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Oral History Interview with Dr. Patricia Lancaster

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Oral History Interview with Dr. Patricia Lancaster
(6/27/2005)

Zhang: Good afternoon. My name is Wenxian Zhang. Today is Monday, June 27, 2005. With me are Corey Schreck and Lily Velez, two student assistants working with Archives during the summer. We're going to interview Dr. Patricia Lancaster who is Vice President and Provost of Rollins College. Dr. Lancaster, could you share with us your family background?

Lancaster: All right. I am an only child. My parents, Sam Lancaster and Nancy Eubanks Lancaster are both from South Carolina. I grew up in Spartanburg, South Carolina, and attended school there. My family on my father's side has been in the upstate region of South Carolina since before the American Revolution. And most of my relatives still live in South Carolina, but I struck out to go to Florida and came to Rollins in 1970 and have been in Florida ever since.

Zhang: Could you share with us some of your educational background, where you went for grade school and college?

Lancaster: I attended grammar school in Spartanburg until the fourth grade. And then my father was recalled into military service during the Korean War and we were sent to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. So I had two years of grammar school in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and then we returned to Spartanburg where I attended Evans Junior High School and Spartanburg High School. I then went to Coker College, which was at the time a women's college. It's located in Hartsville, South Carolina. I received a scholarship to go to college, and I was graduated first in my class.

Zhang: That's wonderful. Is Coker College a liberal arts college?

Lancaster: Yes it is, and in fact my education there, I think, had a great influence on the development of my interest in further education as well as the things that I like to teach. They had a curriculum that was called world civilization. And it was a course that you took all four years. I should say that in fact, I finished college in three years; I started in 1960 and finished in 1963. But the course was designed so that you had lectures by faculty from a number of different areas and there was an effort made to give you background about a historical period and all of the things that went on at that time. Not only the political events, but what was happening in the arts and what was happening in science, so that there was a real holistic understanding of each period as you worked through it. I think that course is no longer taught, but for me it was a wonderful way to learn. I think that I got more out of having that type of course than I would have by taking a lot of individual courses on the same material.

Zhang: So what made you decide to major in French?

Lancaster: When I went to college, I thought that I was going to major in biology. I was very interested in science. I had some image of myself wearing a white lab coat and doing

something, not exactly sure what. So I told the college advisor that I was majoring in biology. But I had had a lot of French in high school. We had a very progressive school system that had more than the usual amount of language study. So I was already fairly advanced in the study of French, which I enjoyed very much. When I was a freshman, I went into an intermediate level French class, and then I was taking my biology class. And when the midterm advising period came along, my biology professor said, "Now, you need to sign up for calculus next semester." Well, although I could do mathematics, I never enjoyed it a great deal and during the same advising period, my French professor said, "You know, you have a real talent for French. I think that you should major in French." So I thought that sounded pretty good and I said, "If I major in French, do I have to take calculus." She said, "No." I said, "Fine, I'll major in French." (Laughs) I don't know how I thought I was going to be a biologist without taking advanced math. Maybe, you know, as a freshman you haven't really thought that sort of thing through. So I told my parents that I was intending to major in French. I was the first person in my family to attend college. Although there were teachers in my family, I was the first one to get a four-year liberal arts degree. So my parents said, "How will you make a living?" And I said, "Well, I don't know. I guess I'll teach."

So here I am, many years later, making a pretty good living (laughs). And I think that it follows along with what Joseph Campbell says in his books. He always says, "Follow your bliss, do the thing that you like and enjoy, and you'll be much more likely to be successful." I liked French, majored in French; I became a teacher. Would you like to hear about my teaching?

Zhang: Yes.

Lancaster: After I finished college with my bachelor's degree, I taught junior high school French in Spartanburg. Then I taught high school French in North Carolina and I had an opportunity, even though I only had a bachelor's degree, to teach freshman level French at Clemson University. So I took that position and I found that college teaching was very good in comparison to high school teaching (laughs), where you have maybe five classes a day and a study hall. And I thought, you know, this is the life for me. Although I liked, I did like teaching very much, I liked working with junior high and high school aged students.

