

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH KATHERINE N. KINNICK

CONDUCTED BY DEDE YOW AND THOMAS A. SCOTT

EDITED BY JAN HEIDRICH-RICE

INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

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DY: Good morning, Katherine.

KK: Good morning.

DY: It's wonderful to have you here. I know I've watched your career for a long time and seen how apparently wonderful you are in the classroom. That's just one of the things we want to talk about, but I think we want to get started with how did you get here? How did you get to be a college professor? Was that in your whole life plan? Is it there in your family background? Or maybe we could start with what was there in terms of your family and education.

KK: Well, my mother, Freya Neil, was an elementary school teacher, but I didn't plan to become a teacher myself. I was a journalism major in college and decided to go into public relations and began my career here in Atlanta with a public relations agency, Hill and Knowlton. I moved on from there to be director of communication for a non-profit organization called the Southern Education Foundation. Its goal was to promote equity in education in the South. It was an interesting position because I was essentially the white spokesperson for what was a black organization. They had a hiring process where they asked the candidates to write a public relations campaign plan and mine was apparently the best, so that's how I got that position. But I was surrounded by Ph.D.s in that career. It was a foundation that also operated programs and drew heavily on academics from the metro area and from the South who were doing scholarship related to educational equity issues. I had always enjoyed school. I was always a good student, and as I worked there I completed my master's at night at Georgia State and just . . .

DY: So you started there with a bachelor's degree then with your B.A. in Journalism?

KK: Correct.

TS: I noticed you got a bachelor's at University of South Carolina? Did you grow up in South Carolina?

KK: No, I'm an Army brat, and so that was an important influence on my outlook. I think some of the courses that I teach deal with diversity because we lived all over the world; I lived in very integrated Army base situations and attended very integrated schools at times when, particularly in the South, that was not the case. We moved to South Carolina when I was thirteen to a community that was very—

what's the right word?—there were definite differences in the old time Summervillians whose families had been in that area for a long time. I mean, there were cliques in the high school.

DY: Gentrified, is that it?

TS: What period are we talking about? What year would that be?

KK: This was 1976 when we moved to South Carolina, so my life had been very transient up until that point. I had never lived in one place longer than four years. This was a community where black students and white students in the high school really didn't have much interaction unless they were on a sports team together or they were in the band together. There was definitely tracking going on in the schools.

TS: And in '76 they probably hadn't been integrated that long in South Carolina, maybe like six or eight years or so.

DY: This is Summerville, South Carolina?

KK: Yes. It's a suburb of Charleston. I think I've gotten off track with what your question was.

DY: No, not at all.

KK: But, anyway, I guess working at the Southern Education Foundation was my first exposure to Ph.D.s—what they were like and what they did. I completed my master's during that time period and so the obvious question was, well, what comes next after a master's? To this date in the State of Georgia, the only place to go for a Ph.D. in mass communication is the University of Georgia. So I eventually quit my position there [at the Southern Education Foundation] after six years.

DY: And went full time as a student, as a doctoral student?

KK: I commuted from west Cobb, where we live here, to Athens for two years to get my Ph.D.

DY: And then what brought you to KSU?

KK: While I was working on my dissertation, I taught here as a part-timer, and then I was subsequently hired. I had never been to Athens before my first day of classes. I had commuted to downtown Atlanta from Alpharetta first, and then from west Cobb. So I said, "How much worse could it be?" But it was actually two hours each way, and so that was quite an ordeal.

TS: You didn't go every day over there, I don't guess.

KK: I had to for two semesters because that was the only way they taught statistics—every single day of the week. And I had small children, Jordan and Owen, at home at the time.

DY: I was going to ask you, how old are your children now?

KK: My oldest is sixteen, my middle son is eleven and then the youngest son is four.

TS: You had to be motivated to handle all of that.

KK: Well, it was one of those things, now that I'm in and I've started this, I've got to see it through. So that's what happened.

DY: What did you teach part time at KSU?

KK: I taught the persuasion course, which is a course I still teach.

DY: And then when did you come on full time?

KK: The fall of '95.

TS: Which is right after you got your Ph.D.? Or a year after?

KK: A year after. [The degree was awarded in December 1994.]

DY: Was the department small then, Katherine?

KK: Oh, yes.

DY: That's what I thought.

KK: It was very small.

DY: It was you and John [S.] Gentile and . . .

KK: John Gentile and Joan [E.] Dominick, George Simcoe [VI] . . .

DY: Yes! Was he the chair when you came?

TS: Richard [F.] Welch?

KK: Richard Welch was there. No, Joan Dominick had just been made chair.

DY: In '95?

TS: So you came in right after the big blowup.

KK: Yes.

DY: Oh, she sure did. The Candy [Candace] Kaspers thing.

KK: Right.

DY: So then you must have been teaching part time with those part-time folks?

KK: Candy Kaspers hired me as a part-timer. In fact, the person who had been teaching the persuasion course was one of the people who sued and—

DY: Bari [R. Levingston]?

KK: Yes. She was very helpful to me. I met with her and picked her brain about how she taught the course, but yes, I knew the players involved in that.

DY: She's very dynamic. And then Alan, too.

KK: I didn't know him.

DY: Oh, you didn't know Alan? Alan Schwartz.

TS: So you must have gotten one of those positions when they upgraded from non-tenure track to tenure track positions. Did you have to testify in the suit at all?

KK: No, my understanding is that I was sort of replacing Bari because she had taught the persuasion course, and they were hiring me.

