that took me a little while to adjust. But I certainly felt the passion of the faculty and

the staff towards the classroom. That would've been the biggest thing that I felt at that time.

TS: I was amazed looking back that you had business law in that department too.

KS: Correct, it's still there, accounting and business law. IS is no longer there, but accounting and business law are there. That's not unusual. The CPA exam has a business law component to it, so it's not unusual to see that.

TS: Well, we've had some fabulous accounting professors over the years.

KS: We sure have.

TS: I've interviewed Dana Hermanson a couple times and Divesh [S.] Sharma.

KS: Yes, yes, yes.

TS: Some good people over there.

KS: We do. Back when I first got here, Paula [H.] Morris [was an associate professor of accounting]. You may know Paula?

TS: Oh yes, sure.

KS: When I think about the heart and soul of that department at that time, Jane [E.] Campbell was here at the time as well. These are individuals that love the classroom, love the students. Linda [M.] Malgeri is another one. They wanted to prepare them for the profession. Accounting is a profession, and they wanted to prepare them for that profession.

TS: Did you come in as an associate professor?

KS: I did. I did.

TS: So, you got a promotion by coming.

KS: I absolutely did.

TS: So, you become an associate dean in 2006?

KS: Let me think. Probably 2007, maybe January of 2007.

TS: Then it was August of 2008 when Tim left to be president of Columbus State.

KS: Correct. I think in January of 2007, I became his associate dean and worked with him for about a year and a half before he left. He left here to be president of Columbus State.

One of the things that he'd wanted to do before he left was to build a doctoral program, and he got that doctoral program. He didn't build it, but he got the doctoral program approved at the Board of Regents in spring of 2008. I think that was something he wanted to do before he concluded his deanship. He was dean here for eighteen or nineteen years [1990 to 2008], so for a long time. He told me, "This was my goal." So, he assumed that presidency, and I was able to step in that year as interim, and really began the task of implementing the doctoral program, which was something that I worked on from '08, '09, on up till 2019 when I left the deanship.

A doctoral program is sometimes an interesting beast to navigate. How do you staff it? How do you bring it back? It was a wonderful journey. But yes, I became interim dean. I didn't feel prepared to be an interim department chair and certainly didn't feel prepared to be an interim dean. But you just dig in. I will always say, "I may not be the smartest person in the room, but nobody's going to outwork me." I've got a lot of elbow grease, so I'm going to get in there and work hard and figure it out. I made a lot of mistakes. We always make mistakes. But I think when you're a green administrator, you step on it a few times, but I do try to learn from those mistakes. Great time! Great year, '08! I really liked being the dean. It was a lot of fun to be dean. Now you're going to see a pattern here. We hired Ken Harmon to be our dean in '09, right?

TS: He keeps replacing you.

KS: Yes, I'm preparing the way for Ken Harmon. That's how I felt all the time.

TS: That's a good way to put it.

KS: So, Ken at that point became our dean and did a fabulous job. He was with us for only a year, if you think back to that time, because he was then tapped very quickly by Dan Papp to come up and be interim provost in fall 2010. Then, of course he ends up staying in that role. So, I go back to the dean's job at that point and end up being interim about three more years.

TS: I guess my biggest surprise from interviewing Ken Harmon was trying to imagine him with long hair and playing a guitar and doing all the rhythm and blues or whatever he was performing with his band.

KS: Right, right. He loves music, still does to this day.

TS: Betty Siegel was president when you came to Kennesaw. Talk about your relationship with her. Did you get to know her at all?

KS: I did get to have a few conversations with Betty. Betty was always good about stopping and talking to somebody and distilling, asking questions. She was always somebody who would ask questions. So, it was during the time, I believe that I was interim department chair. I think I ran into her at one of the progressive dinners that we would have for new faculty at that time. She just asked me about what I was doing and what I thought about

the role and what I was going to accomplish that year. Then I had a few other opportunities through the years to meet with her, especially when I was dean. She and I were honored by the Morris Brown Foundation on the same evening. So I got sit at a table with her and Joel, and that was really memorable for me to get to visit with her. What I think about Betty most is her energy and just how energetic she was and how that energy filled a room and how she really led from that space.

TS: She did a lot of mentoring of women, moving them into administrative positions throughout her twenty-five years here. But you came in at the end of that, I guess.

KS: I did, I did. I was a faculty member during that time, and I believe Dan and Ken started at the same time in 2006. Ken came at that time and then Dan as well. So, I'm grateful that I had some time where I was here under Betty's leadership, which was real special.

TS: Well, I guess you got to know Dan pretty well as an interim dean.

KS: I did. I did. At that time, [Lendley C.] Lynn Black was here [until August 2010 when he became chancellor of the University of Minnesota Duluth]. Lynn was the one who initially put me into that role. I've stayed in contact with Lynn, not regularly, but through the years. He and I will exchange emails every now and then. He and I came to Kennesaw [at the same time] in fall 2002. So, he and I were in new faculty orientation together. We sat at the same table. Then he was the one that asked me to serve as interim dean during that time. Then I did get to know Dan through the years that I was a dean. A lot of times those are interactions that you have at events, and you get to have some conversations with them. In some cases, there might be projects that you're working on, and as business dean there might be a project that he's interested in that involves the college.

TS: Well, let me ask you one last question before we break for today. We'll talk about your administrative experiences the next time we get together. But you got a master's degree in liberal arts from Johns Hopkins University. How did that come about? I don't have the date.

KS: I graduated in 2018, so that was a late...

TS: In 2018?

KS: Correct. Correct. That came about when I was dean in Coles College. I was interim dean [2008-2009 and 2010-2012], but I became [permanent] dean in about April of 2012. During that next year, I'm hanging out with the dean from the College of the Arts, [Patricia] Patty Poulter, and the dean from Humanities and Social Sciences, [Robert H.] Robin Dorff. When I say hanging out, we were interacting a lot in deans' meetings. We would go to some conferences together that would have some common themes. I over time realized that even though I had three degrees in business—I had an MBA, a BBA, and a PhD in business—there was something that from an education point of view, I felt was lacking. So, I thought, "I'm going to go and get a master's." At first I thought I

would do something in the arts, but then I realized you've got to be artistic, and I'm not. So, I started looking at different programs, and I saw this program. There was a program at Rutgers I was interested in. There was also this program at Johns Hopkins. So, I applied to it and was accepted into that program. By the way, they wanted to know why my grades were so bad as an undergrad at accounting.

TS: Well, you had a PhD. That ought to count for something.

KS: I did, but they still wanted to know about those poor grades in accounting at Baylor. What I loved about this degree, I sometimes felt uneducated because I had all these degrees in business, but there was something missing. I also had never taken classes just for the joy of it. I was always pursuing a degree. So, even though I would be pursuing this master's of liberal arts, I was doing it for me. I was doing it because I wanted to and because I wanted to learn in this place. I also know that in these administrative jobs, we're all busy, we're all busy. For me to sit down and read about ethics in the way that I would get in the course that I took on ethics, I'm probably not going to do that, right? So, the structure of a course, the structure of higher ed, was something that I really gravitated towards.

So, I applied to and was accepted in this master's of liberal arts program. It was one of the best experiences I've ever done. The MLA program at Johns Hopkins is an interdisciplinary program. They don't really have a defined core that you have to take. It was ten classes. They have a set of classes you choose from. So, I took a couple of classes in religion, which was wonderful. I took a class in family dynamics. I took a class in politics. I took one in the metamorphosis of art. I took a theater course. Probably one of my favorite classes was something called Writing the Sea, and it was actually held in Annapolis. So, I went to Annapolis for a couple of weeks. It was a writing course, but you learned to write by reading. They would bring in different authors that had written some books about the sea. It was just a wonderful, wonderful experience! I took a digital humanities class. So, I learned about that area, which I knew nothing about.

TS: I was going to ask, were the courses mainly online?

KS: Most of them were online. That was another thing for me. Kennesaw State does a lot of online programming, but I never taught online and never took a class online. I'm a big believer that you can learn online, especially when courses are designed well. These instructors did a lot in the area of group discussions, and it helped me to have the time to reflect and structure my thoughts. So, it was a wonderful, wonderful experience. I went to graduation in May 2018.

TS: You walked through graduation?

KS: I walked through graduation and loved every moment. There's not a graduation I've ever had that I haven't [walked through] graduation. It was fun, a big coliseum. My name

was called, and I walked and shook the hand of the dean. So, it was a great experience. I'd do it again in a minute. It was wonderful.

TS: I remember [Robert B.] Bob Ormsby [Jr.], the former president of Lockheed, saying he knew a whole lot more about Shakespeare than English majors know about quantum physics. I think it's good for all of us to go into a different discipline and learn something different.

KS: Yes. I'll share two stories about that. One of them was, there was one course I had. Johns Hopkins does A+'s, so you can get an A+. You can get an A. You can get an A-. It was an environmental class. The instructor was brilliant. She lived in a yurt in Montana, I think, and I loved the class. It was a brilliant, brilliant course and brilliant instructor. I had a hundred on everything, a hundred on everything. So, I just assumed I got an A+. Never checked the grade, never once checked the grade. So, the semester ended, and next semester and for some reason I was looking at my grades. I was already taking the next class, but looking at my grades sitting in my dean's office in Coles. I got an A, and it was an environmental class. I thought, "Wait, whoa, whoa, whoa, that is wrong. I was supposed to have an A+ in that class."

So, I set up my computer, and I said, "Am I, as dean of the business school, going to email this instructor as a student and ask about my grade? How many grade appeals am I in the process of?" I looked, and it was already too late to appeal the grade, but I did. I emailed her. I said, "Hey, just noticed that...". I never heard back from her. It was already past the time, but I thought, "I've got to at least ask." So, having been an academic and having been a teacher and having been an administrator for so many years, and now to be on the other side of the podium, to be a student in the class, it was a great experience. It was this moment where I went, "Wow, this is what students feel. This is what they experience." And even the power dynamic that you feel.

I'll tell you one more story about my MLA experience. This was probably summative for me in terms of that experience. It was the same class. It was an environmental class, and I was to do a report on an environmentalist. I don't know why, but I selected a guy by the name of David [Ross] Brower. David Brower had developed a number of environmental organizations. He was executive director of the Sierra Club. He started the John Muir Institute [for Environmental Studies] and different [organizations]. He was an environmentalist from his very heart and from who he was. I really didn't know a darn thing about David Brower. So, I was doing all this research about him. Obviously, he wouldn't be excited about a lot of development, a lot of industrialization. He was about preserving nature. So, I was writing that paper, and a few days later I was in my office. In Coles the window in the dean's office looks out on the atrium [of the Burruss Building]. I looked down at our Division of Global Affairs within the business school. It had a bulletin board where it was promoting different studies abroad and how you could learn about the world. And there was our globe [Spaceship Earth sculpture beside the Social Sciences Building] that we have of David Brower climbing the globe on that poster.

I thought, “David wouldn’t like that. David would not be about promoting international business, but here we are. Because he’s walking on top of a globe, here we are using that to promote international business.” Now I would never have known that. I just stood there, and I thought, “Isn’t that interesting?” We just go by these things every day. As I did my paper, I googled him, and up comes Kennesaw State University because of the sculpture that we have on our campus.

TS: You had to be here when the globe exploded [in the middle of the night on December 29, 2006; the sculpture was reconstructed in 2007].

KS: I was here when the globe exploded. And I remember when the artist [known as Eino] was here, when the sculptor was here, and he was creating. But it was just surreal for me that I’m taking this class, I’m investigating and writing a paper on a gentleman who had lived his life [1912-2000] and had since passed and had this big environmental impact. And then the connection to Kennesaw State University! Not only that, the impact that we’re using his image probably in a way that he would not at all have been happy about! So, it was a real coming together moment for me.

TS: Well, thank you. We’ll wind it up here for the day.

KS: My pleasure. Thank you. Thank you.

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Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
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Location: Kennesaw Hall, President's Board Room

TS: When I interviewed [interim provost Ronald H.] Ron Matson in December 2018, he told me about the Department of Computer Science and Information Systems splitting while he was interim dean [of the College of Science and Mathematics from July 2010 to June 2012]. Following the split, the Information Systems faculty moved to the Coles College. That was confusing to me because you said in the first interview that you joined the Coles College in 2002 as an associate professor of Information Systems. Could you explain again what department you joined in 2002 and where the information systems faculty were at that time?

