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Interview with Dr. Roger Casey: Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

Monday May 17, 2010

Wenxian Zhang, Alia Alli & Jennifer Ritter

WZ: Good afternoon, my name is Wenxian Zhang, Head of Archives and Special Collections. With me are two students, Alia Alli and Jennifer Ritter. We are going to interview Dr. Roger Casey, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost of Rollins College. So Roger, share with us some of your family background. I understand you are also a Southerner, graduating ...

RC: Yes, so I grew up in South Carolina in sixties and seventies and I am a first generation college student. No one in my extended family had ever gone to college; my father was an automobile mechanic and my mother was a housekeeper. Growing up, I think probably the thing that got me so interested in education first of all, teachers. I really developed a very strong relationship with teachers in school. And then my grandmother, who grew up in a very rural area in South Carolina next to a one-room school house. This school house was going to be torn down, and she went in the school and she was told that she could get anything out of the school. She got a set of *Encyclopedia Britannica* from the early 1950s - I think they're 51s or 52s - and gave them to me when I was a kid; I read them cover to cover. Between that and then television was just coming along - well television had been along - but our family got a television set and I watched a lot of television. Television really, I think, opened up my eyes to a lot of the world; and in fact, I just read an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, so I guess it was May 3, 2010 *Chronicle*, about how so many working class - particularly the lower class people who found their way in academics over the past forty years - how television and rock music were two of the things that really helped them to get beyond the boundaries of their live that they grew up in. So, you know, I felt a lot better now that I have verified that television and rock music actually can turn you into an academic. So, uh, I went to college and wound up being Valedictorian when I was at my little high school of a graduating class of, I think about of one hundred and twelve students, and went to Furman, a liberal arts college. And that's what changed my life.

WZ: Yeah, I been to Furman and I'm also impressed by its campus; it's a great school. Tell us about your experience as an undergraduate student at Furman.

RC: Well, the uh, I love to tell this story because you just can't make up a story this good. My very first week of school, I went down to the dining hall at Furman to eat breakfast. I grew up eating wonderfully healthy foods - donuts were my favorite breakfast food. So I went to get my donut, and I got my donut from the dining hall, and I sat down with my tray and I started eating, and this was the worst donut that I ever had in my life. This thing, it was awful; it tasted like a brick. And I looked at this guy who was from New Jersey - I'd never met anyone from New Jersey before - and he was sitting at the table down from me. He was on my freshman hall, and I saw him slice his donut in half and put cream cheese on it. Because I had never seen a bagel - (laughter) and I had no idea what a bagel was. And so from there, I went to college pre-med and while I did well in chemistry, I was having nightmares about benzene rings, and decided organic chemistry was not the thing for me. My first love was literature and so I remember explaining to my dad that I was going to be an English major because being a theater major wouldn't really

have made it. I started studying literature and then had tremendous opportunities - really theater was what opened up my world as well. And then I got very involved in College Bowl, which was the game that was actually on television back then where you competed with different schools; I wound up being very involved with that. Also the other thing that I was also very involved with in college was something called Collegiate Educational Service Corps., in which we did volunteer work in the community. It was a relatively new idea back then. So my job, along with another dozen Furman students, we worked on a rotational basis helping the social work and chaplaincy office in the emergency room of the local hospital's third shift. They didn't have enough money to have social workers and chaplains' third shift, and I guess the liability was different back then. We were all trained, so a couple of nights a month, I would be in the emergency room, third shift, learning to deal with someone to come in with a gunshot wound and their family, or being the person walks in with the doctor when some family is told their infant child is dead. You know, and the doctor walks in and says, I'm so sorry, and leaves the room, and you're left to help this family out. I grew up very fast, and I think that also instilled in me my interest in developing programs in community engagement. And then I had a chance to study abroad through something called a Pipkin Fellowship, and I spent a year in England studying at the Royal Shakespeare Company, and at University of London in the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, and that again I think was foundational in terms of developing in me this interest to create greater international opportunity.

JR: I read that the Kellogg National Leadership Fellowship was also another travel opportunity that you had.

