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### Interview with Joan Davison

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### **Oral History Interview with Joan Davison and Wenxian Zhang**

Tuesday, June 21, 2022

**WZ:** Good Morning. My name is Wenxian Zhang; I'm the head of Archives and Special Collections at Olin Library. With me is Dr. Joan Davison, professor of political science emerita. Congratulations on your retirement! So Joan, tell me about your family background. Where did you grow up? Where did you go to the grade school?

**JD:** Okay. So I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in the city of Cleveland. I think that was a formative experience because being able to enjoy the benefits of a city gave me experiences that maybe growing up in the suburbs would not. For example, at a young age, probably the age of eight,—not alone but with my brother who was ten—we regularly rode public transportation alone across the city to enjoy the various activities of the city, whether that be public swimming pools or going to baseball games. So I think that was significant. Another, I think, significant part of my childhood in the city, which unfortunately, probably, I'm not sure is present today, is that the police athletic league was very active then. Throughout the summers they ran playground programs with officers, playing softball with kids, playing kickball with kids, doing arts and crafts. Basically, my summer days from eight to five, we'd walk to the playground, spend the full day there and walk home at dinnertime.

I attended a Catholic school and at that time, at least in the city I grew up in, all Catholic children basically attended Catholic schools. There was—the public schools were seen by parents as for Protestant children. There was a feeling that – and I'm sure this is something difficult to identify with now, sixty years later. But there was a feeling that the public schools actually had various types of undercurrents of bias against non-Protestant children. In terms of—prayer was allowed in schools then, but they were definitely Protestant prayers. So there were various types of antagonisms.

I also grew up in a ward. It was a democratic ward heavily dominated by the Democratic Party. But it was interesting because at that point everybody knew your ward representative. My father happened to be the only republican in the whole ward. So my mother was a Democrat, my father a republican. This was interesting because every election he had to work the polls because he was the only republican in the ward, and helped secure the ballots. Though, at that point in time, as we know, the GOP was a very different party than it was now. And in fact, my father was one of the leaders of racial integration in our ward, so the GOP was very, very different.

My grandmother lived nearby, and it was about three city blocks away. My brother and I were both able to run from our house to her house during TV commercials (laughs). So we wouldn't miss anything on television if we wanted to go see grandma or watch something different with only one TV in the household. So I would say that my childhood was formative. It was one with, I thought, sufficient freedom, a lot of different interesting activities one could avail themselves of in the city from sports to a great deal of culture associated with the art museum and the history museums, all of which were free. I think it was a good childhood, I would say. Good childhood for at best middle-class family.

**WZ:** That's great, thank you. So, you grew up as Catholic. Is that why you decided to attend Wheeling Jesuit university?

**JD:** Well, not entirely why. I applied to multiple universities and the best, which I got into, were simply too expensive—Dartmouth and Carnegie Mellon. They also had programs which I found off-putting immediately. I knew that I had to work summers to go to college. And for example, Dartmouth—you were required to attend their summer orientation that lasted some time, and not only attend it but pay for it. This was some kind of rafting trip or something. So Wheeling Jesuit – I mean there were other Catholic institutions I could have attended. But they gave me a very nice scholarship and additionally, it was attractive to me in multiple ways. In some ways, it was a precursor to Rollins in that it was a small, heavily liberal arts institution. In fact, all students were required to take a fair amount of philosophy, which is a practice of Jesuit institutions. That might distinguish them from other Catholic schools because of the emphasis on philosophy not merely theology. And in fact, every student in order to graduate—you had to pass a full philosophy oral exam with a three-person panel quizzing you.

So Wheeling was not at home, but not an unreasonable distance. I mean, I either took the greyhound bus to the distance or a family member would drive me. But there wasn't the possibility of flying to school, so it was a reasonable distance without staying in the city. Most of my cousins had gone to John Carroll university, as well as my older brother, which was in the city of Cleveland. And I just wanted to get outside—move beyond the city of Cleveland at that point.

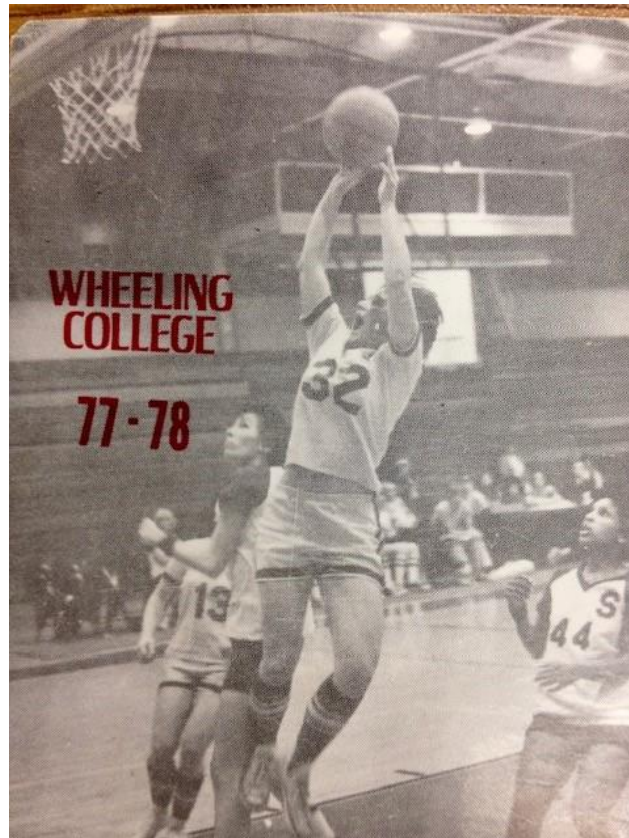
**WZ:** How did your parents make living? Did they have an impact on you deciding to major in political science?

**JD:** (Laughs). Did my parents impact? No, not at all. My father wanted me actually to go to Carnegie Mellon and major in computer science. My mother was a college English major. It's interesting because both my parents were the first and only individuals in their family. They both went to college, but they were the first individuals to go to college in their family. Their older siblings grew up towards the end of the depression and during World War II. So between limited financial resources and then the demands of the war effort they weren't afforded that possibility. In fact, a couple of my aunts and uncles were awarded full scholarships to colleges and universities, but it simply wasn't a possibility. They had to stay home and work to contribute to the family's finances. But both my parents went. My mother was particularly diligent. She completed four years of college in three, because my father was a year ahead of

her. She wanted to marry him, and they did get married at a rather young age, young by today's standards, twenty-one and twenty-two.