KS: When I came to KSU, I joined the Accounting Department. At that time, it was a department of accounting and business law. Now, my discipline is information systems, and information systems is often found in a business school. So, my degree is from a business school that has an information systems discipline. At this time in KSU's history, which was 2002, the IS discipline was not in the business school. It was in the College of Science and Math. Computer science and information systems were together in the College of Science and Math.

But typically, you have a required Management Information Systems course in most business schools. And so, I was hired in to teach that particular course. There were a handful of us, maybe three or four, that were full-time IS faculty members in the business school, and we were housed in the Accounting Department. Not unusual. IS itself is a very young discipline. It has only been around since really the '70s. And a lot of the initial academic departments in IS were in schools of accounting or departments of accounting. So, very typical where I was.

TS: How many information systems people did we have in the College of Science of Mathematics?

KS: They had computer science, and they had information systems. I'm not going to get the exact number, but I would say maybe ten to eleven, in that realm. They would have lecturers, assistant, associate, and full professors as well.

TS: There was a time when we did not have computer science faculty, way back. Then, a whole lot of the math people reprogrammed themselves to be able to teach computer science before we hired more people in that area. But I was surprised that anybody in information systems would have been in the College of Science and Math at all.

KS: This way predates my coming here in 2002. But sometimes decisions are made where to locate a discipline, perhaps based upon enrollment, perhaps based upon discipline. I think in that case, there were some similarities between IS and computer science. The way they built the program was that there was a lot of commonality in the degree programs. Then at one point, the students would branch off. They would make a decision either to be an IS major or computer science major. They are very, very different types of degrees. The computer science is more math, whereas the IS has a lot of the business components in it. The outcomes, what students do from those degrees, are very, very different. But there is some commonality. But when I became interim dean [of the Coles College], Ron Matson was interim dean in the College of Science and Math. He came to me, and we began having a conversation about moving the IS faculty from the College of Science and Math into the Coles College, which ultimately we did. There is now a Department of Information Systems in the business school. I think they're knocking on having about thirty faculty as of today. So, we took that small group of faculty that I was with in the School of Accountancy, and we coupled it with faculty from Science and Math that had the IS background—not the computer scientists, but the IS background—and we created this new Department of Information Systems.

TS: Ron had said that the computer science people all got their degrees in mathematics, whereas the IS people all got their degrees from a business school.

KS: Correct, very, very different purpose. So, at KSU, you get an IS degree, but it's in the BBA program, Bachelor of Business Administration. You take accounting and economics and marketing and finance and all those core business classes. Then, you focus in on the IS as your major. So, you're positioned to be somebody in an organization that understands the business, but also understands the technology and the computing capabilities. Whereas computer science is going to be much more intensive in the technology area or in the algorithm area, in the math area. There are a whole horizon of different degrees across computing, even more so today than there was twenty years ago.

TS: Could you talk again about how you become interim Chair of the Department of Accounting?

KS: Again, I was one of maybe three or four IS folks within a department of accounting and business law faculty. John McAllister, who was the department chair, and had been a department chair for a long time in accounting, had hired me. John left to go be dean at the University of North Florida. I was really honored and somewhat taken aback that a couple of folks had said, "Hey, Kat needs to be the interim." That's essentially how it played out. At that time, Tim Mescon was the dean in the Coles College. Tim and I didn't really know each other that much. I was a faculty member in the Accounting Department, but I guess he listened to a couple folks who said Kat could do this. So, I went in and served as an interim in the fall of '05.

TS: So, you had been here three years, starting your fourth.

- KS: Yes, starting my fourth year. I never, ever had any idea or any inclination to be an administrator. Nobody was more surprised that a few folks had recommended me for the role than I was because I just never really thought about it. I served in that role for the interim year and loved it. I found out I liked the administrative part. There's a lot of it that was challenging that I had never understood, having been a faculty member before. There are different challenges and different things that you deal with that you might not think about when you're a faculty member, but I really enjoyed it. Then that year, Ken Harmon joined the department as a chair. He was joining us from Millsaps College [Jackson, Mississippi], where he had been the dean of [the school of management].
- TS: So, there wasn't any great drama about the accountants couldn't get along with each other, so they wanted somebody from IS to head the department?
- KS: No, no, I don't think there was anything like that. It's one of the most harmonious departments I've ever been a part of. Very hard-working individuals. I loved my time in the Accounting Department and consider it one of my home departments. Even though now I'm technically in the IS Department, I still feel a strong connection to that unit.
- TS: Well, we've had some superior faculty members from the School of Accountancy.
- KS: Oh, sure, sure, the Hermansons [Dana R. and Heather M.] Great faculty in that area.
- TS: You were also a chair of another department, weren't you?
- KS: Yes, I was.
- TS: Did you go from being interim to interim, or did you go back to full-time teaching in 2006?
- KS: In '05/'06, I was interim department chair. Then, the fall of '06, I went back to [full-time] faculty. That was the year that Ken came. By January [spring semester 2007, I became an associate dean within the college. Dean Mescon and I began working together, and that's where I got a broader perspective. As associate dean, I was in charge of the academic portfolio, T&P [tenure and promotion], dealt a lot with academic affairs, with hiring. I guess essentially what we would call a senior associate dean. I don't know that I had that title, but I moved into the dean's suite at that time and just learned a lot about what it means to lead a college, which is different from what it means to lead a department—a very different perspective at that level. But I worked closely with him.
- TS: How so is it different?
- KS: Well, I think any level that you have, any position you have, you deal with the constituents of that level mainly. When you're a department chair, you're dealing face-to-face with your students a lot and with your faculty and obviously, the staff that support your programs. So, it's very frontline. This class has to be staffed; we've got to find a faculty member to fill this section of this course; so, are we going to hire a part-timer? If

that's the case, then we've got to initiate that hiring process. And there's the budget at the unit level. How do you allocate a certain amount of limited operating budget across a unit? It's a perspective and almost a purview. As a department chair, you're working very closely with your students and with your faculty. In many cases, you're looking at your programs too. It's really the bread and butter of the university. You've got your faculty, you've got your staff, you've got your academic programs, and students are coming into those programs. So, you've got the curriculum piece, and you're navigating that, thinking about developing new programs. Or are there classes that need to be changed and evolved? So that's very much what you're doing at that level.

When you come up to the dean's office, as an associate dean, you're now managing or looking at or overseeing a portfolio of programs. In the business school, at that time, there would've been four or five academic programs. Each one is different. Disciplines bring a lot of personality to them. It's not just the unit you're most familiar with. It's a broader perspective of disciplines that you're navigating. Now, you're working with those department chairs and helping them facilitate the work that they're doing on the frontline. I think with every level, you have a different constituency. Again, with the department chairs, we're thinking about students, faculty, staff. When you go up to the college level, you have a broader base of faculty; you have a broader base of students that you're looking at. It's now a different resource perspective as well. It is not just, "These are the funds I have at the department." It is now, "Oh, these are the funds that we have at the college. How do we allocate them? What's the strategy?" That type of thing. I think that's true when you go from dean to provost, and certainly to this role [as president]. There's just a different perspective.

TS: Did you stop teaching at that point, or did you still have a course to teach?

KS: I taught in 2007. I think it was one of the last times I taught. That year, I was an associate dean, and I was requested, probably about February 2007, to come and serve as interim chair in the College of Science and Math. That was the Department of Computer Science and Information Systems.

TS: So, you did get connected to that department.

KS: Yes, I did. I was just with them for about four or five months. They had a chair that stepped down, and I went in and led them. The dean wanted me there because of my IS background. We had IS faculty and computer science faculty, so he asked me to come in for four or five months. It was a very short period of time. I got to work with that group, and we ran a search for a chair. I really loved working with them in that capacity.

TS: Who was dean at that time?

KS: [Laurence I.] Larry Peterson. Larry had asked me to come over and do that for from February to May or June probably.

TS: And Tim Mescon left in 2008, I believe.

KS: Correct.

TS: Did you go back to being associate dean?

KS: I stayed in both roles. While I was interim chair, I was still associate dean in the business school.

TS: So, I guess it makes sense that you became interim dean when Tim Mescon left to be president of Columbus State University.

KS: Yes. That was in the summer of 2008 that he left, and I did assume that role at that time. I was, I think the only associate dean [of administration] in the dean's office at that time. I think [Rodney Alsup] was serving as our graduate dean, and [Jane E. Campbell] was associate dean of undergraduate business]. as well.

TS: So, Tim leaves and you become interim dean, and I guess Ken Harmon is going to follow you again?

KS: He is. That's right.

TS: So, you were interim dean for about a year, I guess?

KS: That would've been 2008/2009. One of the things that was a big part of my learning curve that year was we were preparing for our first accreditation visit that I was affiliated with from AACSB [Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business]. That's a big learning curve when you're preparing for the visit. The visit didn't happen until fall of '09, but we were preparing for that visit. So, I was interim dean during that time. Big learning curve! Again, with every move that you make, you get a different perspective and a different purview.

When you're an associate dean or a chair, you're mainly internal to the college. When you go to a dean's role, obviously you have to lead and shepherd the college, but you're also external. You're external to the community, but you're also connected with the provost office and the provost. The college has to be a part of that strategy of the whole academic unit, so that was a big part of it as well. But we did do a dean search, and I did not apply for that position. I did not feel like I was ready for that position long term because, if you think about it, I had been in administration only for about three years and lots of different interim roles at that time. So, I was thrilled when Ken did apply and moved into that position.

TS: You were still publishing some papers at that time, weren't you?

KS: Yes, I was. Most of the work that I had done prior to my coming to KSU was in the area of privacy or in the area of IT outsourcing, so I did some of that here. Here, I continued both privacy and outsourcing, but I also did some work in project management. It was an area that I liked a lot. So, a paper or two in that space as well.

TS: When Ken Harmon becomes the dean, what did you do?

KS: I went back to associate dean that next year. That would've been the year we had the accreditation visit, which was a big deal. That was a lot to prepare for. Then, we had to host the actual visit. Ken was dean; so, I was his senior associate dean at that point.

TS: August 2010 was when [provost] Lynn Black left, and Ken Harmon becomes interim provost.

KS: That's right. President Papp asked Ken to serve in the interim provost role. I know you've talked to Ken, but Ken was very excited about being the dean in the Coles College. I think that was the main role that he wanted to have and was very excited. So, the idea of going to the provost role for him was one of, "I'll go for a year, but then I'll come back." I don't think he applied for the provost position, but then the [first] search wasn't successful. So, he ended up staying another year. But when he became provost, I went back into the interim dean role again. So, now, I was in that role again. Then, eventually he does apply for the provost role, and I stay interim dean, I think another year at least. So, I don't become [permanent] dean until May 2012, I think. So, lots of years of interim. I think there were three interim years out of four.

TS: That means that you've been dean of Coles College for half the time you've been at Kennesaw.

KS: If you look at from 2008 to 2019, yes, that's true—either interim or full time.

TS: So, from 2012 until 2019 you are permanent dean. Let's get into that period and talk about what was going on in that time. Let me start with the question of community outreach as dean. I think maybe the Coles College has a real advantage in that it's a business school and works with the business community a lot, regardless of fundraising or anything else.

KS: Right.

TS: Did you enjoy community outreach and what Betty Siegel used to call friend-raising?

KS: Right, right. I loved that part of the job. I hadn't done a lot of it until I became dean, both interim dean initially in '08, and then certainly continuing that through the time that I was a dean from 2012 on. I think it's incredibly important when you're in a dean's role, much like when you're in a president's role. You become the face of that organization. It's important to be in the community and to engage with people. There are a lot of different ways to do that. We had a great advisory board that Tim Mescon had established, and I had nurtured for a number of years. We restructured it a little bit. We got it down to a smaller size. I think it was around forty when I first took over.

TS: Oh, really?

KS: I had somebody on the advisory board say, “Hey, Kat, I know how I got on this board, but I don’t know how to get off this board.” So, we put in some bylaws so that people could rotate off and that we could understand expectations. But that’s really where you start as a dean, working with that board and allowing them to connect you to people in the community and just engaging with them and having conversations. Now, I will also say, being a business dean, you’re right, you have this natural connection to the business community. But when you have a business community like we have, the Coles College sits in a wonderful business community with Atlanta, with the Cobb community, and in this whole area.