DY: Wasn't her name pronounced Lovington?

KK: I think she pronounced it LOVINGston, but it was spelled Levingston. [The department was] very small, and we got even smaller in the years following. There was a period of a couple of years where there were just four of us in the department, and three of us were new: Chuck [Charles F.] Aust and Jeff [Jeffrey F.] Anderson were hired the same year I was hired, and it was the three of us and Richard Welch for it seemed like a couple of years. Maybe it was just a year, but we were a bare-bones department. [chuckle]

DY: And a very, very dynamic one, too. I mean, you four were just fabulous. And so then the department began to grow, right? Was it programmatic or faculty first, or how did that come?

KK: To be honest, I don't know. But we continue to be chronically understaffed. It's been a catch-up game. Right now we're down five people. We should have sixteen full-time tenure track people, and we've got five full-time temps right now.

DY: Have you lost people?

KK: We had two resignations last year of tenured people and then. ..

DY: Who was that, Katherine?

KK: Keisha [L.] Hoerrner moved over to University Studies, and Lisa [J.] Lyon left the department. And then Jeff Anderson has been out on an extended medical-related leave. It's been a real challenge being in that kind of environment because the service loads become so great. I mean, there are so many committees that have to have representation from every department. That's been a challenge in all of our teaching. The service loads, that by default we've had to take on, cut into the time that we might normally devote to our teaching preparations.

DY: Exactly. And that's particularly true, I think, in our College [of Humanities and Social Sciences]. Our college does so much service in terms of the university. Why did you stay? What's kept you?

KK: I've just had a very positive experience at Kennesaw State. I mean, there have been some rocky moments. We've had difficulty with chairs in our department and have seen a succession of people.

DY: They move fairly quickly, at least. [chuckle]

KK: That's true! [laughter]

DY: I mean, as opposed to one staying there for awhile. It's kind of like a hurricane, just . . .

KK: Yes. But the teaching part of what we do is very rewarding and very satisfying, and that seems to be something I hear from my colleagues as well. You ask people what they enjoy most about their jobs; it's that interaction with students and the rewards that come from that. So I think that's been the biggest motivation.

DY: Have you found relationships within your department, with your peers, collegial? Have you enjoyed that? Do you all work collaboratively, I guess, is what I'm asking? Has that been part of it, or have you been left to sort of pursue your interests and given rein to do that?

KK: I think there is a history of collaboration. I've been involved in collaborations with a number of colleagues. In fact, right now I'm collaborating with a colleague who used to be here but now is at Berry College, and we're collaborating on some scholarship. There was a big service learning project that was a collaboration between myself and two other faculty members in the department. We involved students in three of our classes with high school students from three different high schools in the area that had varying degrees of diversity. We got our students to develop training modules that they delivered to the high school students dealing with anti-bigotry training and what to do if you hear a friend at your high school make a racist joke—how to handle the kinds of situations that come up in a high school environment with cliques and peer pressure and insensitivity to people who are different from you. So that was a big collaboration. More recently, I've collaborated with Len [Leonard] Witt, who is our new Fowler Distinguished Chair in the department, and the focus there has been on delivering training to non-profit organizations and grassroots organizations that need help telling their stories in an effective way to the media, and to funders, and to the public at large. These are people who have great stories to tell but sometimes are too busy to tell them or don't know how to tell them or how to get started.

TS: Or are too emotional or too aggressive?

KK: Or they can't find the hook that you need with media to make this interesting and newsworthy to media.

DY: You need to go to SRC, Southern Regional Council.

KK: Are you involved in that?

DY: My daughter Ruthie [Ruth C. Yow] did an intern this summer there. It's a wonderful civil rights organization, but they're really having trouble finding and articulating their place today. I mean, I think they're still strong, but it's a matter of promotion. Well, what do you think has been your most significant professional accomplishment up to this time?

KK: The Distinguished Teaching Award! I mean, that really is the biggest honor of my entire career.

DY: What do you think got you there?

KK: I think being enthusiastic about what I do, and being willing to invest time and energy, and coming up with classroom strategies that will engage the students, and being active in service learning. Professors who have taught public relations—which is my professional background and many of the courses I teach—we've always done service learning, but we've never had this buzz word "service learning" for it until relatively recently. Suddenly, this buzz word came

out, and we all looked at each other and said, “Hey, we do this! We’ve been doing this forever!” But I think to others on campus, this was something innovative, and I think more than anybody else in the department, I was engaging with some external constituencies. Our PR campaigns class chose a non-profit client each semester, and the students worked incredibly hard to develop comprehensive PR plans that that non-profit could take and implement. So the students and I were making connections externally with these groups who saw the value in what a university could offer them. Students, I think, learned more than just public relations but also learned something about the needs of our community and how citizens can help address these needs. So that’s been a very positive experience.

TS: I wonder if we could back up a little bit and talk about how you developed the interest in the community, for instance, or the involvement. Who were your mentors along the way who helped make you what you are as a teacher?