She was an English major so really my parents—political science was not something which in any way they encouraged. They didn't discourage it, but nor did they encourage it. I guess, if—other than computer science there was the possibility of studying pre-Med. But at that point, I just thought Med school was too expensive, and I was unwilling to consider the expense of Med school—at that point. So I became a political science major and linked to that—what was really informative and formative, was I also became an Appalachian studies minor.

At Wheeling, a number of my friends were first generation college who were the children, especially daughters, of coal miners. And on occasion, I would go to their parents' homes, and I would see their fathers who had black lung disease and could only sit in a chair. They could never lay down because their lungs would not be able to breathe. And they were in their early forties, but they looked like they were in their late sixties or early seventies. So along with political science there was this Appalachian studies major that was really a great deal about political, social and economic inequalities and oppressions within America. So, it dovetailed well with my political science studies.



*A member of the class of 1978, Joan Davison was a star player of the women's basketball team, and the first woman inducted into the Wheeling University Athletics Hall of Fame. Image courtesy of Dr. Joan Davison.*

**WZ:** Great. So, you graduated from Wheeling Jesuit summa cum laude with political science. Then, you enrolled at the university of Notre Dame, but you took a different focus, Soviet and East European Area Studies.

**JD:** Yes. And I would say something about that—I want to go back. I actually graduated first in my class from Wheeling. And it's really interesting to think about that because I think I graduated with like a 3.98 or 3.99. It seems to me, to highlight the fact of perhaps grade inflation today, I had the highest GPA, and it was not a 4.0 in the graduating class. And today, we often see anywhere from six to twelve people in a graduating class with 4.0s. So I thought that was interesting. Another big part of my life at Wheeling was that I was a student athlete. That only happened in my second year there because with Title IX and the introduction of women's sports, I actually was one of the first women on scholarship—athletic scholarship. So my academic and athletic scholarship came together.

The Soviet and East European studies piece was because at Wheeling everybody, as at for example Rollins, had to study foreign language. I didn't know which foreign language I wanted to study particularly, but during registration the gentleman who taught Russian was very, very engaging. So I decided to study Russian and then, my senior thesis in college was on Khrushchev and some of his changes in the Soviet Union. So that kind of led me in that direction towards Soviet and East European Studies. And so it wasn't entirely a different direction, I would say, in Notre Dame.

**WZ:** Okay, great. So, tell me about your years in Notre Dame.

**JD:** Well, one of the pieces—let me start by saying one of the interesting things was that amongst—I was lucky because I had another friend at Wheeling. His father was Dean of the Graduate School at West Virginia University. And he was really an excellent source of counsel for me with regards to where to go to Graduate School. I had also been admitted to notably University of Chicago and Georgetown, but not with any money. Whereas Notre Dame was giving me a full ride with a stipend. He said, “You should go where you're wanted. Obviously, faculty there wants you to come and that's going to facilitate your education. And if you find after you get a master's degree you want to go elsewhere, go elsewhere then. But at least go there and get the master's degree.” Well, I went, and I stayed.

One of the highlights of my career there was something I did not anticipate, because although I was focused upon Soviet studies, the faculty member who really filled that role, already had teaching and research assistants. And so I was assigned as a teaching assistant first, and then I became a research assistant to another faculty member, a man by the name of Gil Loescher. Gil Loescher was—first of all, he was probably about 6'9". He had played college basketball. He had gone to London School of Economics to study Asian studies. He was of the first Americans to go into Vietnam at the end of the war. And he really was an expert on primarily refugee and immigration policy in the United States, but also linked to the human rights component—the right of people to leave their countries and migrate elsewhere. So I worked with him for a number of years at Notre Dame, and I think it introduced me to other areas of study including US foreign policy. That was the area in which I was his teaching assistant but also, I worked with him on a Ford foundation—major Ford foundation grant on refugee and migration policy in the United States.

He himself in 2003 was present in the UN headquarters in Iraq when the building was blown up by a suicide bomber, and he survived. It said he was entangled and hanging upside down. And they said the reason he survived hours before they found him in the search was that he was so tall, he had plenty of blood to drain his vital organs. Someone who was shorter would have died. He ended up having both legs amputated, but he survived. Then, he worked at Oxford until he died, I think two years ago, finally.

But he was the type of researcher, scholar, public intellectual, focused on converting his research into policy. But also—In an era when a lot of political science and international relations still is about power politics, he focused on these ethical questions. So, that was another person who was, I think, critical to my formation. And important also, because the field—obviously with Gorbachev and the movement away

from Stalinist Soviet politics to Glasnost and Perestroika, the field of Soviet studies falls away. Having worked with him positioned me well to think about other issues.

**WZ:** Great. So, you earned your PhD in Government and International Affairs from Notre Dame, 1984?

**JD:** Yes.

**WZ:** So, when did you begin to work at Rollins, '86?

**JD:** Yes.

**WZ:** OK, so where were you for those two years?

**JD:** Well, so, I taught briefly at a small college in Saint Louis. And actually, I took that job—I was offered other positions both at DePauw University in Indiana and also Carlton, one of their visiting lines. But to be blunt, I went to Saint Louis because my husband—or he was not my husband yet, but, my husband-to-be was earning his PhD at Washington University in Saint Louis. So I took a job at a very small school in Saint Louis for basically a year and a half, two years. And then, we moved to Orlando initially because Don was at University of Central Florida. I taught for one year at UCF, which was, I would say, quite miserable because I had a PhD and teaching experience. But in the state system unless you are on tenure track—(Audio cuts off), at UCF first year adjuncts were 'evaluated' and therefore not compensated for the doctorate or years of experience. I was paid as if I only had a masters.