It’s a phenomenal area for a lot of different reasons. I’ll tell you, we never had a challenge being able to staff classes, because we always had folks from the business community. If we needed some talent, we always had some highly, highly qualified people who could step in. So, engaging with the business community in this area, especially with Atlanta at our front door, was an honor. It was a privilege. It was fun. It was always very exciting. You have a lot of technology energy in Atlanta, so, it’s always fun to engage with that. Those partnerships and relationships come very organically. One of the things that we tried to do, starting in that ’08 timeframe, was a strategic plan within the college and working with members of the college on what are some things that we want to do? One of the things was to elevate our profile. So, very intentionally we began to do things that would help us do that.

One of them has to do with branding and marketing and that type of thing. We had a great group within the college that understood how to do that much better than I understood how to do it. But we focused on elevating our brand and our recognition. That has halo effects that last for a long time. It was very, very exciting. The truth is, you’ve got great faculty. That’s the thing that I love about KSU, and this is true across the campus. I certainly experienced it while I was in Coles. You have faculty that are really passionate about what they do and authentically so. So, I think the programs that we had in the business school were excellent. They were producing excellent graduates. The faculty cared deeply about that, so, we did everything that we could to elevate and to promote those programs.

TS: Who chaired your community advisory board?

KS: Oh, lots of different people did. Typically, you would have a chair from within the board, so different members of the board. Each year we would have a different board chair, so I don’t think I can pull out one, but we would have different board chairs throughout time.

TS: Well, let me ask the question maybe another way. Do you think that some colleges were much more involved in community outreach than others?

KS: Yes. To your point earlier, you said sometimes it’s easier for the business school because there’s this natural connection to the corporate world, right? But I think there’s a natural connection to the corporate world with the College of Humanities and Social Sciences as

well. You have a lot of disciplines that engage, and a lot of those graduates go into corporate positions. Same thing with Science and Math, where you're feeding a lot of scientific corporations with great talent. So, I think it's a more natural fit because of the disciplines that are inherent there, but I think any college can be intentional about it, any dean can be intentional about it. And I think our deans right now are very intentional about it. And that's core to what they do.

TS: But I just find it hard to imagine some of the deans of the past doing a whole lot of community outreach. On the other hand, [former dean Joseph D.] Joe Meeks was certainly doing a lot with the College of the Arts.

KS: The College of the Arts has a different type because you want to connect obviously to the arts community. That interplay between the arts community and the institution is so important. The community wants to be connected to the talent that's here, and vice versa. And I think, to your point, Tom, at different stages in an institution's history, you have different priorities. I think at different stages in the institution's history, you have different focuses. In any five-year history of a college or a university, there are going to be things that are compelling you at that point in time that you're going to prioritize and address.

TS: Was Larry Peterson involved in the community at all?

KS: I know he was involved with some corporations. Larry had a big passion for education. He wanted to create science educators and math educators. That was a real passion that he had.

TS: Maybe another way to ask it, I don't remember most deans of the past doing a lot of fundraising. I could be wrong.

KS: I also think, again, maybe there were different priorities of the institution at a given point in time. When I was dean, I was never held accountable for fundraising. I was never told, "Here, you have this target. You need to raise this amount of money per year." During my time as dean, and it's really because I worked with some great faculty and some great teammates, we raised about \$13 million. But there are a couple things that have to happen, and this is where we are today. President [Pamela S.] Whitten put the structure in place. She hired somebody who knows how to structure around and organize around fundraising, and that's Lance [E.] Burchett. Our deans all have targets on them. Every year they are asked to raise a certain amount of money. I don't know that we had a culture of fundraising until the past three or four years. We had some success in fundraising, but I think President Whitten revolutionized what that means at this institution. Because during her short three years, we had three of the largest gifts ever given to this institution. And she was here for three years [July 2018-June 2021].

TS: The Radow gift: was that one of them in that period?

KS: It was.¹ Another one was the Brown gift.² And the Bailey gift to name the School of Music.³ Those are all significant gifts and some largest gifts that we've ever had.

TS: So it was not part of the job description [for deans] until relatively recently?

KS: It was part of the expectations, and so, I think it would've been in the job descriptions. But again, you have to have the infrastructure for fundraising. It doesn't happen just because you have a dinner with a potential donor. What I think Lance Burchett has brought to the table is he has built a whole infrastructure that is needed. It's just like with research and what Dr. [Phaedra S.] Corso is doing [since February 2019] as Vice President of Research. She is building the infrastructure to help support our faculty in being successful.

What Lance has done is he has got a very highly organized and accurate database of donors and potential donors. He has almost scientific methods of what you do to raise money. Part of that is having those targets, not just for deans but for other leaders on campus, and building a culture of fundraising and a mindset of fundraising—giving on campus by staff and employees, giving by alumni. In some of those areas we need to do better than what we're doing right now, but he's building that infrastructure. It's not just saying, "Oh, we're going to do [so much] this year because we're going to ask for this money." There's a way that you do it. There's a way that you approach folks. And I think we have a better system now and a better unit in that space now than we ever had before. You have to look at the numbers because the numbers confirm that since he's been here. So, it's really what he and President Whitten did. They created the foundation for what I think will be extraordinary fundraising going forward.

TS: It's really interesting to see the evolution of the [Kennesaw State University] Foundation over the years, from when it first started in 1969. If they raised \$30,000 a year, they thought they were having a good year.

KS: Sure, and that's okay, right? There should be an evolution of all of this, and that really wasn't the focus of the institution. We were trying to get our roots in the ground at that point.

TS: Then, when they got a \$1 million gift from Michael [J.] Coles [in 1994], we named a school for him, which now is a college.

KS: That's right.

¹ Norman J. and Lindy Radow gave \$9 million in 2020 to the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, which is now named for Mr. Radow.

² Rosemary and John Brown gave the Honors College \$10 million in 2020 to establish an endowment matching fund.

³ The Bobbie Bailey Foundation gave \$5 million in 2021.

- TS: Although, I understand that was controversial with some of the business faculty who thought the college name was sold too cheaply.
- KS: Yes, that predates me.
- TS: But anyway, the \$13 million the Coles College raised while you were dean sounds fantastic to raise [that level of] philanthropic gifts over seven years
- KS: It is. But a lot of it, again, has to do with working with folks. Some of those were big gifts that were given to some of the centers within the college. There were some individual gifts as well. Fundraising is a team effort, but you've got to prioritize it. You've got to make sure it's a focal point.
- TS: Well, you've already mentioned the accreditation. I think you had to go through a second accreditation with AACSB while you were dean?
- KS: Correct.
- TS: Wasn't the first [AACSB] accreditation in the 1990s [1994]? I know Tim Mescon was involved in it, and that was a big deal when [the business school] first got accredited.
- KS: It is a big deal. It's a big deal for a lot of reasons. There is a small percentage of schools worldwide that have business and accounting accreditation by AACSB. It is the gold standard in business education, so that's important to have. It also helps you to structure and organize, so that everybody's not just going in one direction. Business educators from across the world get together and establish these principles for accreditation and say, "Hey, this is what we feel business education should be about for the next decade or so." You use those guidelines then to structure what business education means at KSU. I learned a lot in those accreditation processes. They're challenging. For us, they involve making sure you have a good, strong strategic plan, making sure that you're doing a good assessment of learning from your students, and then making sure that both your curriculum and your faculty are qualified, that it's solid. So, those kinds of assessments, I think, are really important.
- TS: There are also a lot of national rankings that *US News and World Report* and others give for different programs in the Coles College. Would you like to talk about some of those?
- KS: That ties back to the comment I made earlier that when you're doing good work, you want to do what you can to get that recognition. Rankings are always based upon a perspective of whoever is doing the ranking. So, you want to understand what it is that they value and they care about, and then you assess, "Do we meet those qualifications?" You want to present yourself that way. Some people don't like rankings. Some people say, "Why don't you get more rankings?" I think it's most often people doing good work, and it either naturally gets recognized or you put yourself in a place where you can get them recognized. So, that's important. I think it's very important, and I think one thing that we did in the Coles College was think about how can we elevate our programs?

Recognition matters. I think it's something we need to do more of here at KSU, because people are doing a lot of great work, a lot of great work. How can we—whether it's through a ranking or some type of publicity or an interview of faculty that are doing great work—get it promoted? We've got to do a better job with telling the story of what's happening.

TS: Maybe just one last question on telling the story. There's been a lot of controversy in Georgia and elsewhere, particularly in the public schools, on just teaching Black history. I guess there's a certain balance between being community-oriented and yet protecting faculty rights to say what they want to say in their area of expertise.

KS: Right.

TS: Do you have any thoughts?

KS: Sure. A lot of that concern that has come about has been because there are a lot of complaints from students who feel like their rights are being violated. When we talk about academic freedom, we have to remember that academic freedom is not pure freedom to say what you want to say in the classroom. It's got to be in line with the curriculum. But also, students have academic freedom as well. It's balancing that right and balancing those conversations. You don't want to set up a situation where students are being coddled and they're not being taught and challenged in the classroom. At the same time, they should not be penalized for having a viewpoint different from the faculty member.

Now, where that gets tricky is if there's an assessment that's happening, and a faculty member says, "That's not the right view." Does the faculty member have the right to grade that paper in a certain way? Of course! This is not an easy topic to come out with something simple and formulate to address, but I think it is important, and what it's doing for us is it's having us examine what academic freedom is. Academic freedom is not the freedom to say whatever you want to say in a classroom. You're supposed to be teaching a curriculum, and you're supposed to be creating environments where students can learn and grow and be challenged. It could be all kinds of perspectives on what that means.

TS: While you were [interim] dean, we had the controversy [in 2010] with a Dreamer [Jessica Colotl] who got arrested [for a minor traffic violation] in the West Parking Deck, and it turned out that she came here as a child and was not here legally. Dan Papp supported her vigorously [by sending a letter to federal immigration officials confirming she was a student in good standing and asking that she be allowed to remain in the country and graduate from KSU]. He got raked over the coals in the newspapers.

KS: Sure. Part of what we have to realize is the context in which we lead, in which we serve. We have to be very intentional about understanding what that context is. We are a state institution, and we're part of a state system. So, we have to be very clear about what it means to lead in that context. These are never easy issues, and I think they get characterized probably too simplistically most of the time.

TS: When did we move from the DBA [Doctor of Business Administration] to the PhD in business administration? I know somewhere along the line we dropped the DBA and started the PhD. Were you involved in that change?

KS: I was involved in that. I believe our first PhD in Business Administration was granted in December 2018. The DBA program was approved at the Board of Regents [March 19] 2008. As soon as Tim Mescon got that approved, he said, “Kat, this is something I wanted to do. I’m excited, but I’m going to go be president [of Columbus State University] now.” He was very excited to get that doctoral degree in the college, and we were excited too. My whole time as dean I knew the arc of the evolution of that program very, very well. I worked with the leadership and with the faculty in that program during that time. We had some good times, and we had some hard times, tough conversations, good conversations.

Essentially, what happened is the DBA was designed to be an executive doctorate, but our faculty, who were great researchers that were teaching in it, taught it more as a research degree. We were able to look at the output and what was happening. A lot of our graduates were going on to getting tenure track positions in universities. So, it [the PhD] was more indicative of the degree being recognized as a research doctorate; we wanted that name to be put on the degree. The Board of Regents agreed, so that happened. I believe it happened that fall, 2018, and the first graduates were December 2018, so it happened immediately.

TS: Was there any controversy over the switch? Was Georgia State opposed to it or anyone else?

KS: No. To my knowledge, there wasn’t any controversy. There wasn’t a battle or anything like that. This wasn’t something that had to go through a curriculum process or anything like that. Georgia State has had a PhD and an executive doctorate, and they still have those two degrees. I believe their executive doctorate is now called the DBA.

TS: Well, I know information systems is one of the concentrations in the PhD.

KS: Yes, it sure is.

TS: While you were dean, we went through the consolidation with Southern Polytechnic State University. That was announced in November 2013 and became official in January 2015. How did that affect you as dean?

KS: Obviously, that was quite a journey for faculty and staff at Southern Poly, as well as here at KSU. I remember sitting around this board table and President Papp making that announcement to us. All the deans were in the room as well as the cabinet that morning. I think it was announced momentarily after that. I think it was on November 1st of that year, if I remember correctly.

TS: It was amazing that it was kept such a top secret.

KS: Sure.

TS: If I remember correctly, Dan found out the day before.

KS: Yes.

TS: And so, the deans found out that morning.