KK: I’m probably one of those anomalies in that it’s been one of the regrets of my academic career that I haven’t felt that I’ve really had a mentor. I certainly didn’t have one at the Ph.D. program. There were things looking back on that I say, “Gee, they should have told me this, and they should have . . .” I didn’t have that kind of experience as a graduate student. When I came here to Kennesaw State, I’ve got to say the most positive influence was another Distinguished Teaching Award winner who happened to be our chair at the time; it was Joan Dominick. She was extremely motivating because she was constantly giving you a pat on the back—sometimes when you didn’t deserve one—but extremely positive, giving you that positive reinforcement for the things you were doing. She recognized when you were going the extra mile to bring in top-notch guest speakers or to involve your class in service learning. She recognized and appreciated those things. I’m one of those people that, a few pats on the back, you know—I will go the distance for you if I feel my efforts are being appreciated. So that was very helpful. She gave me one piece of advice that I remember; it really stuck with me. I’ve used it and it works, and that was: “Do something different in the classroom every twenty minutes”. It truly does work. Actually, after she said that, I began thinking, “Okay, at this point I need to insert this activity.” I never had done a total sage-on-the-stage kind of lecture. I’d always tried to vary it, but this was the first time I had heard somebody articulate this as a strategy. And it’s been a very good one.

TS: Was your undergraduate degree in communication?

KK: It was in journalism with a focus on public relations.

TS: So you always knew that’s what you wanted to go into?

KK: I had been the editor of my high school newspaper and had won a journalism scholarship because of that. And my family—the family trend is really writers.

My father, George Neil, was an editor before he joined the Army of the *Princeton* [New Jersey] *Packet*, and his father, George Neil, Sr., was the general manager of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Then there were women in his family—he's just doing genealogical research now that he's retired—but we're discovering a grandmother and a great-grandmother who published works. One of them published children's stories in an anthology; one of them published in a women's magazine that was kind of the equivalent of *Godey's Lady's Book*. So I have to credit my ancestors with the interest in writing.

DY: That's fascinating.

KK: It is really fascinating. I feel like I got the gene from them.

DY: What time period was that, Katherine?

KK: Well, my dad is sixty-six, and we're talking about his grandmother and his great-grandmother, so we're back in the 1800s.

DY: That's what I'm thinking about, that time period.

KK: When magazines first became popular.

DY: Yes, and women were writing in them and had a venue there. How exciting!

TS: What did your father do in the military? Did he continue with journalism there?

KK: No, he didn't. For a large part of his career he was a transportation officer. He served two tours in Vietnam while we were young and coordinated the transportation of food and other things that were needed from one camp in Vietnam to another.

TS: Why did he make a career in the military given that—it looks like he already had a good job to begin with.

KK: It didn't pay well enough to raise a family. They had a nice life in New Jersey. They had a hundred-year-old farm house, but I was two years old at the time, and being editor of the *Princeton Packet* was not paying enough, so he actually got back in the military. He had gotten out, and then he got back in and made a career of it. I think he had regrets. His undergraduate degree was in British literature, and they gave him an opportunity after one of his tours in Vietnam to get a master's in literature and teach at West Point. He had met my mother in Hawaii for the R&R period, and they went to the University of Hawaii to look at the syllabi and see what does an English professor do? He was turned off by something he saw there and wasn't sure if he would enjoy that. But I think he's regretted that, and he's also regretted, I think, that he didn't go into law. His father, who was the general manager of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, was also an

- attorney. My dad is very good with written and oral communication and would have made a terrific lawyer. So he had some regrets, I think, about his career choices.
- DY: Did you ever flirt with that? With law school?
- KK: No. I'm a person who shies away from conflict!
- TS: What was your father's rank when he retired?
- KK: He was a lieutenant colonel.
- TS: Did he encourage you to go into communication or discourage you?
- KK: They weren't real active in encouraging; I think I just always sort of knew. I was the child who didn't need much prodding, I guess.
- TS: There was never any question you were going to college?
- KK: No, no. And they had seen me being editor of the school paper and having success in that. In fact, my dad was stationed in Holland my senior year of high school, and I refused to go. "You're not moving me again!" My senior year when I was going to be editor of the paper, you know, I wasn't going to leave. So I lived with a friend that year, and then they stayed in Holland several more years. Summers, I would go over. He was stationed at a NATO base there, so I wrote for the NATO newspaper, which was an English publication, one summer while I was there. I think they recognized that that was a strength and were glad that I was doing something that would be of use.
- TS: Why public relations instead of being an investigative reporter for *The New York Times* or something?
- KK: Well, being the high school newspaper editor kind of soured me on deadlines. I saw the stress of what those deadlines do to you, and I really had misperceptions of what PR people did. I thought my dream job would be working for Coca-Cola; I would get all the complaints and send people free cases of Coke and be the nice person to make them happy and smooth things over. So I had this misperception that this is what PR people do. Then, in fact, I discovered after I had the degree that, no, that's what they hire people without college degrees to do—customer service. But I had also been told that public relations pays more, and I thought maybe I would want to try a corporate environment where there were longer term deadlines than the kinds of daily deadlines you would have as a newspaper reporter. So selfish reasons.
- TS: Well, the Southern Education Foundation doesn't sound like the most lucrative PR position to be in compared to Coca-Cola.

KK: Well, this was the mid-'80s. We were in a recession, and there were no jobs in PR. It was incredibly difficult. I had actually gotten an offer from a hospital in Columbia, South Carolina, for \$14,000. I had no idea that you couldn't live on \$14,000. Then I came to Atlanta and interviewed with several organizations, and Hill and Knowlton offered me \$17,500. I turned the hospital down to take the \$17,500, and then discovered how not so far \$17,500 will go in Atlanta.

TS: We have had a little inflation since the '80s.

KK: Yes, things have gotten better.

TS: So when did you get married?

KK: 1987.

TS: So after you were in Atlanta.

KK: Yes, I had been working here for two years or so.