(Audio returns) At the end of that first year, I actually started, moved forward with, and was near completion of a master's in applied economics. And I was going to leave academics. But at the end of that last year—or that first year at UCF, I had a call from Rollins that at the last minute the person that they had hired for a political science position failed to earn their PhD and was not coming. And [they asked] would I consider coming and interviewing for the position. So I came to Rollins, and I had previously applied to Rollins for opportunities, so they had my vitae. So I came to Rollins and they hired me.

**WZ:** That's wonderful. So, basically you and Don [Davison] arrived at Rollins at the same time?

**JD:** No, Don came a couple years later. UCF did not pay much in terms of overload salaries and we were young. We were starting out totally on our own. We moved to—literally Don's uncle gave us 200 dollars to move to Florida. That was all the money we had, and he cosigned a loan for us so that we have a car. And so we really started life in Florida with nothing. Don, therefore, was teaching some overloads at UCF, including driving to their Brevard campus at least one night a week.

Rollins needed some assistance teaching courses in American politics. So they asked if Don would be willing to teach some of these courses, not only day division, but in Holt. So he came and then subsequently a position came open in that field, which he was not going to apply for because we were married. So he did not apply. They brought in various candidates for the job, and this person would be teaching the classes which he had been teaching as an adjunct. They brought in various people who were unsatisfactory for one reason or another and then, the students asked, "Well, why don't you just hire him as the person?" So he had not applied because he thought it would be difficult to be in the same department together, but then they offered him the position. And as I said, UCF—their salaries were lower and so it made sense for him to take this position.

**WZ:** That's wonderful

**JD:** So, I think that was in '91, maybe.

**WZ:** Okay. I'm so glad that everything worked out in the end, which is a big win for Rollins.



**JD:** (Laughs.)



*Dr. Don and Joan Davison, Professors of Political Science at Rollins. Dr. Joan Davison received the Cornell Distinguished Faculty Award during the 2011 commencement of the College.*

**WZ:** So, when you came in 1986, what was your first impression of Rollins?

**JD:** My first impression was related to the small size, but also how close knit the faculty was. At that point in time, Crummer and the Arts and Science faculty were all one. We would meet on Friday afternoons, faculty meetings. I think maybe the total number of faculty and virtually everyone would be there would be maybe 120. So there was a great sense of community and solidarity. This extended beyond the faculty, I would say, to the faculty concern for the staff. At that point there was a very active and relatively powerful finance and service committee, which for example helped select our healthcare policy each year, helped determine premiums, and had input into raises. And there were many times where that committee made the decision to forego faculty salary increases for the benefit of staff or worked out ways with the vice president of finance to perhaps have lower employee premiums for healthcare than the faculty paid in. So, I think one piece was the great sense of community and solidarity amongst, not only the faculty, but which extended to the staff. At this point in time also, I think there were only maybe two or three people in student affairs. It was a very small office and so faculty also had a large role in the students' life on campus beyond their academic life.

One of my first memories which I think highlighted this sense of community and solidarity and cooperation was Thad Seymour coming over to our building. So when I first came to Rollins, I worked in

the old Park Avenue building, which is subsequently been destroyed. And Thad came over to the building to say that he had finally raised enough money to build the Cornell Social Science building and that Harriet and George Cornell once again had given a substantial amount. In fact, in those years, especially in the early nineties, I remember there were lots of jokes, maybe serious comments, about renaming the college, Rollins Cornell College or something with George and Harriet's name in it.

But Thad came over. And he came over to the building which housed the social sciences on Park Avenue, and it was filled with asbestos, rats and pigeons, you must know. And he brought bottles of champagne to celebrate, and he brought food. I thought that was so interesting that the president of the college did that. I'm—maybe that would still happen today. You know, I think Grant is a fine president, but I think the staff beyond—not just student affairs but development and elsewhere, all these offices, marketing, have grown so much that perhaps the president today would be more inclined to celebrate that moment with people in development or marketing. But Thad came to the faculty with the champagne and the celebration.

Then – and I give them a great deal of credit – professors Barry Levis, history, and Laura Grayson in political science, were put in charge of designing the building. And the social science faculty made clear they wanted a design to emphasize faculty interaction and collaboration with one another and with students. They wanted it to be a place that would emphasize sociability through common areas. And the building has changed over the years as at times administrators felt it was necessary to carve out more office space, for example, or make certain common areas into all college meeting rooms. And I think that's a bit unfortunate, maybe. I think the single biggest change, which I understand but think is unfortunate, is the conversion of the Master of Liberal Studies classroom into a regular classroom, the taking away of the big conference tables. I really enjoyed teaching my smaller classes around that conference table because it really does set a very different tone for the class meeting when you're around a table instead of with a bunch of desk in front of the faculty member. But we did design the building, as well, and I think that was something that was possible because of a small size of the faculty, but also the relatively small size of the administration at that point in time.

So my first impressions were basically about the small size, the community, and the solidarity. In terms of the student body, I would say the student body was very white. It's still very white, but I'm talking very, very, very, white but, not necessarily homogeneous. There were some students who tended to be substantially wealthier than others. The single largest geographical draw was from the northeast, not from Florida. And there tended to be a bimodal distribution of grades, some with—the very, very, bright group and then a group that was struggling to make the 2.0. However, at that time, no one complained about workload or grades. Students were different then, I think. They did not complain. They, I think, trusted the faculty member to determine what workload was necessary to develop their skills and learn the content to achieve the outcomes of the course. So those were my initial impressions, I would say.

**WZ:** Wonderful. So, you mentioned that Seymour – you being a recognized faculty leader on campus, you have worked with the Seymour administration over the years. Maybe you can share your view of working with Presidents Rita Bornstein, with Lewis Duncan, and of course President Grant.

**JD:** Yes. I would say that Rita—I personally believe that Rita's contribution to Rollins often is underestimated. First of all, Rita was a non-Protestant, female president. There was concern that she was not necessarily an academic first, she was a development officer first. I think those concerns about her being focused on development more so than academics were wrong. She very much was focused on academics, but she also believed and trusted her faculty. She left faculty business to the faculty. She also worked very hard to guarantee faculty academic freedom. I know of cases, one case in particular, where a faculty member was asked not to continue his research and Rita defended him. So, I think that's one point.



