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Interview with Dr. Robert Miller: Former Dean of the Hamilton Holt School

Tuesday, June 1, 2010

Wenxian Zhang, Alia Alli & Jennifer Ritter

Rollins College Archives

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. Bob Miller, the former Dean of the Hamilton Holt School. So Dr. Miller, tell us about your background, where you grew up, New York City?

RM: I did. I grew up in New York City, in the Bronx for many years. And then we moved to Yonkers in Westchester County. And from there I went to college at Alfred University, and one of the former deans of the Holt School is now president where I had served as - oh, when I was a student, Charlie Edmondson, who figures in this story as well about the Holt School. He's one of a number of deans of the Holt School that moved to the-

WZ: I know Charlie very well. I came in 1995 he-

RM: (at the same time) He was still Provost.

WZ: -was the Provost. Yes. Tell us about your childhood, your education, grew up in New York...

RM: Well, I went to the public schools, although my friends often went to parochial schools so we were split up and going to different places. From there I took a test to get into high school-Bronx High School of Science-and I was able to get into the school, it's competitive admission-I was able to get into that school and I was there for three years and graduated from there. So, I went to school in the Bronx at a high school dedicated to science and mathematics, thinking I would become a medical doctor. But I went to a, to college and one of the nice things about a liberal arts college is you get to try all different things, and I found out there were other things I liked a lot more than I liked science, and that was social sciences; although I did flirt with English for a while. I ended up in social science.

And from there I went to graduate school at SUNY Albany and then Syracuse University where I specialized in comparative and international politics, and began teaching at a Jesuit college in Syracuse called Le Moyne College, and a very happy memory of that period of time was I met my wife Janice, who was a graduate of SUNY Oswego and was back in town working, and we met and married. So while I did my doctoral degree, I was teaching because I couldn't afford to live without some income, although I was on a scholarship to pay my tuition and a few dollars, but it's not really enough to get by, so I began teaching; and while I was teaching-in order to sustain myself-I found that very happily I enjoy teaching very much. So I continued my work and instead of ending up in government service, which is what I thought I'd do with my

Ph. D., I ended up in academia, and I ended up, they hired me at Le Moyne on a full-time basis. I had begun on a part-time basis as a graduate student and enjoyed that very much.

The head of the department left—the head of political science—to become a dean somewhere else, and so I was asked to step in. I had no interest in administration but I was asked to do it. I said: “Okay, I’ll do it.” And I found that I liked to do it, enjoyed it. And I continued in administration, ended up at Northern Kentucky University first as head of a department and then as a dean; and from there the position opened at the, it was called then the School of Continuing Education, and I ended up applying for that position and ended up being accepted, being chosen. And as a result that was the beginning of my work at the Hamilton Holt School. Again, back then it wasn’t called the Hamilton Holt School, and one of the things I thought was that it didn’t give a proper recognition. Continuing ed. seemed to be a sort of nebulous term and not, maybe not as serious academic studies.

But one of the really nice things that Thad Seymour did during his presidency was to elevate this entire college. So when we’re talking about the Renaissance of these institution—in terms of a great president during the last hundred years—he has to figure in on that. Because he elevated not just the school I was associate with, but also the entire college and it began taking on a much more serious, much more academic reputation. And so what Thad asked of me was to continue the work of my predecessor, her name was Bettina Beer, she left to become a dean at the Ringling School of Design, and to continue her work. Her work was to take a program that had grown fairly large and make it very high in terms of its academic standards. Well, the students weren’t used to those high (laughs) academic standards, so during the years that she was working and doing what she was obligated to do and doing the right thing, enrollments really plummeted. And so now we were concerned, we had a much higher academic quality program with declining enrollments. In terms of it being self-sustaining it was becoming a problem. So, I came in and I worked with people in the community and with faculty and others in order to advance the reputation and recognition of the school, so that our recruitment of students would begin to grow and they did. So enrollments went up significantly during the seven years I was there. Revenues tripled from what it was when I arrived. So now we had an institution or a school that had both high academic standards as well as a financially viable.