RC: Yeah, that happened much later in life, about maybe five years into my first job as a faculty member. I had gotten very involved in a project developing a leadership education program at Birmingham Southern College, where I was hired to be an assistant professor of English. And um, a lot of colleges were trying to develop academic leadership programs then, and I was very interested in that. And when I was hired there, I actually told the president I was interested in it. It's a great opportunity because I had another job offer, which I wasn't sure that I really wanted to take, and then I had this later opportunity to interview at Birmingham Southern, literally I think on the Friday before I had to let these other people know on Monday about my job. For posterity sake, the other job was at Elon, and I thought Elon was falling apart. I mean the place was in terrible shape and I wasn't sure that I really wanted to go there. So I literally went to this interview in Birmingham Southern and I said this is what I want to do. You know, I'm an assistant professor, and I want to do this, and I want to do this, I want to do this, and I thought, well, okay, either I go some place that I get to do what I want to do, or I'll take this other job - and crazy enough they hired me. And developing leadership programs was one of the things that I wanted to do. So I got very involved with that, and then that got the recognition of Kellogg, and so I had an opportunity to be chosen as one of the forty National Kellogg Leadership fellows. And that, more than anything, probably anything in my life, in my undergraduate education, turned me in to who I am. In fact, I'm wearing an armband right now celebrating the Kellogg Fellows Leadership Association. And a very good friend of mine, Ray Gatchalian, who was killed a couple years ago in a really tragic accident, we started an award for him called Celebrate Courageous Leadership Award - so I actually wear that for Ray. But the Kellogg Fellowship, I went to almost twenty different countries, and the goal was to study the role of vision in organizations - and Kellogg had no interest - well back then, George Bush had just been

defeated by Bill Clinton in the presidency - George Bush the first - and one of the things that people talked about was that Bush did not have the vision thing. So it was very interesting. What is the vision thing? And so that was my pitch to Kellogg, I wanted to study the vision thing in organizations. Kellogg said you know, that's very interesting, but we don't want you at looking in places in the United States, we want you to get way out of your comfort zone and go to places that you can study the role of vision in different organizations, like Buddhist monasteries in Thailand or the Dali Lama compound in Daramshala in India, and I was with Mayan brujas in Ecuador, in mountains in Guatemala, and new age communities in Europe. So all these different organizations, what I wanted to find was an organization that had radically changed its mission and vision, but kept all of its people without firing people or getting rid of people or whatever, because I thought that would be very interesting to higher education, in an environment in which tenure and other things mean you don't get to have the kind of corporate turn over that you get in the corporate world. So I looked for three and half years in sixteen or seventeen different countries and I never found such an organization that had actually radically changed the vision and not gotten rid of all those people or been a startup organization. So, that got me very interested too in a lot of issues related to organizational change and why it's so difficult.

WZ: Let's go back to your graduate study at FSU. Tell us about your thesis, your dissertation. That sounds like such an interesting topic.

RC: Well, I was fishing around for a dissertation and I had done my masters work in modernism and looking at the influence of T.S. Elliot on Hemingway. I had essentially decided I was through with the modernist. I liked them, but I just didn't really want to spend more time studying them. I had gotten very interested in a fairly young developing field at that time, popular culture studies and material culture studies, particularly looking at how objects and artifacts influenced writing. And I think I was also trying to justify my education to my father, and so I started looking to see if anyone had ever written a book about the influence of automobile on American writing and how the automobile has been treated in American writing. And I essentially found that they hadn't, which was lucky for me. So I launched this project, which eventually led to also a significant rewrite of the dissertation to my book, *Textual Vehicle: The Automobile in American Literature*. And so I traced the history of how automobiles were depicted in literature from the very beginning in the 1890s up until the present and found some very interesting themes. And I remember when my book came out, which I dedicated both to my dad for teaching me how to drive and to Robyn Allers, my wife, for riding along with me. I gave him this book and he said, "I can't believe a two hundred and twenty page book and not a single picture of a car in the whole book, it just doesn't make any sense to me." It really got me - the book really got me even more interested in looking at popular culture and how popular culture could be a tool to really grab student's attention and really teach them very deep, very complex critical theory, if they learn to apply it to things that are a part of their everyday life - very empowering for students.