The second point is that Rita's ability to raise funds for the College and to get the message, vision, and presence of Rollins out nationally really brought to Rollins, in my view, a kind of renaissance—the renaissance of Rollins College, the return to what it once was. Rita also—it was under Rita where I think we begin to see the draw of female faculty members to the college. So when I came—one of the stories I like to tell is there were very few female faculty members at that time. We did not have a maternity leave policy for female faculty members. And when I arrived, they were uncertain what to do with me, so they had me have lunch with the faculty wives club. Okay? (Laughs) So, it was a very different place. But the other, I think, contribution Rita made was in bringing these resources. She also made available to faculty more [endowed] chairs. All those Cornell chairs ought to be credited to Rita. She made available a lot more research money for faculty and she made available for faculty funds to travel internationally. And this, for myself, access to research money and travel money made a lot of my research possible.

So, I think, Rita very definitely in my mind is not given sufficient credit. Maybe I'm missing it. Maybe people are giving her credit. But I've always felt that sometimes you read *Winter Park Magazine* and you see the history of Rollins College and Rita is barely mentioned there. She also—I was on a faculty governance at times when she would be in the executive committee meetings with us. I recall having a female student body president. She really was trying to mentor female students, as well, and set up programs of mentorship for how to be—perhaps have a family, or a wife, or a mother and also have a career. And to lead students to believe that that was possible and help them make it possible. And I think some of the mentorship of students and also among faculty of one another that occurs between female faculty members still, was really something which Rita initiated. So I think I cannot underestimate Rita's contribution to Rollins nor to my career.

Lewis Duncan—I'm not sure what I can say (laughs). I actually—I was one of a few faculty members who voted not to endorse his selection as president. And the reason I did that was because he was coming to us as Dean of the engineering school at Dartmouth. And I had looked at Dartmouth and seen that he really did not have female faculty. Not only was this not a liberal arts track, but it was also one where he really was not working with women. So, those were my concerns, which I raised in the faculty meeting at that time. I think that those were ten years, and we know that a lot of the resources which Rita brought in were maybe not well conserved during that time. Enough said there.

I think the person you missed is Craig McAllaster. And Craig is another person who I would say is not given sufficient credit because he knew, I think, as an interim or acting I'm not sure what his official title was—president. But someone coming from Crummer, and yet having to work with Arts and Sciences faculty and having to work it with the A&S faculty at a point of probably trauma, we might say. Because as Lewis left, the CPS [College of Professional Studies] was created, the business major was created, we were separated as a faculty. So I think he knew when to be activist and when to let issues wait for the next president.

He—I went to him with a couple different issues and I think he handled them exactly as I would have wished. His door was open. His door was always open to me at least, not that I went there a lot. But I had to meet with him at various points in time as faculty athletic representative. And he was welcoming. He was willing to listen, ask intelligent questions. So I think that perhaps there were other people who might have also done that job well, but that was really a pivotal moment. I think that that was critical that he did, he did not overreact. But yet he, I think, kept the situation from becoming more tumultuous.

Grant. Grant comes in and he's a charismatic individual. I think he's very, very dedicated to the liberal arts. He has, I think, a lot of credibility as a faculty member. He's administered a school—a college like Rollins, but not like Rollins too. Right? So, Wooster College only has, or had then, an undergraduate program. Classes basically ended at three o'clock and students then could go and enjoy their

extracurriculars. They had more than enough space, it's a large campus, for athletic facilities. So, Rollins in some ways is different because it's a complex institution, with Crummer and Holt. And those were pieces that Wooster did not have.

I think that Grant has brought the faculty back together. You can't take it back to where it was under Rita or under Thad because the size has virtually doubled. So the level of solidarity and community amongst the faculty that existed in the past, I think is gone. But that's not because of Grant. That's because of the size of the faculty and perhaps some of the necessities associated with creating a business program, also creating the student affairs division with the vice president under Lewis. So some of those decisions—those were put into place.

In particular, I have to give Grant substantial credit for leading us through COVID. Difficult decisions were made. Certainly, we know that there was staff downsizing, there was some program downsizing, and those were very difficult decisions. And I can sit here and say they were difficult, but they were traumatic for some of the people involved. But overall, I would say that we survived COVID in ways that other institutions did not, and I give a lot of that to Grant's leadership and the team which he put together to lead us. During COVID, I was president of a national organization that includes all types of schools: large state schools, small private schools, religious schools, flagship campuses, tertiary state institutions. Talking with people at other institutions and making comparisons, I just marvel at how well Rollins moved through COVID compared to some of those other institutions.

**WZ:** Great. Now let's shift focus. Let's talk about your teaching career at Rollins. So, please tell me about some courses you have taught over the years at Rollins, maybe some of—the course that you enjoyed the most or the most challenging.

**JD:** Okay. My favorite course that I taught at Rollins was definitely the Capstone Seminar in International Relations. So, it was the course that enrolled only senior international relations majors. Well, we know, first of all, they have a passion for the field. We also know that they're thinking about what comes next, whether it's going to be moving into the job market or trying to perhaps get a Fulbright or perhaps do a year of service domestically or internationally, or perhaps go to graduate or professional school. So, as they're thinking about that, the capstone also gave them room to focus on a project that might be linked to that future. And maybe they find out they don't want that future they were thinking about (laughs). Or they become engaged with a project that one their student colleagues is undertaking, and they look another direction.

But this capstone kind of began by taking students through some of the major ideas in political science, economics, anthropology, and history that contribute to the field of international relations. Then it looked at theory. And it was always very exciting because international relations theory is often difficult for students to grasp and understand what a theory in international relations is. It's not a law and it's different than scientific theories because you involve probabilities. But they finally are at a point where they understand what theory is. They also understand that there are current events which are timely. But then there are perhaps also timeless principles and objectives in international relations, like maybe law and order—global law and order, that is. So they are willing to think about how the current events are really salient for a long time period. What matters and what does not matter? And what are they passionate about and how can they integrate all these?