Then I applied to graduate schools, and I applied to Emory University in Atlanta. I was offered an NDEA fellowship. Now the NDEA fellowships were given out at that time, this was in the late sixties, as a part of a national effort to increase the number of college professors, because there was a huge demand for spaces in college and not enough college professors. And it's actually called the National Defense Education Act. So, by getting a Ph.D. in French, I was contributing to the good of my country, and they paid my tuition and gave me a very small stipend to live on. I received two hundred dollars a month and this was in 1967.

So I enrolled at Emory in a program that they had, that was a combined master's and doctorate. You studied for your master's degree and took the exam, the written exam, and if you passed it, then instead of writing your master's thesis, you went directly into your doctoral studies. And then you had your comprehensive exams for the doctorate and wrote your

dissertation. And when I had finished all of my classes and exams and had started on my dissertation research, then I was offered the position at Rollins.

Zhang: Okay, now recall your graduate school experience, do you still remember some of the faculty members there at Emory that gave you a major influence and make you want to become a college professor?

Lancaster: Well one in particular, whose name was Walter Strauss, and he was, again, someone who was very interested in interdisciplinary studies. He could read Italian and French and German, and he often taught interdisciplinary type courses. So I had him for several classes including literary criticism. I had another professor, whose name was Walter Evans, and he was a very gentle, quiet person who was an excellent scholar. He taught me how to analyze a text, a poem, or an essay. So I think I was most influenced by those two professors.

Zhang: Okay, so what made you decide to come to Rollins?

Lancaster: Well, I was looking for a job, and one of the other students in my program, who had a similar fellowship to mine, had met the head of the foreign languages department at that time, Frank Sedwick, and this other, this fellow student, was offered a position at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and he wanted to take that position, and he said to me, "You know, they have an opening at Rollins College. I know the head of the department there. I think you should apply." So I did. I came for my interview and I fell in love with the place; it was so beautiful, and of course the Langford Hotel was still standing at that time. I stayed at the Langford, I went out with the members of the department, and loved the size of the place, the beauty of the campus, and I thought that this is— And also the fact that there was a summer study program, because, by then, I had already taken one group of students to France while I was in graduate school. I was a leader for the experiment in international living and so I knew that I enjoyed taking students on study abroad programs and I knew that I would be able to do that at Rollins.

Zhang: That's wonderful. So what is your first impression, besides the physical beauty of the campus? What's your impression of the student body, the administration, or the faculty structure back in 1970?

Lancaster: It was a very exciting time, because there had been a lot of retirements from the faculty—faculty who had been here for decades. And the college was hiring a lot of faculty like me, who were in their twenties and right out of graduate school. There were probably, I would say, at least twenty of us who were new that year. And that was very exciting because you had the feeling that you had an opportunity to really, to come in and even though you were young, have a fair amount of influence. You could help the college to grow and you could have an influence on the academic life of the institution.

Zhang: Could you tell us some of the courses you have been teaching since you came here?

Lancaster: Well, of course, when I was a French professor, I taught your basic French courses: French 1, French 2, Conversational French. I also taught, sometimes we have courses that are organized according to a particular century, and, generally, I tend to teach the seventeenth century and the twentieth century. My main area of specialization is French theatre, so we also, sometimes, taught courses that were French theatre from the Middle Ages to the present; I've taught that type of course. Then we, those of us in the department also developed some courses to be taught in English for students who were interested in French civilization, culture, and literature but who were not advanced French students. And so I developed a course called French Civilization from 1850 to the present. Of course at that time, the present was about 1980 (laughs).

Zhang: So over your teaching career, what course have you enjoyed most teaching or what other course that you feel that has been challenging?

Lancaster: Well I do like teaching the drama course, that's probably my favorite, and then the French culture course.

Zhang: You mentioned about taking the students to France. So could you tell us about that experience?

Lancaster: Well when I was in graduate school, I applied to be a leader for the Experiment in International Living, which is an organization with its home base in Vermont. And they choose young people in the summer to be leaders and take groups of students all over the world. The purpose of the organization is not to offer academic credit, but rather to give you an experience of living in another culture. And so as a leader, you're taught something about small group dynamics and about how you can help students to understand the experience that they're having, of living in another culture, and what makes them uncomfortable and how they can deal with these experiences of culture shock. And the idea is that you create, in the large picture, you create world peace one person at a time, by having young people, from various countries, come together and get to know each other. So my group was sent to a small town outside of Besançon, France and there were about twelve of them. I had college students, a lot of the groups are high school students, but I had college students. So they lived with families. I lived with a French family.