One of the ways we raised those standards was to do two things: one was to involve the full time faculty. So during my years at the school, we changed the ratio of part-time to full-time so that most of the teaching was being done by full-time faculty; second, full-time faculty oversaw the program academically: its curriculum, the quality of its teaching. So now we had their involvement both teaching but also in terms of the important faculty governance oversight of the school. Uh—and third, we hit upon a new concept and that was, why don’t we hire faculty dedicated to the Holt School? But we wanted to make sure that they were every bit as good as the regular faculty. So what we did was joint appointments. So if someone came through the English department, that faculty, those faculty who interviewed become a member of what we call the core faculty. Those faculty members were chosen by the English department and continued to do some teaching, so it might be half and half or more, a little more in the Holt a little less in the day program. But that again elevated the quality because now we had more and more full-time regular faculty who had been screened and carefully selected who

participated—no, there’s nothing wrong with part-time faculty but there’s a problem for me, when part-time faculty dominate an educational program. So I think that change in ratio had a major impact and that high caliber faculty attracted better and better adult students at the same time; and we shared the cost of those faculty so that was a way financially. It was more affordable for us but—say for the English department—they had the benefit of additional faculty that they wouldn’t have otherwise. And we did that with a number of departments. So, those faculty are still here, core faculty, and they’re still making a very important contribution. To my regret, that concept didn’t continue—wasn’t supported—after I left. Because I thought that was an excellent way in order to strengthen both the day program—the traditional program—and the Holt School at the same time.

The story of the Holt School getting its name was that I proposed to Thad that we change the name of the school and he said, “Well, who do you want it named after?” So I said, “Well, how about Hamilton Holt?” And I know one of Thad’s many talents as president was really recognizing the history and respecting the history of the place. And so, through him I learned about Hamilton Holt and how important he was in the history of this institution. So I said, “Well, what about Hamilton Holt?” I figured why not go to the very top? And he said, “Well, be patient. We’ll think about it.” So I wasn’t patient. I was young and I kept pressing it. Eventually Thad, I think, was very pleased with what happened at the school, because his ideal of a financially viable, very high academic adult program was realized. And he did in fact bring it to the Board of Trustees and the Board of Trustees approved it. That’s how it got the name Hamilton Holt School.

WZ: So which year was that?

RM: Oh, I don’t remember. (laughs) It’s probably, it was in the mid 1980s when that occurred.

WZ: What are other challenges that you faced when you first came to Rollins?

RM: Well, one of course was getting legitimacy and recognition for the school, and that was done in several ways. One of which was really to develop a relationship with the full-time faculty and creating a committee—the Holt Faculty Committee—that would provide oversight. So I thought that was very important in terms of credibility. Having core faculty approved by the regular academic departments also added to the credibility of the program in the minds of the traditional faculty. And then as the students became better and better the faculty became very excited because they were teaching very high caliber students. And that was really capped by, I thought it was a little odd that we are a liberal arts college Rollins, yet there was no graduate liberal arts degree. So I proposed that we have a Masters of Liberal Studies, and I reached out to faculty here who were interested in a faculty committee. Worked with, created the curriculum, got approved through the College and we ended up with the first Master of Liberal Studies in the state of Florida, which I think it still flourishes till today and attracts some very high caliber, very interesting students from all kinds of different backgrounds. So that was a challenge.

Another was really having a place here. Because since it’s an adult program it’s really localized, because our students all come from here; unlike the traditional program

where students come from all over—particularly the NE—from all over. So we really needed to have strong roots into the community. So another challenge was to create a Board of Advisors and one was in place, but to make it much more senior, to get CEO folks and that was something that I was able to do with the help of others, and we put together a very strong Board of Advisors. And I'm very pleased that that is one area where I think the school continues to flourish, because the board still remains in place and it's become—if anything—even stronger than when I was here.