TS: And is your husband [Nile Kinnick] in public relations?

KK: No, no, he's in sales.

TS: So you met in Atlanta then.

KK: Yes.

TS: So then most of your graduate, well, all of your graduate training is while you had little children at home then, I guess.

KK: Well, no, I actually finished my master's before I got married and then started the Ph.D. program with one child at home. Then we had the second child—he was my dissertation baby!—and I was hugely pregnant finishing up my last semester of course work at Athens. I had this one older gentlemanly professor who taught mass media history, and I think he was getting very concerned. He knew I had this two-hour commute, and he offered to me, “You can stop coming to class and have another student tape record it for you.” I think he was really worried something terrible was going to happen to me!

DY: That you'd give birth in the middle of a lecture.

KK: Right. Or on the highway somewhere, and he would have that on his conscience.

DY: Well, that was thoughtful.

KK: Yes.

DY: What I'm hearing, too, along the way, your interest and your focus—when you say diversity, I also hear you wanting justice and people being treated fairly. Where did that come from? You said your background; I understand your background academically . . .

KK: Well, both my background and working at the Southern Education Foundation—my eyes were really opened. I didn't know much about the civil rights movement, and here I was working with people who lived it and had their own very powerful stories to tell me. I wrote a monthly newsletter for this organization, so I was interviewing people, playing the journalist role. I really was an in-house journalist for a large extent of my role there. I interviewed lots of people who had stories to tell about inequitable situations and what the schools were like in this poor, rural community that doesn't have a tax base versus other kinds of communities.

TS: Who were some of the people involved at the Southern Education Foundation?

KK: Well, Elridge [W.] McMillan was the president for years and he was a Regent.

TS: Still is, isn't he?

KK: In fact, he was Chairman of the Board of Regents [1986-87] while I was there, and I got to write his speeches when he was asked to give commencement speeches around the state.

DY: Interesting.

KK: In fact, when I graduated from Georgia State with my master's [1987], I wrote the speech that he delivered. So I was sitting there in my cap and gown with the script to make sure he was following my script. But I knew when I entered that graduate program that I wanted to do research about how the media covers social problems. We were very concerned with fundraising at the Southern Education Foundation, and we had these wonderful stories to tell of how funding inequities still existed. Yet, it seemed difficult to get people motivated to give and to get the average citizen up off of their couch willing to do something or willing to write a check. So my dissertation was about this phenomenon that had just become, I wouldn't even say a buzz word, but it was a word that was just being thrown out in the philanthropic circles—our professional association was the Council on Foundations—and it was “compassion fatigue,” in that people hear so much about all of the social problems in this country that they start becoming numb to it. They start becoming desensitized, and I could see that happening in the work that I had been doing at the Southern Education Foundation. I could see this being an issue with a lot of the social problems. You know, people don't want to hear about teenage pregnancy any more; people don't want to hear about these other

issues. So for my dissertation, I did a telephone survey of metro Atlantans—300 surveys—and asked them about their news-watching habits. Basically, I got from people that they will turn the channel, or they'll turn it off, or they'll choose mood-enhancing programming. I mean, one person said, "I watch *Gilligan's Island* before I watch the local news because I don't want to hear about these depressing problems any more."

DY: Well, people don't want to look homeless people on the street in the eye. It's the same thing. "This is not my world."

KK: Right. So it's a real challenge for non-profits: How do we break through this kind of jaded wall that people put up and make them care about something that they've heard a lot about to the point that they think—that they don't feel efficacy? "We've had this problem for years and year and years; what am I going to do to make a difference?" So how do you make people feel that they can make a difference and make them feel that efficacy? It's interesting, but in the Gender, Race and Media course that I teach, it is oftentimes at the beginning of the semester when you talk with students about racism. They think it's their parents' generation's problem—that kids like them today aren't racist and that this problem will vanish in our society beginning with their generation because they have friends, and they'll talk about it from their personal experience. They'll say, "Well, in high school I hung out with people of all different colors." But as we go through the course and we talk about a variety of ways that people are depicted in the media, we'll talk about when you see African-Americans on the news, what kinds of roles are they usually playing? And their eyes start to become opened. By the end of the semester, if you have the same conversation, they will say, "No, racism still is a problem in our society." And they see it in an entirely different way, a much richer way. They can see it from the other group's perspective much, much better than when they started that course and really had never been asked to think about these issues before.

DY: I really like what I'm hearing about it—you know, the balance of the intellectual and the emotive here, too, to make them look critically at a culture that they live in and know that culture acts on . . .

KK: Yes. I just went to a conference, and I had not heard this term before that apparently other people have known. It came from some psychology folks; it was cognitive affective learning or some combination of words with that kind of meaning. There are studies now that show that when you engage students emotionally, the learning is enhanced. It clicked for me because I see that happening in this course. They start becoming emotionally involved and more empathetic to others as we go through the course. They're exposed to documentaries, clips of *Amos 'n Andy* and old programming where they can see, you know, it's very apparent the racism or the sexism that's there. But that's still a controversial thing in the scholarship of teaching as I understand it because, as a professor, we're taught to always be objective. I try to be objective in the way I

present this very sensitive and controversial kind of material. Yet, if there is a way to present it so that intellectually all sides are represented and students can make up their own mind, but at the same time, they can't help but for their emotions to be impacted by some of the disturbing images that they see—that's a powerful combination. From what I heard at this conference, it's a new kind of trend that people are studying this connection and the impact on learning, and it's not always accepted everywhere.