Zhang: So this was the first time that you—

Lancaster: The first time I went to France. The first time I went to France I was showing twelve other people around (laughs). I had gone myself, as a student, to Quebec right after I finished college. I went there and studied and lived with a French-Canadian family, so I knew what that was like. At any rate, so I had taken that group to Besançon and I am still in touch with the family there. In fact I will probably see them in about two weeks. My French mother is eighty-five now. (Laughs) I call her my French mother. And so, let's see— Oh, the first year I was here I got an unexpected opportunity to take the group on a study abroad trip. The woman who was the head of the French section, Elinor Miller, had organized a winter term course. Because at that time we had a four or five week January term, and she was taking a group to Martinique in the French West Indies, and it was a large group. The idea was that

some of the students, if they were more advanced, would go and live with the families in Martinique and others would live in a villa and would have instruction in intermediate level French. So she called me just before Christmas and said, "Do you have a valid passport?" And I said, "Yes." She said, "I have pneumonia and I can't go to Martinique in January. Can you go and take the group?" (Laughs) I said, "Of course. Sure, why not?" And so there I went, off with about forty Rollins students to Martinique—

Zhang: Just you?

Lancaster: Just me, yes. I did have a sort of student work-study helper. But it was quite an experience, very interesting. And we went again the next winter and then we also had a summer program in Tours, France that I was involved with for a couple of summers.

Zhang: Yeah, I took students to China last year, twenty students. I feel it's a large responsibility, I just cannot imagine taking forty students all by yourself.

Lancaster: Well the most interesting thing about that trip was that we were there for about ten days without any money (laughs).

Zhang: So how did you survive?

Lancaster: There was a group of Martiniquais who had, they called themselves something like the Cultural Association, and they had arranged for us to have this place to stay in. It was a large, old house, it had no hot water, but it had a very lovely view of the Caribbean. And they paid for the initial food cost for those of us staying there. And I had gone there with a cashier's check for a large sum of money. You know a cashier's check is supposed to be the same as cash. You should be able to just go to a bank and walk away with the money. Well the bank in Martinique didn't want to accept this cashier's check, and it was drawn on some New York City bank. And they said that I would have to wait a week and come back to get my money. So I waited and I went back, and they said, well no, they hadn't received the authorization yet. And I said, "You know, you really don't need an authorization, this is the same as cash." "Well, you know, we can't be too careful." Essentially, the cultural group that had helped to organize it, kept advancing the money to feed us until I got the check cashed.

Zhang: They had their share of cultural shock.

Lancaster: It was a terrible culture shock. A couple of the young men in the group rented Vespas. And we lived in a suburb outside of the main city Fort de France, and it seems to me that between this villa we lived in and Fort de France, was pretty much down hill all the way with a lot of hair-pin turns and a big cliff going over the other side. One of the fellows would put me on the back of the Vespa and we would go into town and see if we had any money yet. Sometimes I went on the bus. But it had a happy ending: we finally got our money and I only had two of the young men who were injured riding their Vespas (laughs), and not while I was on one (laughs). It was quite an experience, it really was.

Zhang: So everyone back home safe and sound? [Talking at the same time] That's what counts.

Lancaster: Everyone got home safe and sound.

One of the students did actually have to stay a night or two in the hospital because he injured his hand when he had a Vespa accident. The good thing is that I was so young that I didn't get too panicky about any of this. I was only twenty-eight years old, I think (laughs).

Zhang: So besides the French field study, you also got involved in Australia and New Zealand, and what others? Spain and New Mexico? Could you tell us about that part of your experience?