Another was a lot of the best students were working, had children and they didn't really have the means for private higher education. So the fundraising was very important, and so we initiated—I think—the very first fundraising that was done at the school. And we hired a director of development. The first one was Art Wasserman, went on to become, work with Carter, former President Jimmy Carter and his Institute for World Peace, and now he's working in London at the University of London and so he's been very, very successful. Unfortunately, the vice president of development back then who I admired, and unfortunately died recently—Warren Johnson—kept hiring each time we would hire a good director of development, soon as that person was doing really well, he would hire him over to the central department. So we had several directors of development during my time, but each did well, did good work. And then we created the first director of public relations, so we developed our own publications and marketing and as a result to that, I think we had a higher profile in the community than we had before.

JR: I also read that you instituted a couple of—I guess it was—new majors: Organizational Behavior and Organizational Communication. Can you tell us a little about those programs?

RM: Yes, I'd be happy to tell you about them. One of the things that became clear to me that the interests of adult students and the interests of traditional students are not always the same, and that sometimes there's programs that would appeal more to adults than to traditional undergraduates. So we created, and we couldn't have a business program, which would have been a very popular program because it became a liberal arts college and what the college did was put the graduate program separate from liberal arts rather than having part of it in terms of having quote “pure liberal arts experience” so there's economics but there isn't business. And being part of the liberal arts program we didn't have a business program either. But our students were very interested in business, so really what could we do to deal with that? Some of it was economics, but adults are very used to working in organizations and traditional students all end up—mostly—end up in those organizations. So they're keenly interested in how they function, how do you get promoted in organizations, how do you build teams, how can you be more effective in working in an organization whether it's Rollins College or Apple Corporation. And so we developed this program, but we wanted it to be—again—very high academic standards, so we decided that the only ones we would hire to run the program—to oversee it—would have a doctoral degree in psychology in a field called industrial organizational psychology. And we began hiring, I believe we ended up with several faculty, and they were jointly appointed again with the psychology program, but their organizational psychology courses became very, very popular, became one of the most popular adult

programs; although they also taught—maybe—a course or two at the undergraduate level, but I don't think there was the same appeal that there was with the adult students. And we did the same thing, we created a new program on Organizational Communication, which I'm not sure, is that part of the traditional program now? I don't know whether it's just a Holt program or, I know that communications is part of the school, but I'm uncertain about that aspect of it—so that program was created and those two had special appeal for adult students. Although I think Organizational Communication would be very interesting to traditional students as well. I can't speak for you (laughs).

WZ: I think later that evolved into a new master program, became Corporate Communications.

RM: Yes. Yes, so that had its beginning in the—during those years—during the 1980s.

WZ: While you were here at Rollins, I understand you also hold a joint appointment with the political science department.

WZ: Yes.

WZ: So, did you actually teach a course here?

RM: No, I didn't teach courses. I did guest lectures, but I didn't actually teach while I was here.

WZ: So, what topic when you gave lectures?

RM: Well, uh developing nations, while I was in Syracuse University I was offered a chance to go overseas on a Ford Foundation Fellowship, and I ended up in a country called Malawi, which is near Tanzania and that part of East Central Africa. So I became very interested, ended up doing my doctoral degree on developing nations, developing politics, so I would talk about that and comparative politics but also American politics as well. So I did do some lectures. I had taught full-time prior to coming to Rollins at Northern Kentucky University, during my early years there I taught on a regular basis. But when I became dean there I ceased teaching, and I became a lecturer and I would do guest visits and I continued to do that even more so when I ended up as president of Nazareth College up in Rochester, New York. Students were very interested in having the president visit classes, so I did that on a regular basis.

WZ: Mm-hm. So, back a little bit. What made you decide to major in political science?

RM: Huh-

WZ: What made you interested in that subject?