KS: Yes. And then, it was announced [to everybody]. I think there was a meeting that was scheduled on the Southern Poly campus as well. Anytime you bring together two separate cultures, it's a challenge. I was a dean of business at that time. Southern Poly had a business program. So, we began to work immediately with how we were going to bring these programs together. We had an AACSB-accredited business program. Southern Poly had a different accreditation. What we ultimately did was we closed all of those programs, transitioned students out of them, and then moved those faculty into the departments in the Coles College that were existing.

There was no reason to run two separate programs. That wouldn't have made any sense. They were structured differently. We had to teach out of the programs from Southern Poly. It was a tough time. I think we had about eighteen or nineteen faculty members from Southern Poly that moved into the Coles College. So, you're finding their academic homes there, different culture, different tenure standards. You had to work through it almost one-on-one. Department chairs were having to look at the portfolios that those faculty had and where they fit into what we were doing, or whether they allowed us to do some things we hadn't done in the past.

TS: Did they all move over to the Kennesaw campus? Did we continue to teach any courses down there [on the Marietta campus] in business?

KS: We taught some, and I think we still have maybe one or two of those faculty who are still down on the Southern Poly campus. For example, we have economics, which is a general education course. We have students on the Marietta campus, oftentimes, who will take economics or other business classes. We do offer courses down there. I know we offer some marketing classes down there as well, because those students can take those classes as part of their degree programs. I don't believe we offer a full business degree on the Marietta campus, but we do have classes and some faculty that are still on the Marietta campus.

TS: I would think this would have been very time consuming for a couple of years, at least.

KS: It was, but I think it was for everybody. It's just figuring out all the nuances. It's like anything like this. The complexity of it is more than you can imagine until you start walking through it. When you start talking about degrees being discontinued, there's a whole process to that. Then, obviously, you have folks that are not thrilled about this decision, whether that be current students or alumni. There was a timing on when students would stop getting a diploma that said Southern Poly on it, versus when they

would start getting a degree with KSU on it. Some of those students said, “I didn’t go to KSU. I went to Southern Poly. I want this degree.” So, there’s just a lot of complexity, a lot of emotion, a lot of things to work through.

TS: Some faculty were doing fabulous research at Southern Poly.

KS: Oh, of course.

TS: But a lot of others didn’t want to do research.

KS: Yes, a different type of institution. We would have the same thing at KSU, right? We would have faculty that came at a time when research was not a priority at the institution. They have more passion for the classroom, whereas we’ve hired, especially in the last ten or fifteen years, faculty that are more interested in the research side. I think that’s just a typical tension that you have in reconciling a mission.

TS: Well, I know the business college was ahead of everybody else on campus in going to the different tracks where you have a teaching track or a research track or a blend of the two.

KS: Right.

TS: Do you still do that in the Coles College?

KS: They do, and I think it’s a real foundation to the college. Oftentimes, you’ll talk about, “Well, how much research do you want me to do? How much teaching do you want me to do?” It’s very clear in the track system when everybody is in some track with them. It’s very clear how many classes you’re going to teach, and if you’re going to have some release time for research, the quality and the quantity of research that you need to do. It’s very, very clear. I think most faculty in that college absolutely love it. It’s a recruiting tool. People say, “We love this. This is great clarity.” There’s not a lot of ambiguity. You see what the standards are, and that’s what you need to meet.

TS: I guess as more graduate programs develop, a certain part of the faculty members within the Coles College don’t teach undergraduates much anymore, do they?

KS: Sometimes you’re hiring faculty to teach in a specific program. When we started the doctoral program in ’08, we needed to hire more faculty that could teach in the doctoral program. That was certainly a focus that I would ask all the chairs to look at, especially if it was a department that had a concentration in the DBA or the PhD program. So, over time, you hire faculty that are focused in that area, which are going to be more research-oriented faculty. Most of the time though, you can’t guarantee to a faculty member, “You’ll never teach an undergrad classroom.” But, oftentimes, you’re hiring faculty based upon a need that you might have in a high demand master’s course or program.

TS: I can’t imagine anybody who enjoys teaching, who doesn’t want to teach an undergraduate class.

KS: Agreed. Agreed.

TS: Well, in 2013, you received an award from the Cobb Chamber of Commerce. It is called the Cobb Executive Women Glass Ceiling Award.

KS: Oh, that was so nice of them.

TS: Can you talk about it? Nowadays, they call it the Woman of Distinction Award. I know Lisa Cupid, our Cobb Commission chair, got it this past year. I know the Glass Ceiling Award goes back to 1991. I guess there is just one a year that they give.

KS: I believe so, yes. It's one of these things that some staff and folks within the college nominated me for the award. I was very surprised when I got the award. It's not anything that as a recipient you seek out to apply for, but somebody applies on your behalf for it. I was very appreciative of it and very surprised. At a Cobb Chamber breakfast, I received the award. They were talking about individuals who have had an impact in the community and are doing things to help other women be successful and move forward in leadership positions, but also that have an impact in the community.

TS: I think when you were dean, you launched a Women's Leadership Center?

KS: We did.

TS: Was that related to the award?

KS: I don't know if it was related or not. They're two very, very separate things. One is run by the Cobb Chamber and by the Cobb Executive Women, which is an independent organization from the university.

TS: What did the Women's Leadership Center do?

KS: We began a program. That was pretty soon after I became dean. I can't remember if I was an interim at the time. I think I may have still been interim, but we did begin a Women's Leadership Center. It was mainly community focused, externally focused. We were building executive education type programs that help corporations develop young talent within their corporations. At that time, we were talking a lot about young, high-potential women that would come up into a corporation, and they would be very, very successful. The corporation would be very much about trying to keep them in the company and keep them going. I guess the big problem that was trying to be addressed was this issue that there are very few women on corporate boards.

TS: And it's still true, I guess, isn't it?

KS: It's still true. Of course, the idea is you get to keep them in the organization long enough that they build the skill and the talent and the know-how to be in those types of positions. That's really what we were trying to look at is how do you help women navigate certain

points in their lives, oftentimes, when they choose not to stay in the workforce. They maybe decide to go home and raise children or go on a different path. So, the corporations were wanting to have a program that would help in that space. What we did is we created a kind of consortium of companies that came together. It was the leaders of the Women's Affinity programs in these corporations that came together. There were probably about twelve different programs. They would fund these workshops and these training sessions. It was a lot of fun. I guess the center remained active for probably eight or nine years. We did some executive education programs in the summer.

TS: Who headed the center?

KS: Her name is Erin Wolf. Erin had been an executive in the Atlanta community, lots of different industries. She'd been in investment banking and several other areas. And so, she had that expertise and coordinated and led the programming.

TS: I know we've talked about a lot of strategic planning already. But maybe could we talk a little bit about your philosophy of what a college of business should be doing? We've talked about outreach to the community. What about student success? I guess we've talked about research too. I guess if anybody does strategic planning, it ought to be a business college.

KS: I hope it would be any organization, actually. I think that's really important. Obviously, a business school should be about excellence in business education and what that means. And it can mean different things at different times and different points in history. It certainly has a difference across disciplines within the college. If you take accounting, for example, in the area of accounting, you want graduates who are technically good at accounting, but also you want accounting graduates to be great communicators. You want them to be able to ascend the management hierarchy within an organization. Not only do they need to be technically good at accounting and know how to do that work from a technical perspective, they also need to be well rounded in terms of communications and just overall business acumen. That might look different if you go into the IS program, which would be a different career path.

And so, I think great business education looks to see how we can equip our students to have the knowledge and the domain that they need, but also how can they navigate changes throughout the business community year after year and decade after decade. A lot of our focus in the initial strategic planning that we did in the college was creating a higher profile for the college, which we hope should benefit the students, give them greater opportunity for greater positions, better positions in the marketplace as well. Another big thing that we were doing during that time, which I mentioned from a research point of view, was hiring faculty that could teach in the doctoral program. That changes the profile of your faculty over time because you're hiring them to teach within that program. I think what's important with strategic planning, whether it be in a college or university, is that it be substantive and not something that is just the mechanics of the strategic plan.

What is it that you're really trying to do? Oftentimes, you can get metrics driven, and that is great, but metrics are not the end be all. We all have metrics that we need to go after. We need to move, but I think the biggest benefit of a good strategic plan is it helps you allocate resources. It helps you say, "This is our priority at this moment in time," so that we're not just trying to be everything to everybody. Because an organization will pull you to try to have them be a priority. But if everything is a priority, you're probably not picking any priorities.

TS: I wanted to ask you about an interesting award you received from Morris Brown College, the Oscar Burnett Award for Distinguished Achievement in Business. Can you talk about that?

KS: Sure. I think I mentioned in our last conversation that I got to have dinner that night with Betty Siegel. Her husband [Joel] was there with her as well, and she was honored that night as well. There was a colleague that I knew who was an alumnus of Morris Brown and served on their advisory board. He and I had worked together. He was also on my advisory board, and he and I worked closely together. I believe he nominated me for that award. I was honored to receive it.

TS: Then there was a Women Making a Mark award from *Atlanta Magazine* in 2015 and a nice article about you in *Atlanta Magazine* [by Kelly Skinner, June 4, 2015].

KS: Your people sometimes submit applications on your behalf, and you don't know that they're doing this. So, this was done from some of the staff members in the Coles College.

TS: That was nice.

KS: It was very nice of them, and I very much appreciate that they did. Since I became president, I got to attend the luncheon of Women Making a Mark. They still give this award every year. I was able to introduce the governor's wife who was being recognized, so that was fun. I was an alum of the award, but still able to be in that role. And it was fun.

TS: Now, the Dinos Eminent Scholar Chair of Entrepreneurial Management, did that go automatically with being dean?

KS: It is an automatic thing. If you sit in the dean's chair, that's the title that you get. These are wonderful programs. Jack [A.] Dinos was the donor and was a prominent donor within the Coles College and just a lovely, lovely man. I visited with him a number of times at his home in South Georgia, and he was just a gracious man. He had been a good friend of Tim Mescon, the previous dean. Jack put that chair on the dean's position, which our current dean, Robin Cheramie, holds right now. It's an honor to have Jack's name on that chair. We lost Jack about four years ago [July 30, 2018]—just a kind man.

TS: It might be a good time to stop at this point, but a last question: In 2016 when Dan Papp announced his retirement and things became pretty topsy-turvy at the top, were you in the Convocation Center when he made his surprise announcement.

KS: I was, I was in the room. What I remember from that day... Prior to a graduation, typically the platform party gathers upstairs. That's where we put on our graduation regalia, et cetera. I remember Ken Harmon walking into the room. As he went in the room, he reached behind him, and he closed the doors. I looked, and I thought, "Well, that's different. That's not normally what happens." So, I thought to myself then something was up. Then, Dan very graciously communicates that he'll be stepping down. He was very gracious, as he always is. Obviously, that sends attention through the room, and everybody's minds light up with questions. It was a tough time, very tough time. We all want stability. We all want to understand where we're going. I think in that moment you realize it's not going to be stable for a while.

TS: I heard from some other deans that for the next several years, it was very, very frustrating. Just as soon as they had explained their programs to one president, somebody else was coming in.

KS: Sure.

TS: Did you experience that?

KS: To some extent. I will tell you, the business school was very, very fortunate. The business school was stable. It's always been a pretty stable college. Certainly, the context in which we exist, the university matters a great deal. I don't want to infer that it doesn't. But the programs had steady growth in enrollment. They have a pretty steady group of faculty. There's a good solid internal culture. I will just say it wasn't overly disruptive in terms of the operations of the college. I think it just creates [a question of] "Where is the university going, and what are we going to be?"

That's why I think people want to have leadership that will communicate that and be clear about it. It wasn't a great disruption internally. That was a time when we were growing a lot. Colleges like Science and Math and Humanities and Social Sciences, when we have a huge growth in the number of students, immediately feel that impact. I know there was a lot of stress and tension because those colleges were having to staff that demand immediately. Whereas for the business school, it is a dispersed demand that comes a couple years later. So, we have some time to absorb it. I think everybody craves some stability and knowing where we're going, and those years were just confusing in that way, for everybody, I think.