Lancaster: Well, after I'd been on the faculty for a while, I had an opportunity to—I was always very active in the faculty governments, I was always on a lot of committees. You have to understand that there were very few women at Rollins at the time; there was just a handful of us, really. And the faculty wanted women on the various committees, so I ended up doing a lot of committee work and chairing committees when I was still a very junior faculty member. And I was involved with the curriculum committee quite a bit. So at one point there was a decision on the part of the faculty to have an associate dean of faculty who would be selected from the faculty. So I was selected to be the Associate Dean of Faculty, and one of the jobs that I had in that regard, I worked with faculty development, helping faculty get funds to go do their research, and so forth. But I was also in charge of our study abroad programs, and that included: the semester in Australia, and the semester in Ireland, and the summer program in Madrid. And then I also helped with all the winter term programs. We had a lot of overseas winter term programs at the time; I used to advertise those. And then I helped students find other study abroad opportunities, because we had various associations with other programs. If you wanted to go to France or Germany then you would go through one of our affiliated programs

Zhang: So basically you served as Associate Dean of the College and also in the capacity of the Director of International Studies?

Lancaster: Well as Associate Dean of Faculty, I was overseeing the international programs and I had a coordinator. And after I'd been Associate Dean of Faculty for about three years, we changed the faculty government structure again, and there was no longer the position of Associate Dean of Faculty, but then I kept the position of Director of International Programs.

Zhang: Okay. So as the Director of International Programs, do you visit all of Rollins' abroad programs? Did you go to Australia?

Lancaster: I used to go out with the Australia group maybe every other year. I think I went to Australia four, possibly five times. I went to Ireland at least two times that I can recall and then I visited the program in Madrid one summer as well.

Zhang: So you go there and visit students?

Lancaster: Well you talk— Because we had, in Australia and Ireland, we had resident directors, so you'd go there and work with the resident director, you meet the faculty, you do any type of business that needs to be done related to classroom space, housing with families and so forth. Or at least make sure that things are going well.

Zhang: Okay, good.

Lancaster: Kind of a supervisory visit.

Zhang: So over your years, do you recall any students that gave you a lasting impression, that you will always cherish their memory?

Lancaster: Well we had, very early on we used to have a different curriculum. And part of the senior curriculum was a senior capstone course. And students could form groups and ask a faculty member to be the teacher for that group. But it really was a seminar in which they did research and then they came and reported to the group. There was a group of young women who had been very active leaders on campus and they were very bright, and they asked me to be their teacher for a senior capstone course on women. And one of the students in that class was Adis Vila, who later went on to law school, and at one time, worked in the governor's office here in Florida. There were several other very talented women in that group. I've had so many students over the years.

Zhang: Do you keep in touch with some of them?

Lancaster: Some of them, right. One was here just lately, Lois Cooper. And she was a very, very good student and went on to study for her doctorate at Princeton. She was here last— Was it just last fall we had the presidential election (laughs)?

Zhang: Yes.

Lancaster: It seems a long ago. All right, so she was here in the fall of '04 working, heading up the Central Florida campaign to elect Kerry. And so it was nice to get to see her again.

Zhang: So, during the years, do you recall any significant moments that you think that had a major impact on the direction of Rollins? For example, do you have any memorable experience during the Vietnam War era or any other special events that you can think of?

Lancaster: Well I think, not so much an event, but over time, it's been good to see the change in Rollins in the diversity of our student body. And, in fact, that does bring me back to one student in particular with whom I do keep in touch, and his name is Goliath Davis. He was among the first African American students to earn a degree from Rollins. He went on to get a Ph.D. in criminal justice; he later became the chief of police in St. Petersburg, Florida, which is his hometown, and he's now the deputy mayor there. And my colleague, Eleanor Miller and I, were able to put together a scholarship for him to go on one of our summer study programs in

France. And that made such a lasting impression on him. He always credits it with being one of the most important things that happened to him in his education. So, you know, that always makes you feel good.

Particular events? I remember sometime fairly early on in Thad Seymour's presidency, there was a student demonstration related to the City of Winter Park was protesting— You've heard this before? The City of Winter Park didn't want us to have *Equus* on our campus, or, if we did, they wanted to make sure that everyone stayed fully clothed. And there was a sort of march on downtown Winter Park. Probably someone else remembers more details than I do, but I do recall—

Zhang: Yes, we heard the story from Seymour, but we would like to hear, what was the faculty's take on the issue?