RM: Well, that's an interesting question, because as an undergraduate I barely knew the difference between history and political science. In fact, when I applied to graduate

school I applied both to history and political science, but I got more financial aid in political science. So that's why I ended up in political science. At one time, political history and history were very similar, and they were taught in very similar ways but there's been a revolution in terms of political science—in terms of it becoming more behavioral. So, it became more distinctive, more differentiated but the time that I began I found that the two areas were very similar in how they approached looking at things and analyzing things. And you're a history major right, Jennifer? Do you take political science too?

JR: I just finished my freshman year—

RM: (at the same time) Oh.

JR: —so I haven't taken any courses in it yet.

RM: Oh, I see, so you haven't yet. I was going to ask you whether you find it very distinctive, the differences between the two now, the way it's taught here at Rollins.

WZ: So you have on your way to become a successful teaching faculty, what make you decide to pursue a career in administration or a specialty in this field of adult education?

RM: Well, um you know I was doing both for a while—as a department head—and I was enjoying both. I found that I enjoyed being a chair more than I thought I would. And then when I went to Northern Kentucky University I ended up as a dean and it just seemed like an interesting opportunity. And I found that it was something I enjoyed very much, and I thought I could make a contribution that way. Also, think that administration is also teaching, so part of what a good academic administrator does is be a good listener, which a good teacher has to be, but also be able to explain why certain directions are worth pursuing and to be able to share with faculty, students, administrators, thoughts and analysis and experiences to help in terms of a persuasive way. So that I continue to think of the work of an administrator as being as teacher, but as I got more and more into it and more and more involved in it, I found that I was more consumed by that and had less time for teaching. I always found that some people couldn't just walk into a classroom and teach. I found that it really took a lot of preparation—that was my style—and I really couldn't do both; although I've known very fine administrators who have been able to do both. But that wasn't my case. That's why I began visiting classes rather than preparing courses.

So this experience at Rollins was very satisfying, very rewarding, and when Thad Seymour retired—it was sad to see him retire—as you know I've described him as a really Seminole person here in terms of leadership and moving the institution in very positive ways. At that time, I considered other possibilities and I was offered a deanship at Antioch University, which is one of the great progressive institutions in the country, and a chance to do some interesting curriculum development that perhaps would be less acceptable here. One of which was a limited residency program, a masters of conflict resolution where people in diplomacy, labor management relations, family counseling, from all different fields would come together and share their experiences during the

summer and then go back and work. I don't know that there's any limit to residency programs here, it's, this is a very high intensity face-to-face experience. So the thought of students doing work during the year elsewhere and coming back in the summer would be perhaps a little different. So I saw some other opportunities to pursue there at that institution and so I moved on. If Thad was still president I'd probably still be a dean of the Holt School till today, but he had other things to do and he went ahead and continued to make great contributions to the community, and continued to teach here, if I remember correctly.

WZ: You mentioned Thad Seymour, who are the other people you get a chance to work with?

RM: Well, another was Dan DeNicola who was vice president, Dan hired me. And Dan, I would describe as one of the finest teachers I have ever seen. He is a really gifted instructor and very supportive of my work in the Holt School. It was really because of Thad and Dan's support that I think the Holt School took off and prospered so much, because they were so supportive of it and understood its purposes, and understood the importance of really creating a model program, a nationally distinguished program which I think is what occurred. Dan left too after Thad left, and he became vice president of Gettysburg College and served there for many years, continued to teach and administer. Some things that—

JR: (at the same time) Backtracking a little bit, once you finish—sorry—what was it that brought you to Rollins in the first place? You've talked a lot about moving around and working at different organizations. What drew you to Rollins?