WZ: Okay, after you received your doctorate degree from FSU, you began your teaching career at Birmingham Southern. Tell us about your life as a young assistant professor in the English department. What courses did you teach there?

RC: Um, I taught writing every term, and I loved teaching writing. And I would teach usually a 200 level introductory course, either in American Literature or in Drama, and then every term you taught some kind of upper-level class. I did a lot of things with the modernists, and I did a lot of things in Southern culture. And I think my favorite course that I taught there was a course that I did a couple of times called *Dirt Roads in Dixie*, and we would read Southern literature and one day a week I had a van-and we had fourteen students in the class that I could drive and there would be fifteen of us in the van - and we would go and visit some very far out person, who was essentially the same kind of person depicted as a character in what are the so-called Southern gothic novels and short stories. And I really wanted to help students - even students from Alabama - understand this notion of Southern gothic's crazy. These are real people; I mean this is not manufactured. So, you know, you'd visit people that were outsider artists and did a lot of work with people who get these inspirations from God or from some spirit power to go paint and give your life up and make artwork out of all kinds of crazy things. We'd visit a guy who had covered his entire two or three acres of property with crosses with things that he had written on them, and then we would read Flannery O'Connor's short story about some guy who covers his yard in crosses - you know, I mean, so - or gets tattoos of Jesus on his back, and we'd visit a guy who gets tattoos of Jesus on his back, you know. And so the students really began to learn these are real people that are being depicted in these short stories that have historically been called "gothic."

And then, I did a number of study abroad trips and did a winter program in London, and did another program working with the Maya in Guatemala - a project that came out of Maya, Kellogg work. And then another course that I actually would still love to write a book about, an English seminar course looking at the depiction of - literary depictions - of the relationships between teachers and student. So we would look at movies that are about teachers and students, like *Dead Poets Society*, and so forth, and we would read novels like *The Autobiography of Jean Brodie* and talk about historically how these relationships have been treated. I worked out a really interesting thing when I taught the seminar class. We would meet the first hour and half of our seminar in a classroom, and the second hour and a half we met in the teachers' lounge, the faculty lounge at Birmingham Southern. So the students - we were in both of these worlds, which turned out to be a very controversial thing. There was a lot of faculty very upset that I was taking the students into the faculty lounge, as if there was some sacred rituals or something that go on there. But that was a great class.

And then I was also very involved in pedagogical innovation projects, which led me to be a part of founding, and the eventually directing the ACS teaching - the Associated Colleges of the South - teaching workshops that was actually held here at Rollins, which is the very reason that I came here for the first time, I think in '92 or '93.

WZ: Yeah, I think I was one of your graduates. I really enjoyed that program. It was a wonderful initiative that you help lead. Tell us why you decided to get in to administration? I understand for a few years you were an Associate Dean at Birmingham Southern.

RC: Yeah, um, there is something about faculty culture, where as faculty members we loved to point out what's wrong with everything and analyze everything. But a saying that I developed was that "the plural of analysis is not action." And so, I got really tired of a lot of people sitting around and talking about things that needed to get done and nobody actually doing them. A real problem when you start doing things is that senior administration start taking notice of you, and

they either take notice of you one way or the other: you're either a problem child or um, you know, they go, Hey that guy knows how to get some stuff done. I can get him to do some stuff. I might have been a little mix of both, but lucky I think I had more in the latter category in the beginning. And so I started getting some special projects. One was developing this leadership development program; another one had to do with trying to creating freshman seminars; another one was community engagement.