*Political science professor Joan Davison facilitates a simulation of the U.S. National Security Council during her Globalization RCC course. Photo by Luke Woodling '17MBA.*

So, students all were always so passionate, so engaged and at the end of the course always marveled at what they could do in the capstone. They did not, coming into the course, have confidence in themselves that they could accomplish what I had on the syllabus they were supposed to submit to me at the end. They always marveled at this. Including, for example, the use of primary resources and in bringing those rather than just doing a descriptive research paper that tells me what scholars in the field have said. Actually, to perhaps examine the World Bank's annual reports themselves and reach conclusions about how that changes across time. Or compare the World Bank's annual reports to the UN Development program's annual reports. And ideologically, why are these international organizations different from one another? And what do they focus upon that's different? So, I think that that was always a course that students knew would be difficult, especially at the beginning, but knew that they would benefit from.

My other favorite class was a class in international law. Many of our graduates in international relations and political science continue to the law school—this was also course that counts as an INB elective, an international business elective. I know Richard Lewin would push students to take this course often time. Students have told me that it prepared them very well for law school. But this was a course that was not for the faint of heart because in many political science courses and international relations courses, I think that you can write an essay and if you have sufficient material in there, it can be a good essay. That's not how international law works.

First of all, in international law, the question you ask determines the answer. They study various international Court of Justice cases, and they see how this works. So, for example, in a very famous case on Kosovo independence, the court said—responded that it was legal under international law for Kosovo to declare independence. Now, that was the question which Serbia had asked in this case. If the question

had been different, if they had asked, “Could Kosovo secede?” There might have been a different answer. So they have to focus their questions very narrowly in international law and students sometimes aren’t accustomed to that. They’re sometimes accustomed to having some big topic essay that they can find a lot of information on and throw it together.

The other point here is that in international law, your research really must be exhaustive. Because if there is any treaty or principle that makes something illegal, then no matter how many treaties or principles you find that might say it's legal, it's still in illegal if there's a single treaty or principle. So, their work has to be exhaustive and that's a very, very, very difficult course. But again, I think it's a course that students, by the time they write their third legal brief, finally begin to understand why the questions are narrow and why the research has to be exhaustive.

The one other course I'll throw out is US foreign policy. I think there, I use a lot of primary documents, documents from the National Security Council, documents from the Department of Defense, from the White House National Security Statement. So it's always very current because these documents are available online and students can read them. I also force students to think about—we also look at the Defense budget in the U.S carefully and think about, Okay, we're already spending more than the next ten countries together spend on defense for seven hundred billion dollars. If we assume you can't spend any more, should it be spent differently and how would you spend it differently? Questions about—as much as we like to criticize presidents for failures of US foreign policy or shortcomings in U.S foreign policy, are we demanding enough of Congress? We know that right now Congress is highly polarized, but most foreign policy powers actually sit with Congress. Yet, the president tends to make foreign policy. So, I think that's a question—that's a course that really introduces students to a lot of issues. Not only how the U.S engages with groups and countries abroad, but also how the US spends its money, what its values are? Is it spending its money and using resources where its values are? Are they adequately prioritizing?

There's all kinds—I think this is one of the great outcomes of digitalization and E-journals. When I started teaching, students had to have hard copy textbooks in their hands. They had to go into the reserve room, read articles there, and could only have the article for two hours. Now, students can access so many primary documents, so much in terms of data sources. A course, like U.S foreign policy really enables them to think about the issue now, rather than just reading what experts say. So, I would say those would be, I think, the courses that I have enjoyed the most across time.

**WZ:** Okay, besides the teaching of various courses a year, you also have very productive research and scholarship accomplishments. I have your edited book here, *Walling, Boundaries, and Liminality: A political anthropology of transformations*. It looks very impressive. You did research on the U.S and Mexican war.

**JD:** Yes.

**WZ:** Also, you have done research related to Donald Trump and the presidential election. Maybe share some of the highlights of your research.

**JD:** I think my research journey, and it has been a journey, has been dictated by international and global affairs. As you pointed out at the start, I started out in Soviet and East European studies. My research then was really about U.S Soviet relations. But with Gorbachev pulling back the Soviet bloc and shifting from, as I said, Stalin’s Soviet style economic and social policies to policies of Perestroika and Glasnost and telling Eastern Europe that they can go their own way, necessarily, my research had to change. Though, I do want to comment here, I think it's really interesting. People thought the U.S defeated the Soviet Union. That's why they had to leave Eastern Europe.

And I always felt that that was not the full picture and maybe that was not the primary point. I think that Gorbachev had a lot of agency and Gorbachev made the decision to withdraw. And I think that what illustrates that now is that Putin has fewer resources than Gorbachev had. Yet his decision-making is to engage, not to pursue peaceful coexistence and detente and a liberal world order and law and order globally, and in fact to challenge the global order. So, we see, even though he has fewer resources, a different world order, so I do think Gorbachev oftentimes has not been given sufficient credit in what happened briefly in the Soviet Union and former Soviet bloc.

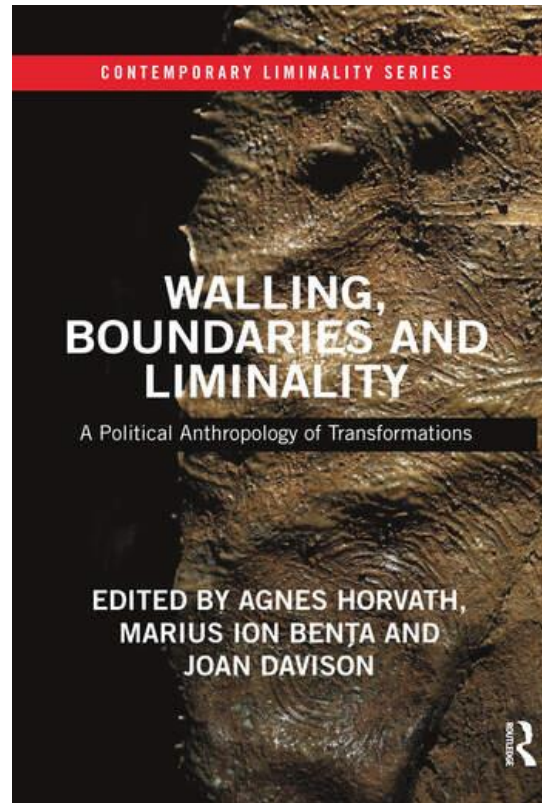
So after those changes in the late eighties, I moved into studying comparative constitutions and the question of what East European countries that were seeking to transition and democratize thought would be essential to put into their constitutions. Many people thought the U.S was a primary influencer on that. Indeed, Poles and Czechs and Slovaks—they traveled to the United States to study the U.S Constitution, learn about it, but also the outcomes of it.