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
KSU Oral History Series, No. 155
Interview with President Kathy Stewart Schwaig
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
Part III – Tuesday, August 30, 2022
Location: Kennesaw Hall, President's Board Room

TS: KSU has grown a lot throughout its history, but it was not until 2016 that we reached 35,000, and last fall, we were almost 43,000. You may know what the latest figure is for fall 2022 [43,268], but we've grown a lot. It took us almost a quarter century to reach the first 10,000, and we have continued to grow exponentially, it seems to me. How do you explain all the growth that we've experienced? And it's not just in numbers. We've grown in other ways too. Why do you think that Kennesaw has become a destination university and so many students are attracted to Kennesaw?

KS: My experience in the twenty years that I've been at KSU is [the growth] has more to do with the people that have been here, and that would be faculty, staff, and certainly the leaders here. I don't think this place and these people have ever been status quo minded. I think we're always looking for what is the next step for the university? Tom, you were here when the university was a junior college, and you saw it become a state college and then a university; so, you saw that trajectory. And I think the nature of organizations is they look for what is that next step and what is that next thing. I think Betty Siegel would've talked about this. I think there was a study years ago that said this was a very vibrant location where we are by I-75 here in the northwest quadrant of Georgia and close to Atlanta. So, I think all those things. The location of this university has played a big part.

TS: She used to talk about that.

KS: Yes, I remember. She was president when I got here. I remember her talking about it a good bit, and it stuck in my mind. Now I don't think a place would grow like we've grown if there weren't good reasons to grow. I think people have been attracted to the programs that we have. I think they're attracted to the faculty. I think a lot of times you'll hear students feel that our campus is more like a home maybe than it is a non-familial-type place. People feel like they're at home here. You still hear that even though we're 40 plus thousand students, which is amazing. So, I think it's a combination of place; I think it's a combination of people; I think it's a combination of leaders. The leaders that have been here—you think about presidents or provosts—can't do a whole lot unless they can rely on the people that are here. I also think we're always recruiting a new type of faculty member and new type of staff member that has that innovative spirit and wants to take that next step.

I think part of it is the steps that you've seen from junior college to state college to university. I remember a few years ago [2013] when we became a comprehensive university and what that means. All these things define different things that you do in

higher education. I'm not going to get the year exactly, but I want to go back to when we began to offer doctoral degrees here [2006 and 2008].⁴ That's a major change in an institution. It defines an institution differently. When we started offering master's degrees [in 1984 and 1985], that was a big change.⁵ A lot of that dictates the students you attract, but it also dictates the faculty that you hire as well. So, there have been markers along the way.

I think becoming an R2 in the 2018 timeframe defined our future for us and made us think differently about who we are. A lot of times folks will talk about, "Well, the Carnegie just changed the criteria and how they calculate it." But it still put us in a pretty elite group of schools. About 6 percent of universities are R1 or R2 or classified as research universities. I absolutely think it had us thinking differently about ourselves now that we're in that position. So, I think there are these different markers along the way.

TS: Some people said that when we got a football team, that would also contribute to our growth.

KS: Yes, I would agree. I would say that's another marker. One of the things I think that did, Tom, was I think it created a campus culture in a lot of ways you didn't see prior to that time. You were probably more likely to see a UGA shirt or Georgia Tech shirt than you would see a KSU shirt. I think it began to create culture, our own identity for student life and a place to have fun and have a great experience, not just an education. We were predominantly a commuter school, and now we're building more of a residential campus.

TS: One of the things I forgot when I sent you the email the other day is one of Betty Siegel's visions was to build an athletic program. We didn't have any intercollegiate athletics before she arrived.

KS: So important. I'm grateful for those things that so many leaders planted. Obviously, Betty Siegel planted so much here. I think you have to decide. Do you want to be more of a traditional campus? Do you want to be a non-traditional campus? There are elements of a traditional campus—resident's life: dining, student experiences, a robust student affairs program, and athletics is a huge part of it. We have about 450 athletes roughly. I think we have eighteen sports for men and women. We have great academic

⁴ KSU's first two doctorates, the Ed.D. in Leadership for Learning and the DBA (Doctor of Business Administration) were approved by the Board of Regents May 2006 and March 2008, respectively.

⁵ The Board of Regents approved the MBA and the M.Ed, in Early Childhood Education on the Kennesaw campus 13 June 1984, and the Master's in Technology Management on the Southern Tech campus October 1985.

athletes. Our athletes do well, which I think is important.⁶ If you talk to our coaches, if you talk to our AD [athletics director Milton Overton], they want our students to succeed in the classroom, and they want them to succeed on the field. And that's not just talking. That's not just a statement. That's a real thing. So, we are super proud of our athletics. I also think athletics will do more in the future in terms of helping us be known as a university. We know, whether we like it or not, that that's a reality. We can be known for a lot of things, but athletics tends to get attention on a national scale more than anything else. So, I'd love to see us capitalize on that.

TS: Let me ask the question just slightly differently. I remember in the early days we were so anxious to grow that we would let students register right up almost to the last minute, so that they could go to Georgia State or somewhere else and not get the courses they wanted and come to Kennesaw at the last minute if they wanted to.

KS: Yes.

TS: We were excited when the enrollment numbers grew by another 100 or 1,000, whatever. On the other hand, places like the University of Georgia can be as big as they want to be, and they have a pretty good idea how big they want to be.

KS: Sure.

TS: So, I guess my question is, how big is too big? Let me rephrase that. Do we have any goal in mind of how big we want to be? Or is there a certain stage we're going to say, "Enough is enough?"

KS: I think it's a great question, and I think it's almost an obvious question given the tremendous growth that we've had as an institution and how fast we've grown. So, I certainly understand and respect the question. I would never say we're going to cap enrollment at any place. I think what we have to do is to grow strategically, right? We have to make sure if we admit a student, we can serve a student. And by serving a student, we're going to make sure that they can get classes and that they have the support that they need. There was a time when we were growing so fast, we couldn't necessarily guarantee that the students would get the schedules that they needed. And we shouldn't admit them if we can't make sure that they can get those schedules.

So, the intent from an enrollment perspective would be that we would have a clear, articulated strategy of what we want to do with enrollment. You have a steady growth at the undergraduate level. I'd like to see us grow about 1.0 to 1.5 percent a year. Then, I would like to see a very intentional growth at the graduate level to where we're always keeping graduate enrollment at a minimum of 10 percent of our overall enrollment. It

⁶ Two-thirds of KSU's student athletes earned a grade point average of 3.0 or higher in fall 2021. The women's volleyball, tennis, and lacrosse teams earned NCAA Public Recognition Honors for their academic success.

would be nice if it'd be 15 percent of overall enrollment. Growing at the graduate level also fits our research profile as an R2 institution.

And Tom, I don't know if you've heard about this, but there's something called the enrollment cliff that is looming right now and that is expected to hit strongly in 2025. I think we're already seeing it now. Certainly, lots of universities are seeing it, especially in the Northeast and throughout the country. There were fewer babies born during the Great Recession during 2008 to 2011, so that means there are fewer middle school students and high school students right now. So, the pool of students to go to college is smaller than it's been in decades, and that's going to impact all of us. We grew in the last few years, I think, because of the quality of our programs, because of who we are as an institution and our reputation. I also think it's because of our location, where we are. I don't think we had to be super intentional about that strategy. I think in the future to grow at a steady rate, a predictable rate, we will have to be much more intentional than we ever have been with enrollment strategy. There are fewer students to go to college now than what there were throughout the time that you've had your career here.

TS: Yes. I came at the ideal time [in 1968] because the first baby boomers had reached college age, and I was just a little older than the baby boomers. So, there were plenty of faculty jobs out there. But that's interesting. I hadn't thought about the Great Recession as a problem. I wonder if the pandemic is going to have the same effect eighteen years from now.

KS: It very well could be. I don't know what the demographics are for that time, but yes, this is expected to last till the early 2030s. It's for the foreseeable future.

TS: I saw in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that junior colleges especially have been hit hard with the pandemic and what have you in the last few years.

KS: Sure. I think it would be a mixture probably of the pandemic and the expected cliff. Our enrollment has been up the last couple years pretty dramatically during the pandemic. That was also during the time that test scores were suspended for a period of time. So, it's hard to know, really. It's hard to have good, clean data on who these students are that came to us; and would they have come to us if test scores had been in place or not. So, we need to let a lot of that settle, so that we have good information to move forward. In fact, I think I have a meeting next week where we're talking about a very intentional enrollment strategy. It will be more important now than ever coming out of the pandemic certainly. But this enrollment cliff could change the nature of a lot of enrollment patterns throughout the state and throughout the Southeast.

TS: There's a question I had that is related to the difficulty in managing enrollment growth. You've already talked about strategic planning and making sure that we've got courses for people who are coming here. Advisement fits into this. What have we done on advisement that's different in recent years?

KS: While I was provost, we hired a boatload of advisors. We hired probably 25 to 30 percent more advisors than we had before. During that time, we talked about having a hybrid approach to advising where the advisors were decentralized into the colleges. The value you have with that is that those advisors learn those disciplines, right? If you're in the business school, for example, they're going to know what it means to get accepted to the business school and the core requirements that you have, and then they'll understand across the different majors that we offer. The centralized part of that was some centralized control to have some standardization across the colleges. What we're moving to right now is a more purely centralized model. We have to be giving consistent messages to students. Advisors are a great way to do that. So, we need to have better data to help to advise our students and having a way to get that to the advisors so that they can understand how best to guide or advise a student. A lot of that requires some standardized training for the advisors to help them be more professional in the way that they interact and communicate. They need the information to be able to advise the students. So, we need to do a better job in that space than what we've done in the past. So, we're looking at restructuring that. The provost office is handling that right now, but it is incredibly important.

TS: So, are we away from where all the faculty are advisors?

KS: As far as I know, we don't have any faculty advisors. I may be wrong on that. I don't know across every college and every department, but for the most part there's not faculty advising anymore.

TS: Really? That's changed since I retired in 2011. That's interesting, but I had noticed that it looked that way in Humanities and Social Sciences.

KS: I think it's true across campus.

TS: I guess another question that is related to good advising is retention and graduation rates. I was looking in the Fact Book, and it looks like there hasn't been a whole lot of change in the six-year graduation rate in the past several years. It was 43 percent in 2017, 46 percent in 2018, 47 percent in 2019, and 47 percent again in 2020.

KS: It's going in the right direction, Tom, so, we're going to be happy about that.

TS: Well, it's slightly going up.

KS: Yes, 43 percent to we're at 48 percent this year; so, 43 to 48 is a good jump. It's still not good enough. Our long-term goal for 2028, six years from now, is we want to be at 60 percent. Now, that's an ambitious goal, but also remember I have this fundamental philosophy that if students can't get classes, they can't graduate on time. We struggled with that, especially in our gen ed courses and science and math and in humanities and social sciences as we grew dramatically. Some years we were growing 4, 5, 6 percent in a fall semester [from the previous fall]. I don't think we did all that we could do to source those classes and to make sure those units and those departments had the teaching

resources they needed to serve those students. President Whitten made that a top priority when she was here, and I'm forever grateful. So, in the last few years, you've seen massive hiring of new faculty and massive focus on wait lists and are students able to get the classes that they need, not just the classes they want, but the classes that they need. I think we've done a good job in getting focused on that. So, I hope that we continue to see that steady change.

Certainly, I'd like to see those percentage points go up 2 to 3 a year as opposed to 1. So, students have to get the classes they need. They also need the supplemental instruction. They need tutoring to be successful. Not all of our students need that, but many of our students need that. Then you go back to this issue of advising. Sometimes, students are not getting advised in a timely manner. We still don't have required advising here at KSU, which means students can do their own schedule for a period of time. So, I think we need to consider if we need to have mandatory advising. But again, we need to get the data, the information to the students. I think there's still work that we can do to look at our curriculum to see if any of our curriculum can be simplified.

One of the things that can slow students down is prerequisites. If a particular curriculum was established twenty or twenty-five years ago, have we reevaluated? Are those the right courses? Is that the right sequence? That's not my job to do. It's the faculty's job to do that. But to ask the question, is this the sequence in which these courses need to be taught? When students change from one major to another major, are we helping them do that as efficiently as possible? We never ever, ever want to lower the rigor, but we have to examine what we're doing. We can't do the same thing five, ten, fifteen, or twenty years and think that it's good. That's not usually the case. So, there are so many things that we need to look at to make sure that we're serving our students well.