And then the biggie was the request to try and reform the entire general education program at Birmingham Southern when that project had literally, totally failed a year prior. I mean, it was just a massive failure and I was asked to go in and see if I could salvage it. Another thing that I really learned about myself was that I was really good at putting out fires and really good at solving problems. And then I went to this workshop that through connections that I had made with Kellogg - that was sponsored by a guy named Max De Pree, who wrote a book called *Leadership Jazz*, and he wrote another one called *Leadership is an Art*. And we went up to - Max was the head of Herman Miller Corporation, the furniture maker, and he was a really innovative leader - and he went to these leadership seminars, and he invited a bunch of Kellogg fellows to come up to his corporate retreat headquarters and talk about leadership. And part of that, you got an hour alone with Max. So he asked me what I really good at doing, and I said I'm really good at putting out fires. And then the next question he said, "Well, you know, why does the leadership in your organization really like you?" and I said, "You know, I know how to deal with problem people really well, too," which I think I learned from being a theater director. He said two things that profoundly influenced my perception of leadership. The first one he said was "Instead of putting out fires, you might want to figure out where the arsonists are." And the second thing he said was that "You're spending too much of time with problems, spend your best time with the best people." And that second one might have been the best piece of advice that I ever got. I ignore a lot of problems now, you know, I just ignore them. People bubble up, the email trail starts flaming away, and you know, I just ignore it because usually they flame out. These things burn each other out, and if you just don't respond to them they take care of each other, and I try to spend more of my best time with my best people.

So, little by little, I started getting more and more in to administration, and when the dean of faculty job opened here, I had known Steve Briggs. By then I knew probably a dozen faculty at Rollins. My wife's mother was in a nursing home here in Orlando. And so I applied for the job here and luckily enough, I got it.

JR: Who were some of those people you ended up working with here during your time at Rollins?

RC: The person I would probably credit most with bringing me here was Jack Lane, a retired professor of history now - and Jack was one of the original founders of the ACS workshop and he was one of the first people I ever met connected to Rollins; Barbara Carson, who is retired from the English department; Gary Williams, who is now retired from the History department; Lee Lines, Lee Lines was a participant in one of the first workshops that I ran here; Rick Vitray and Jill Jones, who are also participants - and now Rick's one of the leaders in that workshop - and a few other faculty who left the college since then. I knew the inside of Rollins from those folks, and I thought its great arriving someplace and having a group of people you know can trust. And so that really, I think, helped get my deanship off on pretty good grounds.

WZ: What's your first impression of Rollins' students, and has that impression changed over the years?

RC: You know, I think it has, because I think Rollins students have actually changed significantly in the past ten years. When I was here interviewing for the job, so that would have been late '99 or early 2000, I consistently heard people say - both inside Rollins and in the community say - all Rollins kids are a bunch of rich kids from New England and they don't get involved in the community around here. They just come down and go to school and they party and blah, blah, blah. You know, that didn't match up with the students that I met when I was interviewing and didn't match up when I got data showing me what the demographics were of Rollins students. But clearly, there was a disconnect between perception and reality and it was just an old narrative of who these students were. I had been teaching in Alabama - teaching a lot of first generation college students. One of the things that struck me immediately about a lot of the Rollins students, they had a greater -for a lack of a better word - I'll call it cosmopolitan or social comfort level than a lot of the students I had been used to teaching. There is a difference to authority in the South, particularly in the Deep South, that really didn't exist with Rollins students. And while occasionally, you might miss that, I found it really refreshing that students very quickly moved passed the authoritarian nature of the student-faculty relationship. That relationship was much more meaningful at a much quicker pace that I had experienced before. And the students here were far more global in the sense of being around the world or being from around the United States than students I had taught in the past.

A part of the project I saw coming here was in continuing to strengthen the quality of the students and we were lucky enough, thanks particularly to the George Cornell's gift, to build programs like the Dean Scholars and the Cornell Scholars program to attract more and more brighter and brighter students, but also really trying to getting students more engaged in the community, which I found students wanting to do. It's not a hard sell to get millennial generation students interested in making a social difference in the world. Then, you know, the College I think in ten years, went from being a school in which people were saying these kids aren't involved in the community, to winning the Campus Impact Awards for being the most engaged campus, Carnegie Foundation awards, Presidential Honor Roll, and then a new general educational program to which I heard the faculty saying we've got to have community engagement. This has been an essential part to who we are. It was wonderful to watch that transformation.

WZ: What are some of the key projects you got a chance to get involved with, and who are some of the key people you got a chance to work with?