Lancaster: Well, I think, for one thing we were very happy that President Seymour didn't just simply say, "Fine," you know, "we won't." We felt that he was very supportive of the theatre and of the academic freedom of the institution to put this play on. And I seem to recall that some group went down to the city hall, and there's a statue there of a nude, or at least from the waist up, and they put a bra on her. Did he tell that?

Zhang: Yeah, we have a picture.

Lancaster: Do you have a picture? So that was a big thing (laughs). As you can tell, we all remember that one.

Zhang: Yeah.

Lancaster: The hundredth anniversary celebration was great. The opening of the Olin Library was a wonderful event for the college, and of course then all of the great changes to our campus during president Bornstein's presidency. I think many of those are memorable; the opening of the sports center, for example.

Zhang: That's definitely true. Now we're talking about changes, what is your impression of the student body? Have they changed for the better in term of quality of student enrollment? What's your impression in that regard, over the past thirty-five years?

Lancaster: Well I think that there may have been, over all, an increase in, perhaps, the level of academic preparation of our students. But I can tell you that, even in 1970 when, or maybe it was '71, President Critchfield made a little talk to the faculty in which he sort of indicated that we had managed to recruit as many students as we needed to fill the class and he said something to the effect that we need to give these students an opportunity to succeed (laughs). He was kind of indicating that we might have taken a few students who could have a little trouble getting through their freshman year. But truthfully, throughout my time at Rollins, I've always had extremely bright, motivated students. I mean, I think that you get a wide range at almost any institution; and Rollins has really, in my time here, had its share of

students who are smart, who work hard, who are politically engaged. I think we have great students.

Zhang: So in 1992, you became the Dean of Brevard campus. Can you tell us about your experience there?

Lancaster: Well that was quite an interesting experience because all of the students at the Brevard campus were adult students, or at least they were studying for their degree in the evening, which meant that most likely they were working and so weren't going to school in a regular full time program. The group of faculty who worked with those students and who headed up the majors that we had, are really remarkable people, highly dedicated, very interested in the students' progress. We had Maggie [Margaret] Dunn, who's still with us, who headed up the English program; Larry Holt, who now runs the computer science major in the Holt school; Professor Ed Harrell, who headed up history; Sandra McIntire, who's now left Rollins, she retired, but she ran the psychology and organizational behavior major. And there were others as well. But the faculty who were truly dedicated to what they were doing and really knew how to inspire their students; it was a wonderful, small learning community. And it became much smaller because we were no longer able to offer the business major, which had to do with the Crummer's school accreditation by the AACSB. So we had to disband the business major.

And one of the more interesting things I've ever done in my life was to move a college. We actually moved our campus from a sort of a warehouse in Rockledge to a very nice facility in West Melbourne, and I got to help redesign the interior of the building. We had very high hopes for having that campus continue to succeed. But the growth of the University of Central Florida in Brevard County finally made it necessary for us to close down. So I had the opportunity to help a program move with the hope of growing and the sad duty and responsibility of closing it out.

Zhang: So Brevard, I believe, was started in 1953, right? On the airport—the military base?

Lancaster: Yeah, so it was started on the Patrick Air Force Base.

Zhang: So were you moved from the base to Melbourne?

Lancaster: No, most of the classes had already moved off the base. We were holding classes, some on the base, but mainly in small industrial facility that was in Rockledge. So I moved it from Rockledge to West Melbourne.

Zhang: I see. So all the programs offered there are undergraduate degrees?

Lancaster: Mhmm.

Zhang: We did receive the space shuttle. [Talking at the same time] Fifty years [time capsule], that's so lovely.

Lancaster: Yes, yes. Well one of the great things about my being there was that I got to—I formed an advisory board of local citizens. I was involved in a couple of things there: the Rotary club and the Junior Achievement of East Central Florida. In fact, I was the first woman chair of the Junior Achievement there. And the folks I associated with were heads of the various aerospace industries. People like the head of—the vice president of Lockheed, MacDonald, Douglas, Boeing, United Space Alliance. And they were very helpful and I got a lot of great opportunities to go and watch the space shuttle from very close. It's a wonderful experience. I became quite a fan of the space program while I was over there.

Zhang: That's great. So in 1998, you became, also, a dean of Holt School.

Lancaster: Mhmm.