DY: I can see how it would be threatening to some people in some disciplines, too. What was the conference?

KK: This was the Governor's Teaching Fellows' first annual conference where they brought back all of the alumni of the program.

DY: I guess we've got a transition here, at least I'd like to think that we do. How do you feel about the intellectual climate on our campus? And you can speak specifically to your area, or you can go as vast and broad as you'd like because I think that's what we've been talking about: Creating an intellectual environment for students to learn and what all goes into that mix.

KK: I think we have some challenges on our campus because of the kind of students that we've historically served and because of the demands on faculty on this campus. Most of our students come here not wanting to go to graduate school, seeing college as a series of hurdles they have to overcome to get that piece of paper.

DY: To make money.

KK: Right. So they come from a very pragmatic standpoint—not an intellectual curiosity—"I'm here to learn and broaden my horizons" kind of standpoint.

DY: Like we came from.

KK: Of course! [laughter] But you know, that's a very different environment from some other places. I think that it's a challenge for faculty to instill a love of learning in a student who's never thought of learning as something pleasurable before. It's been work; it's been hard. And at the same time, because of KSU's tradition as being very democratic with a lot of faculty input, we have all of these committees and this incredible service load which is felt, as I've said, in particular by the smaller departments. That really pinches the time that you can put into scholarship. So I think the intellectual climate is dampened because the kinds of scholarship you can do when your time is very limited tend to be less long-term. You know, more like, "What's a quick piece I can get out and get published quickly before my portfolio's due?" And maybe we're seeing quantity but not necessarily the quality that we would see if we weren't responsible for so much service.

- DY: Within your department or across campus, too, do you find that there's ever any time for any kind of conversations, not unlike the one we're having right now? Or do we have to just pick out a little piece and say, "This is what we're going to do; we're going to have a little lunch, brown-bag seminar."
- KK: Well, we attempted to do that, but it was really designed to help new faculty who had joined our department and give them a chance to get to know us in an informal way rather than focusing on scholarship. I think there are opportunities on this campus if you seek them out. CETL offers programs related to this. I was part of a group whose name I can't remember now, but we would read a book related to some aspect of scholarship, and then we would get together and discuss that book. That may have also been a CETL offering.
- TS: Yes, I remember that.
- KK: I don't know if that program is still existing. So there are opportunities, but I think people get into this daily grind of "I've got to do this, this and this before five o'clock when my class starts." I will say, I think it's pretty clear to everybody that right now we're in some sort of transitional phase of our evolution at KSU. We're moving from a climate that didn't emphasize scholarship so much to one that has higher expectations for scholarship, and I think we continue to get some mixed messages. I've seen mixed messages in my own department, you know—"You're doing all right and these kinds of things are fine." But somebody else is told, "Well, no, you need to be publishing in seminal journals in the disciplines." So it's kind of this awkward period, and it's difficult for faculty to sort out from these messages what's the standard I have to meet.
- DY: Why, because they haven't been codified by the administration yet? We've always been in flux with tenure and promotion, but I think you're right; I think the whole institution is in transition right now.
- TS: I think part of it is that the administration doesn't have one voice. If a department chair says one thing and a dean says another and the president says a third, or the vice president . . .
- KK: And then the faculty sitting on a T&P [tenure and promotion] committee have a different perspective . . .
- TS: Yes. What do you see as the relationship between good teaching and scholarship?
- KK: Well, obviously there should be an integration there. The scholarship should feed the teaching, and perhaps the teaching can feed the scholarship of teaching. You can share your successful techniques with others that way.

- TS: Have you been able to integrate scholarship and teaching, do you think, in your career?
- KK: I have. My resume reflects some of both, I think—the scholarship of discovery and the scholarship of teaching. But that’s another thing that we’re getting mixed messages about on campus: Is scholarship of teaching enough, or do we expect scholarship of discovery from all . . .
- DY: Yes, traditional academics.
- TS: Let’s talk a little bit more about teaching. By winning the award, I guess you’re considered a master teacher. What is a master teacher, do you think?
- KK: Hopefully, a master teacher is somebody who demonstrates best practices, who is innovative in the techniques that they use, who can demonstrate a variety of techniques in the classroom, and who is willing to share those things with others. There’s something in the connotation of master teacher that says that you teach other teachers. So I think that’s part of the definition.
- TS: What kinds of techniques have worked best for you?
- KK: I can’t get totally away from delivering some lecture notes, so I’ll give some content, and then there’ll be some sort of activity, you know, a self-quiz or role-playing exercise. I’ll have students come to the front, and instead of me telling them, “Here is the model of the communication,” I’ll say, “Okay, I need a volunteer, and everybody else in the class, you tell them what to draw to draw the model of communication.” In the persuasion class, we do a lot of role playing of compliance-gaining strategies and persuasive techniques. So I’ll give the students note cards that say “You are a door-to-door encyclopedia salesman” and “You are the person who answers the door” and “You need to demonstrate this particular technique in your sales pitch.” And so they’ll do that, and the rest of the class will have to guess which technique they used. Students really enjoy those interactive things. I also, in several of my classes, have students give presentations to the class where they are the teacher for five to seven minutes, and they present on a topic that supplements what’s in the textbook or provides examples of a textbook concept. Even though the quality of those will vary, on student evaluations the students consistently say, “I enjoy the student presentations.” They enjoy watching each other get up and convey the information.
- DY: I think they feel like we are honoring and valuing what they have to say and what they think. I use the same kind of thing. I call it “panel presentations,” and they present their ideas. But yes, they do like that.
- TS: Do you teach mainly majors in communication or . . .?