RC: Well, it's just been such a phenomenal experience having so many wonderful faculty and staff and students to get to know over the past ten years. So it would be hard to pick out amongst those. I think the three projects that I leave here feeling the greatest sense of accomplishment - accomplishment in the sense that I know that I'm out of the picture, but these things are going to be great and they are going to move on, and that I think is the important thing about leadership that when you leave, nobody really notices from the point of view of the things that were important keep going - community engagement would be first and foremost. Early on, I was very lucky to have been able to hire Lauren Smith, who was actually a former a student of mine. She was in the very first class of college students I'd ever taught to help found this Office of

Community Engagement. We were very lucky to get some significant support from the Surdna Foundation and from David Lord and his family to really get that program going. Seeing the community engagement program develop at the College - SPARC Day was something I'd wanted to start the school year with every student at the College being off-campus and doing something in the community, and SPARC Day involved a lot of that. And the other thing that I had always wanted to do was to see a college have a partnership with a school - although I had envisioned it being a high school or a junior high school, not an elementary school - and to bring those kids from those schools here so that it was a partnership so that kids would grow up, and out of that really immersed Fern Creek and the Fern Creek opportunity. And to watch that school go from being an F-rated school to an A-rated school was just an amazing transformation too. And then, when we had a position change a few years later - I had been made aware of young staff member at UCF I had met through some national leadership organizations named Micki Meyer, and when that position change happened, I called Micki up and said I'd love to talk to you. This was late in the year-I think it was August, might even have been getting close to September, it was August, first of August - and I said, "You need to be here." I think that's how the conversation began, no playing, I just said, "You need to be here. I heard you speak and I know what people say about you. Cara Meixner and Donna Lee, who were friends from Micki from across town, had told me how wonderful she was, and that was a great hire. I mean, she has absolutely transformed this institution with her vision and her service leadership. So that's one.

The second would be internationalization. I was involved in a project called the Mellon Global Partners Project, which had brought together forty-two small colleges around the country. And I had been involved with that when I was at Birmingham Southern as the Associate Dean for internationalization there, and Rollins was also involved in that project, so I was able to keep my position on that advisory board when I came here. And I took some Rollins faculty to a conference at Lake Forest College up in Chicago. And we came back from that conference and Tom Lairson, Roy Karr, Pedro Pequeno, Luis Valdes - we held an intercession for any faculty member from Crummer or the Arts and Sciences, who had been involved in doing something internationally - let's get together and talk about what we might do more of as an intuition. And I think sixty-five people came to that intercession, and we had one a week later and our numbers got up to close eighty, it was either seventy-five or seventy-nine. And people were looking around going I didn't know you did this; I had no idea you did this; I didn't know. You know, I had been reading all of this from these annual faculty activity reports, but what I realized what that there were a whole lot of people around campus who just didn't know how internationalized we already were. I know colleges right now that probably have a faculty of two hundred that don't even have twenty people who are involved in internationalization. Here we were, half or more of our faculty doing something. And so these guys - I credit Tom Lairson for a lot of this - started getting together and talking and developing a plan. Barry Allen got involved, and Hoyt Edge got very involved in this, and all of us had been doing internationalization in our own ways over the years. And then I wanted to try and find something to really jump start this program even more. We had very late in the year, we lost a faculty member because she was going to get married and she found a job home of where her new husband lived, so we lost her. We had an open faculty line, and so I thought, let's take the money from this faculty's salary, and let's take a group of our faculty to the Galapagos, where I had been going with the Kellogg Foundation. And Barry and I had already taken a group of students there. Getting sixteen faculty on a boat and traveling around the Pacific, you can't get off the boat, other than being on one of the

islands, so the kind of connections that we formed from that really picked up something that happened a couple of years before when we had a project called Spanish for Professors, where all these faculty had been studying Spanish together for three days a week. So when Lewis was hired - Lewis Duncan was hired as President - I think heard about a couple of these projects and had an experience at another college, where he had put a whole bunch of money out there trying to entice faculty to do study abroad and they didn't do it. And he said I'm going to try this again. We had promised of a gift that would support the project, but we also had Cornell money to support it. We became I think, still the only college in this country that commits to send all of its faculty abroad. I think 80 percent of its faculty has now been a part of some study abroad experience. Wenxian, you've led one to China, and we've been - you know, when Rachel Simmons - Rachel Simmons in the Department of Arts, who was the very first person I hired when I became dean, who is an alum of the college too - she wanted to go on the first Galapagos trip. She was very worried about sea sickness, and I talked to her about patches, and I said check this out, I think you'll do great. So here this artist goes to the Galapagos and totally changes the direction of her art based upon things she saw there. And then a couple of years ago, she uses one of these grants to go to Antarctica. This person who was afraid of getting on a boat - now is leading - and then she comes back and leads a faculty group to Antarctica, even though she was worried she was going to get sea sick in the Galapagos. That to me is transformation, that's transformative education.