Zhang: Could you tell us some about that?

Lancaster: Well by then I was already accustomed to working with mainly adult students, and it was an opportunity for me to pull the Brevard administration together with the Holt school administration, since the two programs were very similar. And then that paved the way, eventually, for us to completely close out Brevard and integrate the Brevard faculty and the remaining students from Brevard into the Holt program. And I very much enjoyed my Holt school experience. My favorite job, other than simple classroom teaching, I think, is being a dean because you get to work with faculty in curriculum and advising, and you have your supporters in the community. It's really a many faceted job that I find very rewarding.

Zhang: So what is most challenging about being the dean of the Holt school?

Lancaster: I think making sure that you maintain the quality of the educational experience of the students, because you want them to have the best possible instruction. And sometimes when you have many students who want to be in the program and you don't have enough full-time Rollins faculty to serve the needs of all of those students, then you have to make sure that the part-time faculty we're hiring have sufficient, you know, education and experience to be able to do as good a job as a full-time Rollins faculty member. That's always a challenge. You work with the departments who also want to be sure about that. Working with adult students is great. Many of them are so excited to have the opportunity to be in college that they are just very highly motivated to have a great experience.

Zhang: You know, Barry and I, we teach each January, that library research course. We have a wonderful time each year. I always look forward to teaching that course again to Holt school students.

Lancaster: Mmhm.

Zhang: So I understand, you are also involved with Holt school students. One of the successful programs is Starry Night?

Lancaster: Starry, Starry Night.

Zhang: Tell us about that.

Lancaster: Starry, Starry Night is a banquet or dinner and auction. And we, essentially, pay for the cost of the evening by selling tables to sponsors, usually tables of ten. And then we collect auction items from individuals and businesses. Some of them are silent auction items. It could be jewelry, art work, things like season tickets to the Magic games, and so forth. And people bid on those. And then we have a live auction, in which they bid on some larger things: paintings, expensive paintings, trips. By selling these things, then we're able to use, take the money and use it for scholarships for Holt students, and that's a lot of fun. We have interesting entertainment. This last year we had, I think we had the Supremes. We tend to have entertainment that was popular, maybe twenty years ago (laughter). It might not be entertainment that students today would recognize.

Zhang: So how long—

Lancaster: Do you mind if I have a little sip of my water at this point?

Zhang: Yeah, sure, go ahead.

Lancaster: (Laughs) Okay.

Zhang: So how long has that been running, and how successful was that program?

Lancaster: Well Starry, Starry Night had already been going for a while when I got there. And I think that this coming year will be its tenth anniversary.

Zhang: Oh, I see. So what other fund raising activities have you gotten involved with? I know that your major responsibility as the provost is more in academic affairs.

Lancaster: Well, your fundraising in a program like the Holt school is— It pretty much relates to your Board of Advisors, and then also, if you have some alumni of your program who may want to support the college or provide scholarships, they're the main ones that you look to to provide donations. The members of the board have to commit to a thirty-five hundred dollar donation each year. And it's, almost all of the fundraising for the Holt school, is related to scholarships. You don't go out to raise money for a building, or a particular piece of equipment. Mainly you just try to increase— Ideally you get people to give you endowment funds, so that you can put it into your endowment so it will continue to invest— to generate scholarship money over the years.

Zhang: Okay, I see. So during your years as the Dean of Holt [School], how many new scholarships have been created?

Lancaster: Hm, you know, it would be hard for me to say. Our largest gift was from one of our, a former chair of the board, Alan Ginsburg, who's now a trustee of Rollins. He

made a gift of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to go into an endowment for Holt scholarships. President Bornstein was very instrumental in helping us to obtain that gift.

Zhang: So basically Holt has a separate board?

Lancaster: Mhmm.

Zhang: Okay.

Lancaster: It's about forty people. Many of them are alumni of our program in one way or another.

Zhang: Tell us about your experience as the Vice President of the College. I'm sure you have much more responsibility.

Lancaster: Yes, (laughs) yes I do. Well it's been interesting. I served for fourteen months as interim provost with President Bornstein and then went back to the Holt school for a couple of years. Then I returned as interim provost, I guess in January of '04.

Zhang: Four, yes.