KK: Yes. I've never taught our Gen Ed [General Education] course, so the courses I teach draw primarily majors. In the persuasion class, we'll get some political science majors. I've got an accounting major this semester, and occasionally we'll get some others. I do teach public speaking, and we'll have a variety of students in that class; but I'd say the majority are communication majors.

DY: I want to go back for a minute and hear you talk about how you see us as teachers challenging students. What ways have we done that traditionally, and maybe are we changing ways in which we challenge students? I mean, clearly the fact that we are even concerned about and think about the standing and lecturing to people for an hour, as was done to us, as being not perhaps the best way to challenge or engage a student. So what do you think? How do you see that as a teacher you challenge them? In what way?

KK: I like to challenge my students by setting the standard high. In the public relations classes, I draw on my professional experience, and I say, "These are the professional expectations, and this is the bar you have to meet. Substandard work won't fly in the real world. You need to be able to produce something of professional quality while you're still in college, so you can show it to perspective employers as proof, as evidence, that you can do professional quality work." So that tends to be very effective for the public relations students who want to get a job and are pragmatically driven. In all my classes, I set very high standards for the student writing probably because that's . . .

DY: Your own background.

KK: Right.

TS: Have you found that students are better writers or not as good as they were when you started here ten odd years ago? Have you seen a change?

KK: They definitely haven't improved since I started here.

TS: Have not?

KK: I don't know that they've declined since I've started here, but now that I have a son in high school, I think I understand why they're coming to us with poor writing skills. It's not emphasized in the high school curriculum; literature is what's emphasized in the high school curriculum. They do very, very little writing. They take multiple-choice tests on the literature to see if they understand the meaning. It's a terrible shame because they struggle when they get a course like senior thesis, which I teach, and we count off three points per writing error. And we've had to cap it at a maximum of thirty points because we had students who would have zeros because they never learned comma rules, or they never learned that fragments are a no-no—things that maybe they got in elementary school, which was apparently the last time that it was taught. They've forgotten

or for some reason they've never learned, and it's a real struggle for some of these students. As much as I tell them, proofread, proofread, proofread, there are some of them whose writing skills are so poor that we've had to look at our curriculum and develop a gateway course. It's called Writing for Public Communication, which introduces them to—we have three tracks—the kinds of professional writing you would do in journalism, in public relations, or in corporate communication kinds of settings. They have to make a 2.5 GPA in that course plus our public speaking course. I think we're going to have to bump that up to a 3.0 because they've been somehow getting through that requirement, and then they get to senior thesis. Here they are one course away from graduation, and they're failing because of their writing problems, and it's a shame. I think I've wandered away from your question.

DY: This is fascinating.

TS: No, no, I was just thinking of a student I had just this last semester in the research class. I used to think that a comma splice was about as bad a mistake as you could make, but when you run two sentences together without even a comma . . . I don't know what that says.

DY: It's very disturbing that they lack these very basic skills. So they go through middle school, where it used to be that grammar, punctuation, and the rudimentary elements were taught—or even high school. But when they get here, they should at some point have gotten this.

KK: And somehow they're making passing grades in English 1101 and 1102 before they get to our classes. So I think there are multiple places where maybe we're pushing kids along.

DY: Dropping the ball. Yes, yes, I know since English is my home department. I know that one of the problems there is that we've had to just so extensively use part-time faculty, and there's just so little you can do there.

KK: Yes. Well, I think that part of the problem is many part-timers and even some full-time faculty never learned these skills themselves.

DY: That's exactly right, Katherine. That's exactly right.

TS: We've noticed that on promotion and tenure committees.

DY: Yes, we have. Yes, we have. It's astounding that you get a portfolio narrative, and there are errors in it.

TS: And it's really across disciplines—communication, English, history.

- DY: Yes. Foreign languages seem to be the ones who really don't have a problem. And I think it's easy to see why.
- TS: So maybe a general cultural decline in respect for the rules of grammar.
- KK: Well, I have one assignment in my Gender, Race and Media class where the students have to respond to questions that I give them each week that go into a response journal. I told the students if I can read your handwriting, you can handwrite these because it really is like a personal narrative and a personal journal. But I had one student who wrote in text message code, you know, how the teenagers use abbreviations when they're typing. I said, "I'm sorry; I'm not this hip. I don't know what this abbreviation means. Do not give me text message code." But when you look at technology and how little we're relying on writing any more to communicate with each other . . .
- DY: Yes, I wondered if that was an issue. It's certainly one you can address, and you're a wonderful ambassador for it. This is all great—the technology, media, et cetera—but that medium of literacy and writing, we can't forsake that.
- TS: There was a very good George Will column about six months ago where he was talking about punctuation. His central idea was that it was a way that you show respect for your readers by using the conventional rules. But let's move on to service learning. It seems to me if you can get students engaged, they're probably going to write a whole lot better.
- DY: If they have something they're interested in talking about.
- TS: Yes, if you're interested in what you're doing.
- KK: I think that a key to service learning is finding a client that really resonates with the students—something that they can relate to. Once the word gets out that there's a class at KSU that will do free PR campaigns for you, I will start getting calls from people saying, "Can you help me?" But if their topic is not something student-friendly, I will put them on the back burner and try to find something that really will be more appealing to students. I find that makes all the difference. One of the clients that we've used is Cobb Christmas, which is an unsung hero in the community. Nobody knows about Cobb Christmas—they've done a horrible job promoting themselves—but they collect and distribute toys for needy families. The year when we worked with them I think that they gave toys to over 4,000 families in Cobb County. These are families that are screened to make sure they're not getting gifts from MUST Ministries—from multiple social services. So four thousand distinct families. The students just really got on board with that. That was something that did have that cognitive affective connection that was just really successful. They were motivated to work hard for this organization because it was such a good cause.