I will never, ever ask faculty members to lower the rigor in their classes. In fact, I think we should always strive for, "How can I challenge my students more, not less." But if there's some things that we're doing because we did them twenty years ago, or sometimes we do things because this is the way it says to do them, and we haven't examined it in a while, we need to look at that. There are a lot of things that we can do to move that needle. I think we have to recognize that a big thing that we're doing is making sure that we can get classes on the books, and we didn't always do that.

TS: I think there was a time for maybe at the beginning of Dan Papp's administration, when the six-year graduation rate was in the twenties, and all of a sudden we started focusing on graduation rates and raised them into the forties. But maybe a relevant question is who is the typical Kennesaw student nowadays? There was a time when the average student age for undergraduates was 27, and our bread and butter was the women whose kids were off to nursery school, and they were coming back to college as non-traditional students, and oftentimes going part time, so they didn't necessarily get through in six years.

KS: Sure.

TS: Are those students still here today? Are they overwhelmed by the traditional-aged students? Or who is our typical student?

KS: I think it changes a little bit every year, but I'm going to put a percentage out there that I think is pretty accurate for right now. We're about 80 percent traditional age. Eighty percent are 18 to 22, whereas, when I got here twenty years ago, we were probably 80 percent the other way, and like you said, the average age was 27 or 28. So, we are definitely more a destination institution for students that are graduating from high school and coming straight into college than ever, ever before. We're also a much more diverse campus than we have ever been. We are a majority minority campus now in terms of the students that are here, which is extremely exciting and also needs to dictate some of the student support and services that we provide. We have a lot of first generation students, and we don't really have a very targeted first gen program right now. So, we need to look at that and look at what we need to do for our first generation students.

In my own experience, I had a dad who went to college, but I also had sisters and a brother that went to college. So, I watched them go to school. I knew what it meant to graduate from college, and not everybody has that. So, we need to carefully, carefully look at our student body and make sure that we have the services and support that they need. And a big part of that is financial, a big part of it. I think we are a great value in terms of the tuition, and we do everything we can to keep our fees low, but we don't have enough scholarship support for our students. We have about 4 percent of our students who get scholarship.

TS: Only 4 percent?

KS: Correct, and 75 percent have need for a scholarship, so it's a huge gap. So again, we have to razor focus on raising dollars for them.

TS: Is the Student Success Steering committee something new or has it been here a while?

KS: No, the Student Success Steering Committee was an observation when I was provost that we had a lot of effort. I fundamentally believe our campuses has always cared about student success. I believe faculty care about it deeply.

TS: We used to have a Vice President for Student Success [and Enrollment Services].

KS: Who was our first?

TS: The first one was Nancy [S.] King, [followed by Jerome Ratchford].

KS: Okay, what I think of as Student Affairs Division. Anyway, I think we have a tremendous heart for the success of our students, but oftentimes because we're so big and we grew so fast, a lot of the work is done in units and in silos, right? So, on Day One of becoming interim president, I formed that Student Success Steering Committee, and that includes units that are engaged intensely on student success. You have the provost on

there, and obviously the academics are incredibly important. The VP of Administration is on there, Tricia Chastain. Tricia oversees residence life. [Housing and] Residence Life is a big part of success. Student Affairs, same thing. What goes on in the classroom is so important, and certainly students aren't going to graduate if they're not successful in the classroom. But also the experience of being at KSU and what that means is so important. Student Affairs, Residence Life, play a huge role in that. Our interim chief diversity officer [Sonia Toson] is also on that committee because we need to think about how we need to better serve all of our student body. So, that committee was tasked, first of all, for just putting on the table all the effort that's going on and the student success initiatives and then how we could weave them together and coordinate them better going forward.

TS: You had mentioned diversity a few minutes ago and being a majority minority campus now. I looked up those figures recently and 48 percent are white, which I guess means non-Hispanic white, and about 25 percent Black, but another 5 percent reported two or more races.

KS: Yes.

TS: And you add those of Asian background and what have you, and we're pretty diverse. Cobb County has also become much more diverse, too.

KS: Increasingly diverse, correct.

TS: The last figure I saw on Cobb County was 50.2 percent non-Hispanic white, so Cobb County is right on the cusp of being majority minority also.

KS: Yes.

TS: Of course, we draw students from far and wide these days and not just Cobb County, but still we reflect the place where we are located in that growing diversity.

KS: Correct.

TS: You might want to talk about this, but *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* ranks KSU in the top twenty universities for bachelor's degrees earned by African Americans.

KS: Yes, and I think it's indicative of our student body. Obviously, when we have a large number of African Americans that are taking classes here, we're going to fit in that category, so I think it's wonderful. I think we have to do more to understand our student body and to structure differently than we have before. We're still behind, and we will be behind for a while that our faculty and our staff don't reflect our student body, and that's going to be an issue. It's an issue across higher education, and it's going to take a while for that to be addressed. But I think it's a problem in that we need to have mindsets that understand our students and that can help develop programs for our students that will help them be successful. And so we have to do our best to address in that area.

TS: I know as far back as the 1980s [1988], Jerome Ratchford came here to work with the minority students and help them succeed and did a whole lot of things. Could you say a little more about the effort today? You mentioned first generation students, but maybe minority students particularly? I know we've got a number of people in administrative positions to deal with minority affairs.

KS: Yes, in our Office of Diversity, Sonia Toson leads a number of programs. These are programs that are targeted towards specific communities. They've been very, very successful in terms of having these targeted programs to serve certain communities. The issue is one of scalability and that we need to do more to scale these programs. Given that we have more and more students of these demographics, we need to have more resources invested in these programs that have proven to be successful to scale them up.

One of them that I'm always really fascinated about is a program called Achieve Atlanta. Achieve Atlanta is not us. Achieve Atlanta is a program in Atlanta proper that works with Atlanta Public Schools. It identifies students that have the propensity to go to college, usually an ethnic minority. They have the ability to go to college, but they may not have the mindset to go to college or the example to go to a college. They identify these students when they're young, and then they work with them to plant this idea of going to university in their minds. They work with them to help them be successful, and then they go to colleges.

Before we started formally working with Achieve Atlanta, we had students from Achieve Atlanta that had chosen to come to KSU. Achieve Atlanta reached out to us, I think at that point. I'm not going to get the exact year, but we had about eighteen of their students here, and we didn't know it, right? So, we began. What they wanted is they said, "Hey, they've been successful, and they've made it. They've gotten accepted to college. We want to make sure they graduate from college." So, now we have a team of individuals and graduation coaches that work with those students and help navigate college along with them, and as they face challenges, help them to overcome. When you talk about a graduation coach, that's a pretty expensive proposition, right? Yet it's been found to be successful. So, that's just one example of a program that is having an impact.

But the real challenge for us is scalability. I find I say that all the time. You have 43,000 plus students. How do we create an identity among all of these? What does it mean to be an Owl? What does it mean to be a part of Owl Nation? How do we create that identity? It evolves some over time, but do we need to also be intentional about that? That's an issue of scale. It's the same thing with serving now a majority of minority students on our campus. How do we navigate that? How do we support them best? Some of it is understanding, making sure that we understand, but also it is sourcing and having the resources to do that.

TS: It looked to me in the Fact Book we're still about two-thirds white in terms of faculty and about 10 percent African American. I know we've been working on that since the 1970s, but could you talk about Kennesaw State's effort to diversify the faculty more?

KS: Yes. It's two things. You have to be a place that diverse faculty want to be, right? And diverse staff too. It's both faculty and staff. You have to make sure you're a place people want to be. That's a constant effort. That's constant work to make sure that we're doing what we need to be an attractive place. I think we've got some work to do in that space; I really, really do. You also look at your hiring practice. You have very frank conversations about what it means to hire diverse faculty and a diverse staff. I certainly get asked this question a lot by students themselves that want to see more examples of individuals that look like them or have been on similar paths as they have been. So, it's a priority, and it's also a challenge. One of the things we have to think about is the pathways of folks to get here. How do we make pathways for diverse faculty to come to KSU and diverse staff to come here? What can we do? If you're talking about the pathways, what are we doing to help produce faculty and staff of color? When we have the number of PhD programs that we have and doctoral programs on our campus, we need to be intentional about helping to recruit future faculty and future staff into those programs. We should be a part of the solution to the big problem, and that is a shortage of folks in the field itself.

I've been very appreciative of the leadership that Sonia Toson has done in this space. We talk a lot about what it means to be truly inclusive on a campus and for people to belong, for them to be able to be their authentic self and to be able to voice what they feel and to be able to have an impact out of their expertise that they want to have. But it takes work. You don't arrive at a place and say that you're there. It's absolutely all of our jobs. It's not just Dr. Toson's job; it's all of our jobs. They're doing some great work right now in the hiring process in terms of having information to search committees, about how do we make sure that we have a great pool. We want to hire the best people possible, but one of the ways you do that is you make sure you have a diverse pool. You make sure that you are doing everything you can to have the best pool possible and what that means. We've done this throughout the history of KSU at different points in time. Different best practices emerge every few years and different ways of thinking about this and doing this work. So, Sonia and her team are rolling out a training program right now for our search teams, which I think is important, but you have to be persistent and intentional.

TS: Shifting gears a little bit, I was looking back and was surprised that we weren't even an R3 until I think 2015. Then, I guess late 2018 by the Carnegie classification, we had enough external funding and doctoral degrees granted to be an R2. Can you say something about the Office of Research? I was surprised how many people are in the Office of Research nowadays.

KS: Sure. We have a target to grow our external funding by 20 percent a year. We're at about just under \$13 million right now. We hit 18 percent growth this past year, so we're right there. So, our target is to grow by 20 percent a year. How do you do that? One of the most important things that you do is you build an infrastructure to support our faculty in research. If you're going to receive external funding, they've got to write grants. You have to have a team that can support on the grant-writing side. But once the grant is awarded, you need a post-award team because you really want the faculty member that has the talent to write the grant, to secure the grant. While they'll have to do some grant

administration, you mainly want them to do the research. So, you have to have that team that encompasses those faculty members to help support them. A big focus that our vice president for research, Dr. Corso, has been doing in the three years that she's been here is training faculty that are interested in grant writing. Where their field is conducive to grant writing, train them how to do that, and give them seed money and make sure they understand the process. Nobody needs to waste time writing a grant that's not even in the right lane towards being successful. So, people that have done it can mentor those of us who have not done it but want to get on that path.

Another part of it is as we look at growing that external funding by 20 percent a year is making sure we have the right faculty and making sure that we're hiring faculty consistent with our research mission. That's important as well. If we want to grow by 20 percent every year, one way is you make sure that you're hiring faculty that know how to do that. Not every faculty member, obviously, because we still have a strong teaching mission as well, but [make sure] you have a cadre of faculty that can come in and are intrinsically motivated to do it. That's what they want to do. Then we help support them through this infrastructure that Dr. Corso is building. So, I'm very, very pleased with the expertise that she brings and also with her intentionality to do a lot of great work.

TS: I've been focused on that recently because we did an interview with Nikolaos Kidonakis not too long ago. I just finished editing the transcript. He has brought in a National Science Foundation grant every three years since 2006.

KS: It amazing, isn't it?

TS: Yes, so he certainly knows how to write a grant.

KS: He does. He does. He's impressive.

TS: And now he has theoretical particle physics colleagues as well.

KS: Yes.

TS: What's the R2 roadmap? I know it got updated recently. Can you talk about what it is?

KS: Yes. President Whitten launched the R2 Roadmap when she was our president, and that was in 2019 that she did that. The graduate dean, myself as provost, and then the VPR (vice president) of research, coordinated that process. It was very iterative. We work very closely now. We worked closely with the colleges and with the deans. But what came out initially was this framework that's actually very simple. It's very pragmatic. There's nothing overwhelmingly complicated about it. I really appreciate this because I think it was Dr. Whitten's way of saying, "Hey, let's focus on the basics. Let's do those basic things that we need to do, and let's do them well." So, what are the things we need to do? We need to be great at undergraduate programming, and we need to move the graduation rates. So, all these things, Tom, that we've talked about with respect to advising and student success, making sure that we had enough faculty to teach so that our

undergraduates could be successful and that our graduation rate [can reach] the target for 2028 of 60 percent. That's where it's stated in the R2 roadmap under the undergraduate pillar [ENHANCE Undergraduate Educational Experiences]. So, it's really this idea about excellence in undergraduate education and what are some metrics for that. So, that was number one.