Lancaster: And then after the new president, Lewis Duncan, was selected, he asked me if I would stay on in the role of provost, for at least a couple of years. So it's very interesting work. It's interesting to see the operation of the college from the vice presidential level, and you get to see the great work that all of the different parts of the institution are doing: the deans of the various programs, the director of the library, the director of athletics. And mainly what you do is try to assure that they get the resources that they need to do a good job. You try to do that in a responsible way, because you have to be between, sort of between the institutional budget and all of the requests that are being made for funds that are coming up, starting with faculty and staff, and coming up through the divisions and then ending up on the provost's desk. And so really a lot of my work is to coordinate the work of the various deans, really to know what's going on in all of the different areas, and then to be responsible, for all of them, to the president.

Zhang: Okay. So now, looking back, how do you view your Rollins career?

Lancaster: It's been very long (laughter). I guess after I got my thirty-year watch, I was thinking maybe I'd retire pretty soon, but it's been thirty-five years now and it's been a wonderful experience for me. I think one reason that I've enjoyed it so much is that every few years I've been able to do something different. Moving from classroom teaching to administration; moving from teaching French at one point into teaching humanities courses; having different roles: director of international programs and all the way up to vice president. I mean, I came here as an instructor, without a Ph.D., I still had to finish my doctorate, so I suppose it's pretty amazing—

Zhang: Yes, it's incredible.

Lancaster: — To me that I came here as really my first true college teaching job as an instructor, and now, eventually, ended up as a vice president. I can certainly say there was plenty of opportunity for advancement (laughter).

Zhang: So, if you got a chance, what would you do differently, now looking back, or would you do exactly the same thing?

Lancaster: Oh gosh, well, you know you can't change the past.

Zhang: Mhmm, that's correct.

Lancaster: As an archivist I'm sure you know that very well. Not a great many things, I think I'm pretty happy with the way things have gone. I do have some regret about a particular opportunity that I have professionally in terms of scholarship. I have a good friend who is a novelist, poet, dramatist who is French [Vera Feyder]. I made contact with her in 1983. We've remained friends. I think if I hadn't been as busy with the administrative work that I've taken on, there would have been some real opportunities there for me to work closely with her, perhaps on some translations of some of her work, or I probably could have done more to contribute to scholarship about her in this country; and I think it's something that I may still do, after I retire. But particularly with the work that I did as Dean of Brevard and Dean of the Holt school, it's not a type of work that just goes from eight-thirty to five. Because if you're really doing your job, you are back, very often, in the evenings for student events or development activities. When I was in Brevard I was working so hard to try to make a go at that campus. I was in a lot of community organizations and I was going to Chamber—I would be up and going to a Chamber of Commerce breakfast, I'd work all day, and then that night I'd go to something else. So it's a kind of work that really takes over your life.

Zhang: So you had to travel from here to there every day?

Lancaster: No, I lived there for seven years. I lived in Brevard County for seven years and then moved back here in 1998. But I did, frequently, drive over here about once a week. I find that it's difficult for me to do a good job as an administrator if I also try to teach, because teaching is really— Teaching takes, if you do it right, takes a lot of time.

Zhang: Definitely.

Lancaster: To me, it's not something you can do in your spare time. You really have to devote yourself to the course or courses that you're teaching. So as an administrator, I really have enjoyed my work, but there are sometimes aspects of teaching and scholarship that I'm sorry I have very little time for.

Zhang: But so, have you taught courses while you were Dean or Vice President?

Lancaster: I taught, let's see, the year before last— Well, I wanted to take part in the interdisciplinary course in the Holt school, so I worked with Professor LeRoy in music and

Leslie Boles in art history. And the three of us developed and taught a course called “Romance and Revolution: A Parisian Century.” And so I was really the main organizer of the course, and I talked about French culture and literature, and Professor LeRoy did the music and Leslie Boles did the art history, and that was fun. I truly enjoyed it. We did it the first semester. And so while doing that, while being the Dean of Holt [School] was a challenge, but it was pretty workable. But then the second semester, when I was asked to step back in as the provost, we were teaching the course again. Luckily we were going through it for the second time, because if we were going through it for the first time it would have been more difficult. I think you need to do it from time to time. You just have to be very careful about how you structure it so that you don’t shortchange either part. You know, you don’t shortchange the students because you’re an administrator, or your job because you’re teaching. But we all have to balance things in life.