RM: I did want to mention—I will speak to that, Jennifer. You were asking about folks who I worked closely with. I know many of the faculty and administrators who are still here, those who have been here for many years but I particularly worked closely with Bob Smither. He was the person that I recruited to be chair of the Organizational Behavior program, and then he in turn hired other faculty and he led and established the program. After I left, all my friends then followed as dean of the Holt School, so when I left, Charlie took the position. When Charlie became Provost here, Bob Smither took the position. And then when Bob left, another friend of mine, Pat Lancaster, took the position. So I thought that one of the requirements in order to be dean of the Holt School was you had to be my friend. But it did change more recently to other hands, people I didn't know back then.

But you were asking what brought me to Rollins. I saw the position and I had done some work with adult students at Northern Kentucky University, both traditional and adult students, I thought that was interesting. I was very attracted to this area, being in Florida. My family was here and that was attractive and so I thought I'd come and interview and see what it was like, and when I came down I just was knocked out. I mean, this campus is absolutely beautiful, it's just as beautiful if not more so than ever. I don't know when you interviewed or perhaps you did this also, just being impressed with this campus, right on a lake, abutting one of the really neat areas, downtown Winter Park and the park itself and Park Avenue. And then, the people I met, I really liked very

much. I'd been at a public university for the first time in my life—Northern Kentucky University—and I really found it interesting, the differences. For one, it was much smaller here but a lot less bureaucratic. So I felt this is a place where it would be easier to do administration, because you didn't have to go through Frankfurt or Tallahassee, that decisions were made here locally; and it's a place where you can be more entrepreneurial, innovative and that in a public institution it's harder to do it. So those were reasons that I found it appealing to get back to private institutions; and as I look back at my career, I really think of what I've done is helping to sustain and advance private higher education at small liberal arts colleges. And these are the places that I think are most precious, most important and with the growth—huge growth—of community colleges, of public universities, and now they're out fundraising too. So, in all different ways the competition—and tuition is being much lower—so private liberal arts colleges have to be better than ever in order to prosper. And I think since I attended a private liberal arts college, I began teaching in a private liberal arts college, that going back to those roots at Rollins was very, very attractive. And I was just thrilled to be back here and everything I thought about in terms of this kind of institution I found here, all those positive attributes.

WZ: So, when you first came here, do you notice any difference between the Holt School students with other students, those you get a chance to work with at Northern Kentucky or state school or from different community college that you had experienced?

RM: Well, I found the Holt students very highly motivated and as the standards went up—because we—one of the things we did with the faculty, great faculty support, was to have an admission standards that was very high. So they had to take four courses in order to be admitted. One was a freshman survey which was taught only by full-time faculty. I believe that was two semester. Then there was an English course, I believe one other course. So, it was admission by achievement which for adults is good, because an adult may have been in college and flunked out ten years ago, and now they have seriousness they never had before. So how do you judge an adult on how good they are or will be? So, we developed what we call a behavioral evidence of high quality, which was they'd actually take challenging courses and would have to achieve a certain level. So the students we found through those processes and those who matriculated through the way I just described were—I think—a higher caliber student. So, I would say yes, they were—and even more so at the Masters of Liberal Studies program where you had some really brilliant students go through, but we, talk about the caliber of students, Polly Seymour went through the Holt School with a straight A average, and she's an indication of the caliber of student who's going through. She maybe more so than most, but is illustrative of the kind of talented adults who achieve degrees here from the Holt School. So obviously to me it's a very important institution, very important part of Rollins that I hope will continue to prosper in the years ahead.

WZ: You mentioned earlier the MLS program. Is that funded by a NEH grant?

RM: Yes, we began that program with some funding through the National Endowment for the Humanities; and I believe our first director was Barry Levis, who was a member of the history faculty. He may have retired. No? He's still teaching?

JR: He's the head of the department and the honors program now, I believe.