- TS: You mentioned Samaritan's Purse in your Web site.
- KK: Oh, well, that's just kind of a personal thing I do. I don't tie that into my teaching at all.
- TS: But it sounds very similar with gifts for—what is it?—clothes and so on.
- KK: Well, that's my hobby. They asked us to say what our hobbies were when our department Webmaster was putting together our Web site. That has been my hobby over the last couple of years. When I find clothes or toys for children on sale, I have this one area above the garage, and I stash everything. Then you put together shoe boxes for certain age groups and genders, and Samaritan's Purse distributes them all over the world. This year I did 327 of these shoeboxes. My husband told me I was obsessed with this!
- DY: That's a wonderful obsession to have.
- TS: Who is Samaritan's Purse?
- KK: Samaritan's Purse is an organization run by Franklin Graham, who is the son of Billy Graham. They do a variety of things; this shoebox project they call Operation Christmas Child. It's just one of their programs, but they have other relief-type programs all over the world. The year before this one, I had put address labels on the lids of the shoeboxes, just to see if anybody would write me back because I said sometimes people do. I got two letters, both from boys in India. One of them was the son of the director of a Christian orphanage in this remote part of India, so we started this correspondence. Then his father could go to a computer center in the nearest city, and we e-mailed to each other. That's been neat to see a relationship develop that way.
- TS: I guess if it's Franklin Graham, he doesn't need a PR campaign.
- KK: No, they do quite well with their materials.
- TS: What are some of the clients that you've used for your class?
- KK: Let's see. MUST Ministries and Cobb Christmas, as I mentioned. The very first year I came here, we worked with the biology department and the American Red Cross to do a bone marrow drive on campus. We've done several on-campus clients. Continuing Ed offers children's camps in the summer, so we worked with them, and then they offer a senior university for senior citizens, and we helped them with that. We also did the City of Smyrna, which has been trying to attract more affluent home buyers. They have lots and lots of apartment dwellers who tend to be transient and don't invest themselves in the community. They've been doing some really interesting things in Smyrna. You may know about Smyrna's activities.

TS: It's amazing how they've rebuilt their city. They're a new city that looks like an old city.

KK: And they've become a model for other places. And what's interesting is, when they first approached me about working with them, the city manager said his model was Summerville, South Carolina, where I was from, so . . .

DY: Do you find yourself mentoring students in any significant way? You said that you missed that in your own academic [experience].

KK: I think I do. With the students, it tends to go in two directions. One of them is career advice for the students, especially those who want to get into public relations. I still have my portfolio from when I went on my first job interview, and I'll show them what it looks like and kinds of things you can put in it. I'll read their resumes and talk with them about what kinds of environments might be best for them in public relations. The other direction is the more scholarly direction. In our senior thesis class, we build in time for individual consultations. Each week there's usually one day when I am there during the class time, and they can come to me for one-on-one help. That's been a really satisfying experience, I think, both for me as well as for them. They're doing original scholarship and gathering their own data if they choose to do a research thesis. So they've needed that one-on-one assistance. They've never done anything like this before, so I enjoy working with them to set up the methodology—what is the strategy that's going to yield the kind of data that you want?—and seeing them through that process to completion at the end of the semester. There are two students that I'm working with right now. One of them has graduated, but she did a fabulous job on a study that became an interest of hers after taking the Gender, Race and Media class where she examined the lyrics of the top fifty songs in three different genres for the year 2003. She's cataloged all of the anti-social messages in these songs. It's a fabulous study, and I'd like to . . .

DY: What genres did she do?

KK: Rap, pop and country. I think it's a publishable study, but I'm struggling with where to tell her to send it because she was the coder. She didn't have objective coders where you would have inner-coder reliability and that kind of thing.

DY: Is she going to graduate school?

KK: No, she actually has a job with Laura [S.] Dabundo [Director of Kennesaw State University Press] now. She's Laura Dabundo's administrative assistant.

DY: Is this . . . ?

KK: Cheryl [K.] Miller.