Zhang: Yes. You mentioned about scholarship. Can you talk about your dissertation? And I understand you are also a member of Modern Language Association. You make quite a few presentations at several conferences.

Lancaster: Well, not recently, not recently. But I wrote my dissertation on a French dramatist by the name of Jean Tardieu. Well, in fact, he’s a poet as well as a dramatist. And I got to meet him in Paris after I finished writing my dissertation and I most recently was asked to write his biography for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. And I finished that about a year ago. They’re supposed to be sending me the proofs sometime this summer; they’ll probably arrive while I’m overseas. That was very interesting; I was very pleased to be asked to do that. And then as far as my work with my friend Vera Feyder I haven’t written—I haven’t published anything about her recently, but I would like to, again, before too long. And I’ll probably be seeing her next week.

Zhang: We have this nice feature in the Olin Library newsletter, *Olin Info*, called the “Books That Made a Difference.” So we’d like to ask you the same question: what books do you think make a difference in your life?

Lancaster: Most recently— Well there’re two books that I think are— There’s one book in particular that I really like in French literature, and that is Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, because I think that she was able to foresee how women’s lives would be in about fifty years from the time that she was writing. And when you read what she wrote, it’s remarkable how well she was able to predict what an increase in independence and career opportunity would do to women’s lives. And so I think anybody ought to read *The Second Sex*.

And then most recently, a book called the *Artist’s Way*, which has to do with getting in touch with your creative, the creative side of your being. It was written by a woman whose goal was to help people overcome writer’s block. And there are ten chapters; you work through the chapters, you do journaling, and you do various activities. And that was a great experience for me. I find that, and I’m going next week to a creativity seminar in Provence. I find that with the kind of work that I do, which is, you know, very bureaucratic in a way, dealing with budgets, planning, memos and so forth, for myself I have to also try to balance

that with some attention to creativity and imagination. Because the other stuff becomes very stale.

Zhang: Great. Now you have worked with four administrations from Critchfield, right? Critchfield, Seymour, Dr. Bornstein, and now President Duncan. So could you give us your reflections, working with different college administrations?

Lancaster: Hm (laughs). Well it's simply been interesting to see the different orientation that each president brings to the job. President Critchfield was not here for very long, and I was a very junior faculty member so it's hard for me to judge very much about his administration. However, he did come to the college from a background in admissions. And I think that he had, probably, a tendency to look, particularly, at the admissions side of the college. President Seymour had been a college president, but he came into that job through a student affairs. He was the Dean of Dartmouth who was primarily concerned with student affairs. President Bornstein came to Rollins from a position primarily concerned with development, institutional advancement. I suppose, in a way, that you could say Dr. Duncan comes from the field of science; he's a space scientist. But I do find that he is also particularly attuned to the interests and to the daily lives of students.

But I do think that all of these presidents have been very dedicated to Rollins, very selfless. This is one thing that you really must do, if you're a college president, you have to, essentially, say that this institution is what I'm striving to build and to represent; and I've seen that in all of these people. And I think they've had, in some cases, they've had a different influence on the institution to some extent, based on their background. President Bornstein of course, as she continued in her presidency, became a very active as a scholar about education and presidential—the role of the president, and she's now receiving national recognition for that. They've all been dedicated people and I think if you're fortunate enough to have presidents who are truly dedicated to advancing the institution, then you are indeed fortunate.

Zhang: Thank you. Last question: what is your plan for the future?

Lancaster: I'm leaving for France tomorrow (laughs).

Zhang: We wish you a wonderful trip and congratulations on your upcoming publication.

Lancaster: Oh, thank you very much.

Zhang: Thank you for your time, and thank you for your contribution to our oral history project.

Lancaster: Oh, well you're very welcome. Now if I think of anything that I've left out, do I get a chance to call you up and tell you (laughs)?

Zhang: Yes, you can add to it.

Lancaster: All right, this has been very pleasant, Wenxian, you're a good interviewer.

Zhang: Thank you.

Lancaster: I appreciate it.