RM: Oh, great! Well, he did a super job in terms of—you know—the first starting something from scratch is always the hardest. And he's the guy who started this program from scratch, so once we achieved the approval, and Barry really approached it as a mission. He had great passion for this program and he taught in it on a regular basis, and he made sure the students would be very talented. And it was a program—the rule was that it would be taught back then only by full-time faculty, and the other deal that I made with the administration was as long as it didn't cost the institution money—so it wasn't the place that we were looking for in order to raise general support for the institution, but rather it was a place that would raise the visibility of the school in Orlando, a kind of admission based effort. So because we realized it wasn't like a graduate business degree, which was very functional and students would flock to and pay a lot of money for. So we had to keep tuition within means; although they do pay a lot of tuition compared to a public university to do graduate programs. But that program, I think, is very much in keeping with this institution as a liberal arts institution. It's very interdisciplinary, which is something the faculty here believe in and enjoy. It provided faculty—full-time faculty—an opportunity to team-teach, which was very important as well. So I'm glad to see it's become institutionalized and part of this place as well as some of the other innovations, at the time Organizational Behavior and Communication continue to prosper here.

WZ: I read that during your tenure the endowment of the Holt School was raised from half a million to 1.6 million. So tell us some of your fundraising, is that most through the Board of Advisors?

RM: Yes, mostly through the Board of Advisors, but also through their contacts and through our relationships with businesses in the communities. So I think those numbers are a little bit higher, I think it got that high after I left because one of the things that I began that become even more successful after I left was fundraising, and they have a wonderful event, that annual event, I'm trying to remember—

WZ: Starry, Starry Night?

RM: Starry Night, which is a great event; I've been a guest on several occasions. It's just a first-rate party with the purpose of raising money for scholarships. So yes, it seems that fundraising became stronger and stronger. That's what happens with fundraising, or should happen. That it's beginning and then you build on that, and you build on it, just like at this college, you know, when you have a campaign. Maybe the first campaign is for ten million, next it's thirty million. I think you did over a hundred million dollar campaign a few years ago, completed one. So hopefully that will continue here as well. But I know under Rita Bornstein there was great success in fundraising. And she has a very strong background in it, but that was built too on the foundation, to those who followed. And I'm glad that we helped provide a foundation, because I think we began the first fundraising and we were raising about a half a million dollars a year so, it may have been one and a half total by the time I left, and that went into scholarships.

And one of the things we did to attract donors is we permitted the donors, we encouraged the donors to be part of the interview team. So we screened our students who applied, and they would have to actually visit and talk about why this was important, their background, and so we would have several faculty and a member of our Board of Advisors or a contributor to the scholarship fund. So they saw first-hand the quality of the students who were being interviewed and were receiving these awards. And I think that may have been a little bit innovative to include in the interview process donors, I haven't seen that elsewhere. Donors are often included after the fact, invited to meet the students who have received it over lunch. But to actually be involved as part of the committee it's a bit unusual. Don't know if it continues to be practiced today, you can ask the folks over there.

JR: I know that you also had a lot of corporations that you would arrange internships for your students. I think IBM, Disney, a lot of big names.

RM: Right.

JR: How did you connect with them to get them to create these internships?

RM: Well again, through a social networking process, talking to someone who talked to someone else. The hardest way is just to knock on a door cold, calling. So, almost all the time it was through someone else. For example, we had one of the most senior people at Disney—Joanne—on our Board of Advisors so she knew many business leaders in town. So it was through that process and I enjoyed—I didn't mind calling and saying, "Someone suggested" and I would tell them what we were doing and—so yeah, that's how we did it, which is a sort of normal way through fundraising, and friend raising, I guess we called it not just fund raiding but friend raising, it's just as important.

AA: So, how was this program different than the other programs that are at other universities?

RM: (at the same time) Well—

AA: —Because I know Florida was the first one to have the MLS program. So, how did you—

RM: (at the same time) Well—

AA: —design this?

RM: Actually, I think we had it before Florida. They may have been second.

AA: Oh.

RM: Yeah, I think so. (laughs) But in terms of them—MLS or just graduate students?

AA: Of MLS.