So, those two are two of the three. And then the third one that I think I'm most happy with is the enhancement of the quality of our student body: breaking the twelve hundred barrier with the SAT averages, seeing our acceptance rate drop down in the fifty percentile when it had been in the upper eightieth percentile, and then just last week getting the nod to become a probationary member of Phi Beta Kappa, which had been really my dream when I came here was to try and get the Phi Beta Kappa chapter, and now within the next two years, that will be decided. So the foot's in the door for that. So those are the three things that I think have meant the most to me.

WZ: Can you also outline some of the challenges that you faced during your tenure here, both as the dean and the vice president.

RC: Probably the biggest challenge I would call the narrative challenge. There has historically at Rollins, particularly within the faculty I think, existed a very wide range of cognition between perception and reality. And by perception, I mean, this is what the narrative is, this is the story; and by reality I mean, this is what the data tells you. And so, part of the project that I really tried to work on was on - we came to call it myth busting. The myth is all the best students at Rollins are dropping out and they're going to other colleges. There is no data to support that, and there's been no data to support that for fifteen years. In fact, the greatest retention is of students who get both merit aid and need-based aid. The worst retention at Rollins are average students who are full paying. That's counter to the narrative that's out there. So, that's an example of the myth busting. I was surprised how resistant parts of the community were to that kind of myth busting, because breaking up someone's world view, particularly breaking it up with data, proves to create a lot of friction. So that was one of the issues I really had to work hard with.

A second issue that we faced, the quality of our resident halls was abysmal ten years ago. Fortunately, through the endowment and other gifts, we were able to significantly revitalize resident halls. Ward resident hall project was one of the most amazing building transformations

that I have ever seen. When you have eighty-eight days to gut a building and have it ready for the beginning of fall term - and we did it, and we did it with about four days to spare. Three shifts a day, seven days a week - I remember one day walking in and there were forty-four electricians working in the building on one day. I worked very closely with Hoyt Edge, who was Associate Dean of Faculty then, trying to come up with a way to create stronger programs to strengthen our first-year student experience and to create learning communities, which we knew would be a great idea, but put a learning community in a crappy place, and it doesn't go anywhere. So Ward was essential as part of that vision, and so, that transformation was a difficult one as well.

And a third one which was very difficult, and continues to be a struggle for Rollins, is trying to build its national reputation, because when you're a small school and you don't have division I athletics, which is the way most colleges actually get in the paper, enhancing the intuitional representation and the institutional visibility nationally is a very, very difficult thing to do, and it's done very, very slowly, and you suffer lots of setbacks. I mean, for every time you get your name in the *Washington Post*, it only takes five minutes for somebody thinking, Oh it would be cute to send a bunch of letters in to *Playboy* and get ranked as one of the party schools in America, to destroy everything you've been working on. And so, I actually developed the line which is, "If a tree falls in the woods and no one hears it, somebody at Rollins chopped it down" because of how hard it really is to get that kind of national attention. And were engaged in a strategic marketing initiative that I think did a great job of getting us a logo and getting some things common, but we're a long ways still, I think, from the kind of name brand recognition that Rollins is going to need if it really is wanting to catapult to the next-level.

WZ: I understand that you are also teaching a course while serving as vice president and dean. So tell us some of the courses that you taught here while at Rollins.

RC: Well, I really taught a couple courses, but the one that I really developed the most was on post-modern cultural theory, and that class, and students' interest in studying media and cultural theory really led to getting a group of faculty together, principally led by Lisa Tillman in the Department of Communication, and then developing a new major in Critical Media and Cultural Studies. And with Denise Cummings, who was a visitor and now a tenure track faculty member, and Lisa, and then about twenty different faculty from about ten different disciplines, who really worked for three to four years to develop this program. And we were convinced it would be a huge program and students would really love it, and it would create great majors. And so I really developed the core course and the theoretical course in that program, and then got a chance teach it for a couple years, and now we've graduated two classes and I think the media studies major is the forth or third largest major at Rollins now; I think there are a hundred and sixty media study majors. I will predict it will be the second largest major in the next year or two, right behind international business.