They also looked at constitutions in Europe, though, the German basic law, the French constitution. The constitutions of Eastern Europe are both a reaction to their own domestic conditions, whether they're a homogeneous country, like Poland, or perhaps a more heterogeneous country. But also, it's a mixture of U.S Constitution and European constitutions. Most of these countries opted, at least initially, for a parliamentary system, not the system of checks and balances. But yet, they did include checks and balances in creating a kind of Supreme Court that many West European countries at the time did not have.

So, I focused for a while on Constitution making. But once you have the consolidation or seeming consolidation of the initial move towards democracy in these countries that field kind of disappeared—. And then, I began to focus on, and this stayed my focus, issues of ethnic, religious and nationalist conflict, primarily in Yugoslavia. A lot of I believe what happened in Yugoslavia had to do with former leaders who were trying to remain leaders, even though communism was gone. So, they had to find something new, and democracy does not allow them to be a dictator. Nationalism, a type of populist nationalism, might permit them to still maintain extensive powers as they had as communist leaders. So, you know, this question of ethnic nationalism and populist leaders who want to have power, comes into play in the former Yugoslavia, but also increasingly translates to other countries around the world.

You asked specifically about President Trump and Mexico and building the wall as a symbol of his America first policy. I think that many countries—many democratic countries are founded on the assumption of civic nationalism. That is the idea that anyone who agrees with ideas of equality of all citizens, rule of law for all citizens, basic political freedoms and civil rights for all citizens, the notion of transparency and accountability and elections—that they are then a citizen of this nation; it's not a nation brought together based upon ethnicity but brought together based upon the shared democratic values and aspirations.

It seems to me that increasingly the primacy and maybe the ethical superiority of civic nationalism is being questioned and ethnic nationalism is being held up as a superior idea. That civic nationalism leads to mediocrity, leads to catering to the lowest common denominator. That ethnic nationalism allows us as a people, whoever gets included in the people, is necessarily exclusive to a particular race or religion or gender, whereas civic nationalism is inclusive. But here now, we're talking about superiority and a certain group leading for their interest or what they have come within their particular ethnic or religious or racial culture to determine to be the best ideas. So it's necessarily exclusive, and to the extent it's exclusive, it becomes polarizing in states. It also dismisses the basic tenets of democracy—basic values and tenets of democracy.



*Cover of the 2020 Routledge book co-edited by Dr. Joan Davison, Walling, Boundaries and Liminality: A Political Anthropology of Transformations.*

Oftentimes these leaders are populist. As populists, they come from outside the normal political system, and perhaps they have not had their political credentials checked. And by political credentials here, I would say I mean their commitment to democracy checked. And so, they're willing to manipulate the system in ways the notion "America first" and the building the wall, whether we're talking about metaphorical walls with decreasing the number of refugee admissions and simply the quotas for states, or we're talking about an actual physical wall. The notion of building a wall symbolizes the exclusion of people. There's the exclusion of immigrants, but there's also the exclusion of a lot of people within the US because their status as being part of the ethnic nation is in doubt. I think it's a really, really critical area of research. And how to kind of undo populism and undo ethnic nationalism is a critical area of research.

Some people believe, and I think this suggests that the significance of higher education and also concerns about governors and state legislatures that want to tap down on social science courses at universities as being useless or being ideological. I think one way in which we build civic nationalism is in our educational institutions by simply listening to other people in a controlled environment, by simply being given the facts to look at, by simply growing in tolerance, even if we don't ultimately agree with other people's values, we at least find a way to tolerate them and are not hostile to them. So, I think that this is a critical area for the future and for real life here, in not only the United States, but many countries.

**WZ:** Great. I also noticed that you have done student-faculty collaborative research on the causes of a terrorism, so that also sounds very, very interesting. Maybe you can tell me more about that and also your mentorship in general to others.

**JD:** Yes. So, the student I did that with, Roxanna Ramirez, she's now an attorney. She went to UVA law school. She graduated from Rollins at only the age of nineteen. She was very, very bright. That was



earlier in the collaborative research program; I don't know how much it's changed. I remember her coming to me at the last minute wanting to do research with me, and she was an outstanding student. However, it seemed like the collaborative research message only got out to students in the honor program, and she was not in the honor program. This was something I subsequently found out – that a number of our students, especially Latinx students who did not speak English at home, did not do particularly well on the SAT's that were required at that point in time. So, they were not invited into the Honors program. Roxana was one of four siblings who came to Rollins and majored in political science, so I've had her brother, and her sisters as well.



*Dr. Davison with Roxanna Ramirez.*

She wanted to know what the cause of terrorism was and why we saw the development of terrorism in some states and not others. So, we looked at – first we looked quantitatively at where terrorism occurred and then she pulled out some of the areas where terrorism occurred and did specific case studies. It was really her idea to look at this, but it came out of – she had been in my ideologies class, which had a section on terrorism in it. What she found was that, and this is not unique to her findings, terrorism tends to occur in States—and we're focused here more on domestic terrorism, not necessarily terrorism across like Al Qaeda, for example, across state boundaries,

Terrorism occurs when not simply society creates tools of repression against a group, but when the government creates tools of oppression against a group. That makes sense because as long as the government continues to be perceived by perhaps an ethnic minority or a class minority as fair, that group believes they still have some kind of nonviolent mechanism to bring about change. It's when the government becomes oppressive of groups that terrorism occurs. Indeed, you can see where communities themselves become fatalistic, where family members support young adults and their adult children who engage in terrorist activities.