RM: Oh, you mean in terms of the MLS?

AA: I guess both.

RM: Particular. Well with the MLS in particular, I think we just developed a strong team. One, being first was important. And I think we, I don't know if we're still the only one in Orlando, but we established a strong reputation and word of mouth helps a lot. We developed some beautiful recruitment materials that helped and it was a—I think—a very compelling story, this graduate program; so we attracted physicians, attorneys, engineers, and I don't know if there is any competition here because if University of Florida has a program in Gainesville that would probably not compete with ours. But more generally, when we talk about the Holt School—undergraduate and graduate—I would say it has been unique in some important ways. One is the academic quality. That—and I can't speak for anything other than my period when I worked with Thad and Dan. The purpose wasn't just to raise money, in fact some of the money that was raised was kept by the school and reinvested in these core faculty and other—but the purpose really was to provide a very high caliber education. And nationally at that time there were a lot of adult programs, but they were taught mostly by part-time faculty as an afterthought and really not central to the mission of the institution. So how was it different? It was different in that it was central to the mission of this college that the regular faculty were the same faculty who led this program, that the stringent requirements to get in was different than other programs which were much easier. With the scholarships that we had to make available to adults—so all those kinds of things I think, and then developing distinctive curriculum just for these students is something—I think—somewhat unusual, and that's why I feel this program really became a national model for adult education and a very counterpoint to those institutions, which were many, and are still many, that have these programs only as a source of revenue. And that I think does a disservice to the students that they serve, whether it's young folks eighteen to twenty-one, twenty-two, or older students or sixty year old students. I think we have the same obligation to provide them with the same quality education and to have the same standards and not to allow students to graduate who haven't gone through a rigorous education.

WZ: This is a piece of news clipping you may recognize. (sound of paper moving)

RM: See the mustache? [referring to his picture in the clipping]

WZ: Yes, so tell us some of your community outreach efforts.

RM: Well, one of the things I did was to serve on the Board of Directors for the Winter Park Chamber, and through that I got to know a lot of the business community as well. I did a lot of speaking at the Chamber of Commerce and other places that I would describe what was going on and what we were doing. So it was through all these kinds of things that I began to have a connection—not for me—but to make a connection for the school

with people in the community. So by the time I left, I knew a lot of the business leaders in particular in Winter Park, in this area, but more generally, and I think that's helpful for this kind of locally-based program. A dean of liberal arts would be a lot less involved in the community because it's—again—it's a national program and so it's a different kind of a job. But one of the interesting things about this kind of deanship, which is different than a dean of arts and sciences, is that it has so many more avenues for opportunity: of having a Board of Advisors, doing fundraising, of doing public relations and marketing, of recruiting students, direct oversight of the recruitment of students. So having done all those I think is a very good preparation as an administrator, because now I learned a lot more about recruitment, admissions, marketing, public relations, fundraising, and those were all things that I needed to do as a college president. So I thought it was a very good foundation for me. I mean, I didn't do it in order to become a college president that was the furthest thing from my mind (laughs) back in those days. But in retrospect, looking back, learning how to do those things and working with people who were specialists that we recruited to lead it, was very helpful for the school but also helpful in my development as an administrator.

WZ: Any special moment you will always remember, any story you'd like to share with us about your years at Rollins?

RM: Oh, there's so many stories it's hard to share just one. But I think there was an event—it's now the fiftieth anniversary I believe of the Holt School—in fact, one of the graduates will be interviewing me in just a few minutes, it just worked out that way, conveniently. But on the twenty-fifth anniversary we had an evening soiree which was black tie. We had never had an event quite like that, and we had it in a big ballroom with a dais for important people like Thad Seymour and his wife, and that event ended up being very, very successful. The ballroom was filled with people, I think we had, the mayor may have spoken at that time, some of the very well-known and very successful Holt School students spoke; and I think at that moment Thad Seymour understood the potential of the school, that it wasn't just a place where we would have high academic standards, it was also a place where we could reach out to the community and have a real impact as a college. And it's interesting because it was soon after that event that Thad agreed to rename it the Hamilton Holt School. But I think if you ask him, he would say the caliber of that event, the caliber of the speakers, the ability of the school to bring out such a large outpouring of support for an event like that demonstrated a kind of community relationship that he understood to be very important.