JR: Speaking of media studies and cultural analysis, a lot of your convocational speeches you have are pretty well known to be very pop culture influenced. How do you develop those?

RC: I do a lot of - I read about a job that some people who are in the marketing world have a couple of years ago called cool hunting, and these are people who are actually paid by organizations to try and figure out what's going to be cool next - and so their called cool hunters.

And so I read a lot about how they worked and how they've watched trends and watched things appearing in multiple television shows and pop cultural references, and music, how words appear in the urban dictionary, and so forth. So I took the tools of the cool hunters and literally throughout the years, I tried to find when there are major pop cultural events or songs that go to number one or number two, television shows that are highly ranked, movies that are highly ranked, and try to find in them some meaningful texts that I think really speak towards arts and towards the educational process. And I keep a running log of all those things. Most of the speeches that given, I use those as the fundamental texts. The rhetorical device that I use - I grew up Protestant - I grew up Evangelical Protestant actually - and a church experience that actually by most people would probably be defined ethnically - most people would call it the black church experience in the South - I mean it's kind of Evangelical Protestantism- well that experience extended far beyond the black church experience, I mean, it was really common to much of Evangelical America. And the rhetorical structure of such a speech is that you have the text, which in the church is biblical, which in my case it's from these pop culture references; a lot of rhyme - in the church experience, it's built on rhyme, which the dominant rhyme theme in our culture is rap, and so that was the second thing; and then analysis, and the analysis usually should involve humor, and it would it would involve a lot of self-deprecating humor too in terms of trying to make fun of yourself. I mean, that's the basic structure of the Evangelical sermon and that's exactly the structure if you look at virtually every speech that I've used that I've laid out. And I've just changed all the text, you know, I've changed all the historical structures of that to really try to apply it to higher education.

So, there are a lot of fun to write, and the past couple of years, I've also gotten very much in to tweeting because I'm fascinated by the limitation of one hundred and forty characters, to be able to say something in one hundred and forty characters. To me it's like the digital post modern sonnet; it's a form you have to work in. And in fact, the graduation speech that I just gave at Holt this past weekend, I called "The Seven Tweets of Highly Effective People" - things you can live your life by. So it's fun, and it's fun to try these out on audiences and to see what works, what doesn't work, and then to really refine a message based on that. The big thing that I really want to say to first-year college students is that your college education will give you the tools to critically analyze anything, even the Black Eyed Peas. If you get them thinking that way right from the bat, I think it really helps in terms of this notion that the whole education is this stiff thing, and particularly at things like convocation, where we're up there with our robes on, and we all look like Supreme Court justices. I can only imagine what it feels like to be - I remember what I felt like when I was just seventeen year old or an eighteen year old and I walked in to this hall, and there were these people in their black robes and these multicolored things, I didn't know what any of this stuff meant, and stripes down their arms. I thought I was going to jail, I mean, that's what I felt like. So I thought let's liven this thing up a bit. It's been fun, and I think there are a lot of people who like it, and there are also people who also can't stand it. I mean particularly the people who are traditionalists, who you know, how dare you do this to our controlled ritual.

WZ: Yeah, that is very fascinating. So are you going to write it out and get it published? What are some of your ideas for research and scholarship?

RC: Well, for an academic this next sentence might be controversial, but I think the era of publishing is dead. I mean, publish it yourself, and put it out there. I will reach more people in

one Facebook status update than in any critical article that I ever wrote in my life that was published in a critical journal. As an example, last weekend I posted the seven tweets on twitter and seven minutes later, a student at McDaniel broadcasted to other students there saying this is our new college president, this is cool! So, I hit an audience of at least two to three thousand people in less than twenty minutes. One quote in the *New York Times* and you hit an audience that can far outreach most scholarly monographs that are ever published. So I'm not saying that somebody shouldn't be doing that, because scholarly research is very important and it's very important in a certain community. I don't think that's the method through which I can reach the most people. I mean, I think speaking orally and then capturing that is the venue through which I think those ideas can be shared to a broader range.