That was really an excellent study. It's difficult in the social sciences to do collaborative research with students in ways that perhaps it's not difficult in the arts and the sciences. In the sciences, you can get them in the lab and show them things, perhaps at the end of their first year. In the social sciences, you must have so much substantive knowledge combined with research methodological skills before you can really do collaborative. So, I might have a student who becomes my research assistant, but the collaborative research program calls for you to be equal partners. Well, people earn a PhD that takes anywhere from four to seven years, and then you will—it's hard to conceive of a student who's a first year or second year, even a third-year student who somehow can participate equally with the faculty member who has a PhD and has engaged in research. But I would say that Roxanna achieved that. She was exceptional.

**WZ:** Wonderful. So, we went beyond our original one hour, but I need to ask this important question. I believe that this is a very important part of your life at Rollins—your community services. You have served as a vice president for the faculty and the athletic faculty representative. Maybe tell me more about that? You mentioned you were originally a student athlete while you were at the college.

**JD:** Yes. I think that was the reason why the Provost, Charlie Edmondson, at the time asked me to become the faculty athletic representative back in 1991. At that time, it was primarily an honorary appointment where you would sign awards for student athletes who had a certain GPA, perhaps. Subsequently, it became a very specific role which the NCAA bylaws designate that the Faculty Athletic Representative must have certain roles on campus and fulfill certain tasks.

The Faculty Athletic Representative is supposed to guarantee institutional control of athletics. That's not a question at Rollins. It's a question at some institutions with big football teams where perhaps the faculty and the President don't have much control and the athletic department is leading the charge of. You know, it makes a big difference. Division II schools don't make money on athletics, right? Athletics doesn't have a bargaining chip in that way to be beyond institutional control. There's also in what the faculty athletic Rep is supposed to do is maintain academic integrity. Then, the faculty athletic Representative is supposed to promote and protect student athlete well-being. This means their emotional well-being, mental health, physical well-being. Are they being forced to practice too long? Are there, perhaps, harassing techniques being used against a team?

Rarely in my time as Faculty Athletic Representative, have I had to deal with these questions of institutional control, academic integrity, or student athlete well-being. But when I did have to deal with them, these are really, really difficult issues, because sometimes it leads to a coach perhaps being dismissed. If not immediately, perhaps down the road as problems accumulate. Now again, I mean that's very rare at Rollins. I believe that we have in general an outstanding head coaching staff who—what, they do with our student athletes, I would constitute as high impact practices. It helps retention indeed. I think the college knows this. It helps recruitment and retention. That's part of the reason that we have expanded teams, but it's also simply about the well-being of our students.

Student athletes tend to score much higher on all aspects of wellness than non-student athletes. Athletics can be an important part of the student's life. It's also a source of diversity at Rollins. You know, for many years there were more African American students on the women's basketball team than at the whole rest of the College. It enables students of perhaps family background, family income, who don't have as much money to come to Rollins and receive an education. Those students sometimes work so hard because they don't have the same kind of high school background as perhaps students who come from a wealthy background and have been at a very good private institution. It brings students of different backgrounds together. So, I think athletics is very important.

I would say that Rollins has a huge advantage that a number of our coaches are Rollins grads. So, Tom Klusman and Bev Buckley both graduated from Rollins in the mid-seventies—Keith Buckley, the men’s soccer coach who also has a doctorate. We have, I think, only two – I hope I’m not wrong about that – coaches right now with Doctorates. John Sjogren, who just took the men’s team to the semifinals of the NCAA, has a doctorate. Keith also has doctorate. Keith was in my very first class that I taught at Rollins, so I have a long-term relationship with him. I know the extent to which he is dedicated to the academic success of his soccer players. Alicia Schuck was a Rollins student. Kevin Hogan—the list goes on and on. Tasi Purcell, Jessica Deese, Shawn Pistor, many of our coaches were students themselves. They know what’s required academically, and they are willing to assist their students—Kourtne Berry—in achieving that, while also encouraging them to kind of live the full Rollins College life, to not just be an athlete, to find a way to carve out some space beyond academics and athletics to perhaps do community service or be a res hall director or be a peer mentor. So I give a lot of credit to the department.



*Dr. Joan Davison with members of Rollins women's basketball team.*

I really enjoyed meeting many of the student athletes who I would not have known if I didn't have this position because they would come to me with various issues, perhaps issues about scheduling because their own academic advisor didn't understand fully, perhaps, the demands of their team or their season. So, I would get to know student athletes of other majors and that that was very exciting. I also was able to help student athletes in three different ways with NCAA programs. One is to help them get graduate scholarships. This year we had two students receive an NCAA post grant scholarship – Emily Curran, who was a sociology major and also Jessika Linnemeyer, who was a biology major. So, neither of these were students in my particular department, but I got to know them well and help them get these graduate scholarships. One of the most exciting ever was Julian Grundler, who received a graduate scholarship and is at Yale working on nanotechnologies for cancer cures. Some years ago, Fabia Rothenfluh, a women's

golfer received a graduate scholarship. She was on a national championship winning team and she now works in geriatric public policy in her home in Switzerland.

So, there's those graduate scholarships. Then, equally important, is degree completion scholarship. So sometimes student athletes—when their athletic scholarships are up at the end of four years, they need money because they need another semester to finish their degrees. This is especially true if they are education majors, oftentimes, because it's difficult for them to do student teaching while playing a sport. One student in particular that I'm very happy for, was a young woman by the name of Ines Teuma. Ines was from Cameroon. When she came to the United States, she did not even speak English. She played basketball at Rollins. She spoke French and her own native language from her part of Cameroon well, but she did not speak English, so it took her additional time to graduate. I got her—well, she applied, and I facilitated her receiving a degree completion grant. She's now a doctor practicing in North Dakota. These are the kinds of student athletes we want. They graduate and they engage in meaningful activities.

The third possibility through the NCAA that I help students with is various types of leadership programs and leadership seminars in which they can engage in. For example, Jakobi Bonner, who currently is playing semi pro basketball in England. He undertook some of these and he was really a national representative for student athletes. Another young woman who was a national representative for student athletes was V “Vernisha” Andrews. In working with her, one of the interesting points I found out was she had majored in communication.