Number two [GROW Graduate Programs and Enrollment] was to grow the graduate programs to be 10 percent of our overall enrollment, but also to make sure that any graduate programs that we put on the books are programs that are relevant to the marketplace. A lot of corporations and organizations are craving graduates in the fields of science, in the fields of computer science and engineering, and business. So, you've seen a lot of those types of programs be put on the books. Then the third area was this metric that we just said about research [PROMOTE Interdisciplinary Research and Relevance], where we're going to grow external funding every year by 20 percent. How do we build a research infrastructure? When I became interim president, we added another pillar and called it the community pillar [ADVANCE Community and Culture]. How can we make sure that we build an inclusive campus here internally, but also how can we connect more with the external community? So, the roadmap is really very simple. Right now, the roadmap has excellence in undergraduate, grow graduate, build that research infrastructure, and make sure that we build a good community internally, but also connect more externally. There's nothing overwhelmingly complex about that, but it's also the basics. Are we really focusing on these basics?

When you say it gets updated, what happens is the academic units each year say, "Okay, this year, for academic year 2022-23, we're going to focus on those four pillars by doing these things." Remember, if you've got a target in the undergraduate one of a graduation rate of 60 percent by 2028, we need to make sure that we're doing the work in the colleges that will move us towards that. So, this year we have a dashboard that each dean has where the dean can look at what things they need to do better in their college to help move their majors and their programs along, their students along on that graduation rate. Same thing with how are they growing the research? So, the roadmap helps us make decisions about how we allocate resources to support these things. If a dean comes and wants to do a new graduate program, but we don't think it's going to have great demand in the marketplace, we're not going to be able to move forward with that because number one, we wouldn't get it approved at the university system office. But number two, there's no reason to put resources into something that's not going to impact according to the strategy and what we're trying to do.

TS: Sure. I guess what was confusing me about the R2 roadmap is that it's only partially about research. It's what kind of institution should an R2 be.

KS: I love that, and I appreciate that. It is a bit confusing because it has that R in there, right? But what we've tried to do is ask all our colleges to look at other R2 institutions as their peers. What does undergraduate programming look like at an R2? What does research infrastructure look like at an R2? What does growth in graduate programs look at an R2? So it helps us to select peers for us to go out and look at.

TS: Who are our peers?

KS: I do understand why it's confusing. I think at that moment in time with President Whitten it was appropriate for us to say, "Research is going to be a big component of who we're going to be in the future." I think that having that in the title of this de facto strategic plan was important. I absolutely understand why that can be a wee bit confusing. One of the biggest things that we did in the context of the roadmap is to invest more in the research infrastructure without a doubt. We've also added, I guess, at least two if not three new PhD programs. That's in the graduate area. So, they all relate; they all connect. We are really impressive in undergraduate research. I'm super, super pleased with the work our faculty do in that space.

TS: I wanted you to say something about that.

KS: I think our faculty have a passion for undergraduate research and for working with students. It's such a benefit to those students because they get that mentorship of the faculty member. They get advanced analytical training, the education that happens, critical thinking. I was at one of our science events this past week, and the students who were engaged in undergraduate research were doing a poster session. They were presenting their research. Oh, my goodness. You're standing by those boards, and those students are talking about their chemistry program or their physics program, the research that they've done, and it's so impressive. Not only is the work impressive, but their ability to communicate about it. I'm a business person, so it's a language I don't understand, but I'm profoundly, profoundly impressed by what they do. We've also increased funding for the partnership of the faculty member with the students so the student can get some resources to help do that research. Amy [M.] Buddie, Dr. Buddie [director, Office of Undergraduate Research], coordinates it.

TS: I did an interview with her years ago [2010] when she got the Distinguished Teaching Award.

KS: Aww, yes!

TS: I think maybe I need to do an update to it.

KS: Yes, absolutely. Amy was the pivotal individual that allowed the university to host NCUR, which is the National Conference on Undergraduate Research, which I think was a defining moment.

TS: In 2019.

KS: Yes. I think it was a defining moment for this institution, and I think it helped a lot of us. Business doesn't do a lot of undergraduate research, and so I didn't have a lot of history or understanding of that. But when you see something like NCUR, or quite frankly when you see these poster sessions, it's like a light bulb went off for me at one poster session that I attended. It's been three or four years ago that Amy was hosting, and just seeing

the ability of these students to talk through the work they've done. The work is impressive. Their ability to communicate about it is as equally impressive. And they're proud, right? I mean, it's such a personal experience. It's not just reading it in a journal, which is fabulous as well, but it's the students interacting with their audience as well as the material.

TS: I used to think it was ironic that the reward for doing a whole lot of research is that you got a smaller teaching load. Yet, I guess if you have a smaller teaching load, you can do more mentoring, if you're so inclined, with students working with you on research projects.

KS: Again, I use the term intrinsic because I think the faculty members who do that have to be intrinsically motivated to do it. They see value and worth in it, and it's fun. At the event that I was at this past week, there were faculty there, and they were very proud of the students and the work that they had done.

TS: Well, I had a few more things I wanted to talk about.

KS: Please.

TS: We've mentioned service, but I know you've always done a whole lot of things in the community. Would you like to say something about that and maybe the importance of community service? And maybe a side question on this: do we still reward faculty for doing community service? I know we don't do it the way we used to.

KS: In terms of your last question there, I think it has to be service related to the mission of the university and the mission to higher education, right? So, that type of service, certainly. In fact, I think the more engagement that our faculty do, the better. It's not a huge de facto percentage of their workload. I think it's 10 percent typically. Oftentimes, that work is internal service, but certainly external service is valuable. It just needs to be related to the mission of the university, and it should be rewarded. We exist as a member of the community. So, we as an institution are not an isolated island in and of ourselves. We're not an ivory tower. We exist as a member of our community. We exist for the benefit of the taxpayers of Georgia and the state of Georgia.

So, we must see ourselves as a member of the community, whether that be the Kennesaw community, Marietta, Cobb County, the state of Georgia, the city of Atlanta. We exist to have an impact in that way. I think we're better when we have our receptacles into the community, and we take feedback, but also when we go out and impact the community. I've had an opportunity to serve on a number of boards, and those are great opportunities for me in the leadership roles that I'm in because I'm connecting with other people. It never fails that people don't say, "Hey, I'd love for KSU to think about X, Y, Z program." Or, "I'd love to hire more of your students." It's an availability of the institution that is very tangible, I think, when we're in the community.

TS: Betty Siegel used to call that friend raising, which could lead to fundraising.

KS: Right, right.

TS: Are you still involved with the Cobb Community Foundation?

KS: I am not. When I became provost, I stepped down from that role. But I certainly enjoyed my time on that board and met some wonderful people that I'm still connected with today. Yes, it's a great board.

TS: Was [Acworth, Georgia, Mayor] Tommy Allegood executive director at that time?

KS: He was not at that time, but he was still connected with it. I don't know Tommy personally, but I've certainly heard his name many times.

TS: I love Tommy Allegood. I think he has done a fabulous job in Acworth. He has been mayor of Acworth forever [since 2002].

KS: A long time, yes.

TS: How were you involved with Junior Achievement of Georgia?

KS: I was on that board for a while, and what a great program. I wasn't familiar with Junior Achievement until I got on the board. During that time, an innovative leader of Junior Achievement of Georgia, probably the innovative leader of Junior Achievement in the nation, created a different model where Junior Achievement gets embedded into high schools and entrepreneurial training is embedded into the high schools. I was honored to be a part of that and what they do at the Junior Achievement Discovery Center down near the [Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta].

TS: I guess our presidents have historically been involved with the Cobb Chamber of Commerce.

KS: I am a member of the Cobb Chamber. In fact, I was at a meeting earlier this week. I'm on the executive board of the Cobb Chamber, and I'll be their Marquee Monday speaker in November [November 14]. I work with their leadership all the time. Some of their leadership is on our Foundation board. So again, just this interconnectedness. It's very important.

TS: Good. Anything else that you'd like to say about your community service?

KS: I am just grateful for the opportunity, and I think it's incredibly important. I did a lot of that type of work when I was dean, but not as much when I was provost. Provost is more of an internal role, but I enthusiastically returned to it as president. It is so important.

TS: Well, before I forget it, we've gone through a pandemic in the last several years in the country. For a while, I guess just about all the classes, or all the classes, were online. How difficult was it to manage a pandemic along with everything else that you had to do?

KS: It's funny to think about that in retrospect now because you really have to think about it as it emerged, right?

TS: I wanted to ask you too, where are we in 2022? Is it over now in terms of what we're doing on campus?

KS: For all practical purposes, it is over. When you think about COVID-19, we treat it like we do any other illness. So, if a student goes to the Student Center, and they test positive, it is up to them to let their faculty member know that type of thing. We're now in a situation where there's no formal track tracing that's going on or anything like that. So, it's now treated just like any other [illness]. We say this all the time, and it's true. We stay in touch with our healthcare community, and we stay in touch with Cobb [& Douglas Public] Health and the CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]. We're following all standard protocols. Right now, as you're filming this, Monkeypox is the big conversation, right? We are in conversation with respect to Monkeypox. What is interesting is we have increased cleaning protocols from COVID-19 that we have maintained. So, we've not started cleaning less than we were before. That's helpful because the same disinfectants that would help with COVID-19 would also help with Monkeypox, so we're following in that place.

In terms of managing the pandemic, I remember when we made the decision to go online very quickly. Part of what we were thinking was, "We've got spring break [in 2020]." We were one of the latest spring breaks in the nation [March 28-April 3, 2020]. So, our thoughts at that time when we were going through the immediate shutdown was, "Everybody is shutting down, and then how are you going to come back up online?" Some of our sister institutions took a little bit longer to come back up, but a lot of them were already in their spring break. We had a spring break out two to three weeks. In our naivete, we were thinking, "Oh, let's go down now, keep it going, and we'll preserve that spring break." You didn't really know what you were dealing with. It wasn't the old term that we're all tired of. Everything was unprecedented. You were just going with it as you can.

TS: Everybody thought we were going to be over it in a month or so.

KS: Correct, correct, correct. I was extremely impressed with how our faculty transitioned to online. Tom, as an institution, we have a strong backbone in terms of teaching online. We had a lot of faculty that were already very well versed in how to teach online. A lot of them were very gracious to help their colleagues who were not. We were trying to figure out technology in the classroom and teaching schedules, all kinds of things. I was impressed with how everybody rallied. It wasn't perfect by any means. I don't know that students would say they had perfect experiences. I think that's across the education gamut. Then you have to start thinking about you're shutting down. You have to think about how do you do a summer? How do you do fall? How do you bring people back? It was one of the most difficult challenges I've ever faced in my career. I will tell you, President Whitten was masterful at how she navigated very intentionally and very decisively. We worked closely with the system. The university system office would

have regular updates with information, information from the CDC, information with how to handle certain situations, because now you're getting into a lot of HR [Human Resources] territory where you don't have staff here. And what do you do? How do you do FMLA [Family and Medical Leave Act]? There were so many different scenarios that had to be handled. I'm glad it's over, Tom.

TS: I bet. Well, we've run through your transitions without really even mentioning them. We have merged everything together. You're going from dean to provost to the president in a short period of time. I guess we should say for the record, it was February 2019 when you became provost.

KS: It was January.

TS: Oh, yes. That's right. It was announced in January and became effective February 18, 2019.

KS: Yes.

TS: So, you were dean [of the Coles College] until that time. Then Linda [M.] Noble was interim provost for a while.

KS: I don't remember when she started. I remember her last day was October 31st, 2018, because it was Halloween. That was her last day. I was in one of her last meetings. If you'll remember, Ron Matson was the interim provost between November 2018 and January 2019.

TS: Of course, yes. I guess Linda came in when Ken Harmon became interim president.

KS: Correct. Ken Harmon became interim president in February 2018, and then Linda stepped into that [interim provost] role about that time [February 15, 2018].

TS: So, she was there from February until the end of October.

KS: Yes, until the end of October.

TS: And then Ron came in and then you.

KS: Correct.

TS: It sounds like you had a very close relationship with Pam Whitten. Is that right?

KS: We did. Pam and I worked very closely together. I certainly understand this now, being in the president's role. You've got eleven or twelve cabinet members, and you work closely with all of them. Because we're an institution, and the academic mission is the core mission of the institution. So, obviously you work very, very closely with the provost, but as provost I began to realize how much reliance we have on all these other

units. Whether it be IT, whether it be administration, where you're dealing with HR facilities, same thing with fiscal services and legal. All these different areas are so important, but the academic mission part is key. That's under the provost. And so, as president, you know it's a very, very important area.