WZ: You mentioned about a community engagement idea at Rollins. Are you also active in the local, civic community organizations that we need to know about?

RC: You know, I really focused my life here at Rollins internally and nationally, and when you're trying to build a national brand of an institution, it's a real struggle between the question of do you spend your time connected to organizations in the local community, or do you go out and you try to build the name in national groups. And so I remained very, very involved with the Kellogg Foundation nationally and internationally, with the Mellon Foundation and the Global Partners Project, with the AAC&U - the American Association for Colleges and Universities -, with the Council in Independent Colleges. My wife Robyn and I were very involved in arts organizations locally, but she more than I. So, if I regret one thing in leaving here after ten years, is that I wasn't that connected to organizations that were here in Central Florida, except vicariously through the projects that we were in the community engagement program.

WZ: Now looking back, how do you view your Rollins career of ten years?

RC: Wow, it's gone, you know, it's just like that (snaps finger). I tend to think of my Rollins career as more of like seventeen or eighteen years because of the ACS summer workshop, but I remember the very first time I saw this campus on a February morning, and the light on Lake Virginia - because I had been brought in the night before, and so it was dark and I couldn't see anything - and I woke up and walked down and saw that lake, and I thought this is like heaven. How can you not learn when you're in an environment like this? And I was really fortunate - Furman has one of the most spectacular college campuses in this country too with a huge lake and mountains right in the background - I've gotten to work or go to school at two of the most beautiful campuses in the country, I think. But every time I've ever taught a class in my life, I get to the end of term and I look at the teacher evaluations. And say it's a class of thirty-five students, you get thirty-four people that say, Oh you're the greatest thing since sloppy joe's and you know, one person says, You weren't very helpful to me on such and such a paper, whatever. All I think about is that I wasn't very helpful to one person on such and such a paper. I mean, I just obsess on that. And, the tension I fight right now as I come to the end of my career here is I look at all these things that got accomplished, and I'm just so humble and honored by some of the accolades that I've received in the past couple of weeks from the College. The Decoration of Honor was just such a shock. I just still can't get over that. I think somebody's going to come take it back. I think about x, y, and z that didn't get done. So maybe a couple of months from when I'm deeply involved in all the new things that need to get done, I'll forget about that, but

there are still a number of things I'd love to get back and love to do differently. But I guess that's part of learning, part of growing up. This has been a magnificent experience in my life. Just great people who work here, great students who go to school here, and I feel very, very fortunate that I've gotten to spend ten years of my life being a part of the history of this place.

WZ: Anything else you would like to share with us before we close?

RC: Anything else in the questions list?

AA: What do you think you will miss the most when you leave?

RC: The place - and I don't mean that - because the people are a part of the place too. But when the marketing firm developed that notion of find your purpose, find your place, I was just so drawn to that phrase "find your place," because I think this campus and this community had such a great sense of place with the environment that we're in, the feeling of luck and prestige to be able to live in an environment like this and work with the people that we're surrounded with, to have the resources and endowment to be able to do the kinds of things Rollins is able to accomplish. Few, few colleges in this country have that, and that's what makes this place magical. One of the things that I'm always saddened by are the people who don't recognize it. I remember, maybe my first year here when we were interviewing a job candidate and I was walking across campus with this guy, and he said, "What do you do when the novelty of this place wears off?" And I knew I will not hire him, A, but the second thing I thought was, well you ought to leave if the novelty wears off. And one thing that I can say after ten years the novelty has not worn off. I mean, I come here every day and I feel incredibly lucky. I don't care how crappy the day is, the next day I come back and I still feel incredibly lucky. I don't think there is a day I've ever lived or worked in this community I haven't learned something from people around me. I know a whole lot of people who live their entire lives and don't get to say things like that. So, I'll miss being a part of this place.

WZ: Thank you so much Roger. We will really, really miss your leadership here. And thank you for your contribution for helping us preserve Rollins history.

RC: Thank you, this is a great project and I'm honored to be a part of it, so I wish you all the best.

WZ: Great, thank you.