So, this is after she graduates because she was still participating as a student athlete in some fora because we wanted to go back and get students who had graduated to find out what went wrong – not only what went right, but what went wrong. She pointed out that she had majored in communication and found out that's not what she wanted to do. And I said, “Well, what do you want to do?” And she said, “Oh, I really think I want to teach now.” I said, “Well. There's a shortage of teachers in Florida with a degree. You can do that while you work on your teaching certification.” She now is a kindergarten teacher. I just have to think, if you're in Vee Andrews' kindergarten class, you've got to have a teacher with more energy than probably the rest of the kindergarten teachers put together. So, it's easy to get excited about being the faculty athletic Rep. I think in an institution like Rollins, it's relatively easy to do your job well because we have good coaches, a good athletic department and dedicated student athletes.

**WZ:** That's just so wonderful. More about your recognitions, I noticed that you received the Cornell Distinguished Faculty Award. So now, looking back Joan, how do you view your Rollins career for the last 36 years?

**JD:** (Laughs.) How do I view it? I guess I view my career as one which was liberating, I would say. It was liberating to the extent that Rollins was a higher educational institution in which I can bring my own values, my own opinions and maintain my own standards in a classroom. I would never have wanted to be at a state institution where perhaps the syllabus and textbook is given to you by either the state or by the department, and everyone follows the same. So, I think it was liberating in that I could do what I do well. I think I was trusted as a faculty member, which was important so that I could identify what knowledge – and we know that students are perhaps increasingly fact averse – but identify what facts were essential to know and what facts perhaps could be looked up at any time in the future.

It was an energizing experience also. Energy, especially from students who were passionate about the liberal arts education. Again, those were not always students who necessarily were political science or international relations majors, but students, sometimes, who understood that the liberal arts taught them multiple ways to think and in their positions today, they integrate it. One example is a political science major from some years ago, Dan Abel. He heads up his family chocolate company. They make candy, but

Dan tells me that his political science degree is really critical. He does not regret not being a business major because he has to think about where to source chocolate from. Is the country stable? Are there fair-trade practices in place? Also, his own particular factory, Chocolate Chocolate Chocolate Company, has solar panels now. It's net neutral. So, he has used his political science major there.

I have students—I am so proud of the number of students we've had that have left and been successful. Brent Woolfork is currently Assistant Secretary of Defense. Laveta Stewart has PhD from Johns Hopkins on Global Health Public Policy, which she tells me dates back to a video I showed in my Intro International Relations class. So, there's so much opportunity at Rollins because of our ability to work with students in more than one class and get to know them well. I know sometimes they wish they had more diversity of faculty, but being able to work with a student in more than one class oftentimes enables them to put pictures together—to integrate knowledge in ways that maybe they wouldn't be able to elsewhere.

So, I think that I've been able to suggest important values to students across time, maybe not explicitly but implicitly, like being compassionate, being tolerant, appreciating the kind of distant stranger and their struggles in life that we might not entirely understand. As I said, I think that it's important that I enjoyed my time at Rollins because I was free, to a large degree, to do what I wanted in the classroom because what I did was in turn—students saw it of value and reported it as such.

**WZ:** Well, from the College Archives, I just wanted to thank you, Joan, for your distinguished teaching career, your amazing research and scholarship, and your important community services to the Rollins community of learners. So, anything else you would like to add before we conclude?

**JD:** I guess there's two other points I want to add quickly. One is—You asked me to think about major events across time. I did that and I guess there's two major events we haven't touched on explicitly and I want to just throw out real quickly. One is 9/11. I think that 9/11, not only was it a turning point for the United States and for the world, but in some ways, it had negative consequences for Rollins. The consequence I recall or felt most strongly was that we used to have a large number of Middle Eastern students, and that stopped. So, in fact, at the point of 9/11, the great nephew of the Last King of Afghanistan was a Rollins student. I had students from Qatar, from Palestine, from Saudi Arabia, from Egypt, all as 9/11 is occurring.

That stopped after 9/11, partially due to government policy. That's still an important part of the world and introduces important diversity. The student from Saudi Arabia works for the government. The student from Qatar has worked for the government. These students contact me and still talk about some of the ideas they learned in political science in the United States and their ability to introduce these in very different systems. So, I think that that's unfortunate that's gone.

Second obvious event that occurred is COVID. I mentioned that with regard to Grant, but I think also that that is something which the College will take maybe another four years perhaps to crawl out from. Our students became so dependent upon having materials given to them electronically during COVID and they don't know how to search for them themselves. I had been on a panel with Johns Hopkins graduate faculty, and one of the points those faculty made was that we should quit giving students links to articles. We should only give them the title of articles they want to read. Do not post the articles for them. Don't even give them the links. If they're coming to Graduate School, they need to know how to find an article (laughs). But they can't anymore, and students react negatively if you don't give them the link or if you don't post an article. So, I think there's a kind of dependency and expectation which developed during COVID, understandably. That's going to continue for a number of years as we have high school students coming in who continue to carry that through.

There were many, many students that I've just had wonderful experiences with over the years, but the one last point I want to just make is an important point of emphasis. My frequent co-author, Jesenko Tesan, is a Rollins grad. He came—He survived the Bosnia war. He survived the siege of Sarajevo, even though he was shot at very short range while at a Red Cross facility which he was helping service. He was a medic. He still carries bullets in his body, but he came to Rollins after the war, had to adjust to Rollins, then subsequently earned master's degrees at both Cambridge and London School of Economics, and then a PhD from the University of Ireland. I think our ability to engage in research together – his experiences and kind of, sometimes, focus on Bosnia with my ability to sometimes push to see a bigger picture, has made us exceptional colleagues. So that was something I never envisioned that I would have a frequent co-author who was a Rollins graduate. I think amongst the important people at Rollins who I've met, he's certainly one of them.

**WZ:** Well, that's just so wonderful. So touching. Thank you for your great work and for making such a difference in students' life. Okay, we'll sign off for now.

**JD:** Okay, thank you! Have a good day!

**WZ:** Take care. Bye. Bye.



*On Saturday, October 8, 2022, Dr. Joan Davison was inducted into the Sunshine State Conference Hall of Fame.*