Now, Pam had been a provost, so she knew how to provost. She knew what that job was. Pam is extremely bright and has deep knowledge. She has deep knowledge obviously in that area because she'd been there. But she had deep knowledge in all the other areas of the cabinet as well. Probably more so than I've ever seen anyone have deep knowledge in an area that's not their main area. So, I learned from her as a provost. Then, she was a president who had very distinct things that she wanted to do and to get done. So, I learned a great, great deal from Pam. Very decisive.

I mentioned the R2 roadmap a moment ago. The R2 roadmap consists of fundamentals that an institution should be about. You don't get more fundamental than how you do in undergraduate, how you do in graduate, how you do in your research. You don't get any more fundamental than that. I believe she was brilliant in wanting to put together that kind of plan to cause us to think on these fundamentals, especially given the tremendous growth that we had. Our growth was wonderful. Let me make sure I say, I would always rather have the problems associated with growth rather than the problems associated with not growing. But when you grow, you want to do it strategically, intentionally, in a disciplined format. I think she brought a lot of discipline to our thinking and to what we needed to do.

TS: I know that when you're an R2, you are focusing on being the best R2 you can be. But is there any vision for becoming an R1 sometime?

KS: Not in my vision right now. I say that because I think we have so much work to do in terms of being a great R2. If you look at how they classify it, it's external funding and it's the number of PhDs, the number of research doctorates you produce. So, we need to do well on both of those. I believe we have solidified our R2 status. We are in good standing on that. But both of these things are key and core to our research mission. So, we're going to continue to focus on those. But there's zero target in mind of saying we're R1. Every now and then somebody will tell me that. They'll actually say to me, "I know you want to be an R1." I'm like, "I really don't. I want to be the best R2." That's what we've put before the colleges: "How can you be the best R2 in the arts?" "How can you be the best R2 in business" or "in computer science?" That's what we're focused on right now.

TS: Is there anything about your vision for the future that we haven't talked about?

KS: I think we've touched on them. I'll run through them very quickly. I think we need to solidify our position as a research institution. I think that's incredibly important. We've got to move our graduation rates. Maybe the part we didn't talk about completely—when you think about graduation rates, you're thinking about students improving their graduation rate importantly: "Let's graduate more in four years rather than six." But I

want our students to have a great experience while they're here. I think they do. I just want it to be more of a quintessential KSU experience. We've got to define what that means. I think we have a lot of emergent things that are great about KSU, but what can we do to be more intentional about that part of it? I want to see our athletics grow and flourish. I want us to be more known as an institution, and whether we like it or not, I think athletics are a big, big part of that. So, we'll be doing some things that help us move the needle in that space.

TS: I understand we have a new campus communication structure. What is it?

KS: When I came in as interim president, in 2021, in July, we put together some standard emails that come out from the university with certain priorities for different types of emails. I'm not going to give all the names. There is a KSU announcement that comes out, and it will have some kind of routine stuff. There's News from the Nest. There's a monthly message that I do. There's a monthly message that the provost will do. So, what we wanted to do is we sat down around the table, and we said, "How can we think about what we communicate, because we're a big place, and it's hard to communicate. It's hard to get information to people, so we need to be intentional." So, we put together this new structure, but it is never set. We're always having to reevaluate how we can do better on it. We have these different options for different types of news that needs to go out. If there's an announcement—hopefully, this fall we'll hire a new provost, and there will be an announcement that will be set aside that uses one of those mechanisms. I think that's News from the Nest. I get them confused on which is which. So, that's what we did in that way.

TS: Well, hopefully in two or three years we can come back and interview you again about all the things that have happened and how these visions have worked out.

KS: That would be fun. I would enjoy that, Tom.

TS: Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to get into the interview?

KS: No, I think we've covered so much. I appreciate the opportunity to do this and just appreciate the opportunity to talk with you.

TS: Well, thank you very much.

KS: Thank you, Tom.

INDEX

- Achieve Atlanta, 49
Allegood, Tommy, Mayor of Acworth, 55
Alsup, Rodney, 27
Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), 27, 32, 35
Atlanta and Cobb County business communities, 29
Atlanta Magazine, 39
Atlanta Public Schools, 49
- Baldwin, Jane, 8
Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 4-9, 13, 15, 20
 Alpha Kappa Psi business fraternity, 15
 Alpha Phi Omega fraternity, 5
Black, Lendley C. (Lynn), 19, 28
Bobbie Bailey Foundation, 31
Brower, David Ross, 21-22
Brown, Rosemary and John, 31
Buddie, Amy M., Director, Office of Undergraduate Research, 53-54
Burchett, Lance E., 30-31
- Campbell, Jane E., 17, 27
Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 42, 50
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 56-57
Chastain, Tricia, Vice President for Administration, 48
Cheramie, Robin, Dean of Coles College, 39
Chronicle of Higher Education, 44
Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina, 10
Cobb and Douglas Public Health, 56
Cobb Chamber of Commerce, 37, 55
 Marquee Monday speakers, 55
Cobb Community Foundation, 55
Cobb County, increased diversity, 48
Cobb Executive Women, 37
Coles, Michael J., 15, 31
Colotl, Jessica, 33
Columbia, South Carolina, 9
Columbus State University, Columbus, Georgia, 17, 27, 34
Corso, Phaedra S., Vice President for Research, 31, 51
Culnan, Mary J., 11
Cupid, Lisa, Cobb Commission Chairwoman, 37
- Dinos, Jack A., 39
Diverse: Issues in Higher Education, 48
Dorff, Robert H. (Robin), 19

Eino, 22

Family and Medical Leave Act, 57

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 11

Fort Worth, Texas, 2-3

Garrison, Carol Z., 14

Georgia State University, 13-14, 16, 34, 43

Information Systems Department, 13-14

Great Recession and the enrollment cliff, 44

Grover, Varun, 10

Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Texas, 2-3

Harmon, W. Ken, 16, 18-19, 25, 27-28, 40, 57

Hermanson, Dana R., 16-17, 25

Hermanson, Heather M., 25

IBM Personal Computer, 7

John Muir Institute for Environmental Studies, 21

Johns Hopkins University, 19-21

Junior Achievement of Georgia, Junior Achievement Discovery Center, Atlanta, 55

Kennesaw State University

Bagwell College of Education

Ed.D. in Leadership and Learning, 42

M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education, 42

Coles College of Business, 5, 15, 19, 21, 23-24, 28-29, 31-33, 35-36, 39-40, 57

Accounting Department (School of Accountancy), 14-16, 23-25, 38

MAcc (Master of Accounting) program, 15

Business law program, 17, 24

MBA (Master of Business Administration) program, 15

DBA and PhD programs, 18, 34, 36, 38, 42, 50

Burruss Building, 21

Department of Information Systems, 24-25, 38

AACSB accreditation, 27, 32, 35

Strategic plan, 29, 32

Faculty research and teaching tracks, 36

College of the Arts, 19, 30

Dr. Bobbie Bailey School of Music, 31

Division of Global Affairs, 21-22

Radow College of Humanities and Social Sciences, 5, 19, 29, 40, 45

Psychological Science Department, 5

Social Sciences Building, 21

Community connections, 29

Spaceship Earth globe, 21-22
College of Science and Mathematics, 23-24, 26, 30, 40, 45
 Department of Computer Science and Information Systems, 23-26
Culture of fundraising, 30-31
Honors College, 31
KSU Foundation, 31, 55
Convocation Center, 40
Athletics program, 42-43, 59
Student Affairs Division, 47-48
Office of Diversity, 49
Office of Research, 50-51
R2 roadmap, 51-53, 58
Office of Undergraduate Research, 53-54
Kidonakis, Nikolaos, 51
King, Nancy S., 47

Malgeri, Linda M., 17
Matson, Ronald H., 23-24, 57
McAllister, John P., 15-16, 24
McLean, Ephraim R., 13
Meeks, Joseph D., 30
Mescon, Timothy S., 15-18, 24-28, 32, 34, 39
Miller, Ann Vardaman, 9
Millsaps College, Jackson, Mississippi, 25
MIS Quarterly, 11
Morris Brown College Foundation, 19, 39
Morris, Paula H., 17

National Science Foundation, 510
Nobel, Linda M., 57

Ormsby, Robert B. Jr., 21
Overton, Milton, 43

Papp, Daniel S., 18-19, 28, 33-35, 40, 46
Peterson, Laurence I. (Larry), 26, 30
Poulter, Patricia (Patty), 19

Radow, Norman J., and Lindy, 30-31
Ramsower, Reagan M., 8
Ratchford, Jerome, 47
Robey, Dan, 13
Rutgers University, 20

Schwaig, Kathy Stewart

- Childhood in central Texas, 1
- Siblings, 1, 3, 4, 47
- Undergraduate education at Baylor University, 4-6, 13, 19-20
 - Lessons applicable to understanding students at KSU, 5-6
 - Post-baccalaureate year, 6
- MBA at Baylor in information systems, 6-7, 19
- Lecturer at Baylor, 7-9, 15
 - Love of teaching, 8
 - Recipient of outstanding teaching award, 15
- PhD from the University of South Carolina, 9-14, 19
 - Dissertation, 10-14
- Assistant professor at Georgia State, 13-14, 16
- Recruited to Kennesaw State as associate professor, 14-15, 17
- Interim chair of the Accounting Department, 15-16, 18, 24-25
- Associate dean for administration, 16-17, 25-28
- Interim dean of Coles College, 18-19, 24, 27-28, 33-34, 37
- Work on implementing doctoral programs, 18, 34
- Awards received
 - Oscar Burnett Award for Distinguished Achievement in Business, 19, 39
 - Cobb Executive Women Glass Ceiling Award, 37
 - Women Making a Mark Award, 39
- MLA (Master of Liberal Arts) degree from Johns Hopkins, 19-22
- Dean of Coles College, 19, 21, 28-29, 32, 34-39
 - Community outreach, 28-29, 32
 - Role in the consolidation of KSU and SPSU, 34-36
 - Creation of Women's Leadership Center, 37-38
 - Strategic planning, 38-39
 - Service on Cobb Community Foundation, 55
- Interim chair of the Department of Computer Science and Information Systems, 25-27
- Publications, 27
- Thoughts on academic freedom, 33
- Dinos Eminent Scholar Chair of Entrepreneurial Management, 39
- Provost, interim president, and president, 41-59
 - Thoughts on enrollment growth, 41-44
 - Improving advisement, 44-46, 51-52
 - Retention and graduation rates, 45-46, 51, 58-59
 - Transition from a non-traditional to traditional student body, 46-47
 - Increase in student diversity, 47
 - Work with first-generation students, 47
 - Need for more student scholarships, 47
 - Student Success Steering Committee, 47-48, 51-52
 - Efforts to increase faculty and staff diversity, 48-50
 - Graduation coaches, 49
 - R2 roadmap, 51-53, 58
 - Increase in undergraduate research, 53-54

- Importance of community service and community involvement, 54-55
- Executive board member, Cobb Chamber of Commerce, 55
- Leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, 55-57
- Relationship with former president Whitten, 57-58
- Campus communication structure, 59
- Sharma, Divesh S., 17
- Siegel, Betty L., 18-19, 28, 33-34, 39, 41-42, 54
- Siegel, Joel, 19, 39
- Sierra Club, 21
- Skinner, Kelly, 39
- Southern Polytechnic State University
 - Consolidation with KSU, 34-36
 - Master in Technology Management program, 42
- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, 2-3
- Staub, Detmar W., 13
- Stewart, Edwin (father), 1-4, 6, 47
- Stewart, Nola Muir (mother), 1, 3-4
- Storey, Veda C., 13

- Temple, Texas, 1, 3, 9
- Toson, Sonia, interim chief diversity officer, 48-50

- University of Arkansas, 9-10
- University of Georgia, 43
- University of Minnesota Duluth, 19
- University of North Florida, 16, 24
- University of Pittsburgh, 10
- University of South Carolina, 9-10, 13-14
- University System of Georgia, 12, 18, 34, 42, 52, 56
 - Board of Regents, 18, 34, 42

- Waco, Texas, 7, 14
- Whitcomb, Kathleen, 14
- Whitten, Pamela S., 30-31, 46, 51, 53, 56-58
- Wolf, Erin, 38
- World Wide Web, origins, 11-12