WZ: When you step down in 1991 you were awarded the Hamilton Holt Medal, that's very appropriate. So how do you view your Rollins career?

RM: Well, you know it's interesting when I received it I was very touched, of course. And at that time—maybe still—but at that time it only—that medal had only been given to presidents of this college who had served with distinction. So I took it as a very high compliment and I still have that medal, I've put it in a little frame (laughs) and I still have that in my office here, and I moved back here after I retired as president and I still have that. So I was very touched by that, and I felt very recognized for the efforts over those

years. So yeah, that was the culmination of being dean of the Holt School, receiving the Holt Medal, which I never imagined at the time that I began. So clearly, these were very rewarding years for me personally, but I think for the college generally and for the Holt School that this was a really a gifted moment in the history of the school, and I was very privileged to be part of the Seymour administration and to contribute to it.

WZ: Tell us briefly about your post-Rollins years.

RM: Well, I ended up as provost in one of the Antioch campuses, which is a very innovative program with individualized masters and low residency programs. From there I ended up in a very traditional academic vice presidency at Queens University, which used to be a partner of Davidson—it was the women’s college and Davidson the men—they both went co-ed. And I served there for a number of years and from there uh-this opportunity came up at Nazareth College and it was very interesting to my wife Janice, because she’s from Syracuse as I mentioned, and Rochester where this college is located is one hour from her home and her family. And unlike Jan, all of her family (laughs) stayed right there. So although she wasn’t keen at that time on my becoming a college president, when she found out that there was an opening in Rochester she said, “Yeah, that would be great.” (laughs) So I ended up there seven years and again, I took some of the skills that I had developed here in the service of that institution, again another liberal arts institution, small in nature, just about the size of Rollins, maybe a little bigger traditional program, a little smaller adult program, a larger graduate program, but a smaller business graduate program, and it had been a Catholic institution ‘til the mid-seventies, so by the time I had been there it was non uh, secular for many years. And I worked there as the second male president at the institution, and I worked both with adult and much more—of course—with traditional program students because they didn’t have the kind of program like the Holt School. They hadn’t built that and although we made some efforts at doing that, we weren’t successful as we were here; though we were very successful with the traditional program, which improved very quickly and while I was at Nazareth the size of the campus doubled. Unlike, it was similar in size to Rollins, but as you know here, Rollins is surrounded by very expensive, very wealthy neighborhoods. Nazareth is surrounded by an affluent community too, but there was an opportunity to buy property and probably not as expensive as here; and so while I was there we doubled the size of the campus which required, as you can imagine, a lot of fundraising to pay for it. And then we had to build a lot of buildings, and renovate and build a whole new road system that would integrate the new and the old. So we continued to do that. We did build a Masters of Liberal Studies, which I was pleased to replicate there. It’s a different program, each has its own characteristics but depending on the faculty and their strengths and interests. But it’s good to be back here and be able to visit Rollins. You know after seven years here and having many friends still working at Rollins it’s a very familiar, pleasant place to be back.

WZ: Any other questions?

AA: Unh-uh.

WZ: Anything else you'd like to share with us?

RM: Yeah, I'd like to tell you how impressed I am with the homework you've done on me. These clippings and you've obviously talked to some other folks. In terms of creating an archive for this college, it's very clear this project is in very good hands. So I commend you, and your students who are helping you.

WZ: Thank you so much, Dr. Miller. We really appreciate all your contributions to Rollins College, especially to the Holt School and for helping us preserve the history of Rollins. Thank you.

RM: Thanks.