- DY: Cheryl Miller. She was in our joint class [Regional Literature/Georgia History].
- TS: Yes.
- KK: So I'm trying to find some venues for her to get that published. And then I have another student in my senior thesis class right now with a really good thesis going whom I want to help in a similar way to get that published if I can. And from a broader standpoint, to me, mentoring is just giving students what motivates me, which is that pat on the back. Sometimes you can't be positive about every aspect of their work, but if you can point out a couple of pieces that are really terrific, then they can hear the bad news; then they can take the fact that they failed your test if they know that you think they did a fabulous job on their presentation. So I think sometimes teachers get so busy—we get in this mode when we're grading of looking for the bad things because that's what we have to mark—and we forget to make the positive comments and point out “great ideas here!” I have to remind myself to do that; that's so important. And when I do it, I see the rewards from that. So I try to make that a part of my mentoring.
- TS: I hope somebody will do an interview like this with you in twenty years because twenty years ago, I would have said that I didn't have any mentors in school. I was really kind of in revolt against everything they did, and my approach to teaching was not like they did, but how they didn't. But now I'm looking back and deciding, well, I think I got a lot more out of them than I used to think. So at any rate, my views have changed a little bit in time to recognize I really do owe them something, whether I thought so twenty years ago or not.
- KK: Well, I certainly owe my professors the content. There are things I remember from lectures as an undergraduate that now I find myself making those same points that were made to me. I may not always remember who the professor was, but I remember this little nugget. So I am grateful for that. But at UGA, I did work that, looking back, should have been published or presented at conferences, and I was so clueless to that academic presentation and publication issue . . .
- TS: And they didn't encourage you?
- KK: No. And there were some missed opportunities there that I regret.
- TS: I think the sad thing about graduate schools, and I don't think it's changed that much, is that instead of building students up they often tear them down. Graduate students are thinking, “Well, I just can't do anything.” Or they make you feel as though you just never measure up to their high and lofty standards.
- KK: I didn't feel that; I didn't feel that at all. But I think the program was so large that the students there really had to seek out a mentoring relationship. It wasn't something that automatically came with the program.

TS: So you weren't in total revolt against what you were taught.

KK: Oh no, no.

TS: Okay.

DY: I wonder, too, if gender doesn't have something to do with it. Now, I was there much earlier than you were, but I saw males being, "Okay, we want you to go here to graduate school, and you go here to graduate school." And I guess they thought, you know, "I'm sure she'll just find somebody and marry him." That was never said, but what I saw laid out in front of me. There were so few women who were teaching in the Ph.D. program. That's another thing, too.

TS: Yes. There weren't any in history at Tennessee when I went there. There had been in the past, but there weren't when I went through.

DY: There were three in the English department at Georgia.

TS: After I got through Gen Ed courses, I was taught entirely by white males.

KK: Wow.

TS: Many of them very liberal white males, but white males.

DY: Well, thank goodness for that. [chuckle]

TS: Didn't know what I was missing, did I?

DY: What have we not touched on?

TS: I think we've pretty well covered it. We've talked a little bit about scholarship. . .

DY: And mentoring and teaching.

TS: Most of those that we've interviewed are senior faculty well advanced in their careers or retired, and you've still got a long way to go in your career. Maybe we could ask you where do you want to go with your career, and where would you like to see Kennesaw State go? In what direction should we be moving for the next decade or two decades?

DY: Yes, that's good.

KK: I could see myself in several roles. I think I would be happy staying in the role of the faculty member and being one of the seasoned faculty members on campus. I have a lot of good role models on this campus of those kinds of individuals who

- have earned wonderful reputations and other people look to as role models and mentors. I would love to be thought of as one of those long marchers around here. I also could see myself at some point maybe going the administrative route.
- TS: What would you want to do in administration? Do you mean going through department chair, dean, that route?
- DY: Didn't you do a stint as interim chair?
- KK: Yes, and that was satisfying because you can get things done as an interim chair or department chair. You can lead a department in some new directions, and that's something satisfying. So I would be open to that opportunity if it should present itself. If not, I'll just stay in my role as a faculty member because I certainly enjoy that.
- DY: Well, if I can go on for just a second on just a little branch of that, what do you think that we need to do at this point for our senior teaching faculty? What do we need?
- KK: Well, I'm on the Faculty Development & Awards committee, so I'm seeing some of the new initiatives that are coming through. We've got proposals in our hands right now for two grant programs for senior faculty, one that will give them a travel stipend, which is the closest thing we have to a sabbatical at this institution—
- DY: That CETL is implementing? Those grants?
- KK: Yes.
- DY: Right.
- KK: And the other one is a restart grant to help faculty who haven't been active in scholarship to get restarted. I think both of those are terrific.
- DY: Do you see any way that we can create, build or—well, I say build because I don't know that we have a community of senior faculty; I don't know that senior faculty have any separate or distinct identity at this institution. It might be because we're such a young institution. I realize I'm being kind of hazy about this. I'm on this senior faculty advisory council that Linda [M.] Noble has cranked up, and it really is, I think, a problem and an issue for senior faculty who want to continue to grow. These grants are very good examples, but since you are in that growth mode right now, what feeds you? What keeps you going?
- KK: I think the time management issues for faculty are the biggest challenges right now. If there is a way to remove some of the demands on our time so that faculty

can focus on their own area of professional growth that they'd really like to pursue, that's a luxury that we haven't really had.

DY: I appreciate your phrasing it as time management; that's a nice way to put it out there. Colloquially, some others have always said we've been asked to make bricks without straw, and when you continue to have to do that, then you don't have the time that you need for reflection, for scholarship.

KK: Well, frankly, we're risking burning out our faculty, and then you're not going to have any senior faculty. There are a number of us who compare what our lives would be like had we taken a position at a Research I institution versus Kennesaw. I think there's a perception for new hires that somehow your life is going to be easier at a Kennesaw because there isn't the publish-or-perish philosophy. But we're seeing the ratcheting up of scholarship expectations and thinking, if I were teaching at UGA, I would have at most a two-two course load. I would have time to do all this scholarship, and because UGA is so huge, I maybe would be on one committee. I'm on five major committees; I'm chairing two of those. Scholarship is being ratcheted up, and my teaching load is heavier. I think if we want to continue to have fabulous teachers and solid researchers, we're going to have to address these workload balance issues. I think people have thought [they] are just a given, and there's nothing we can do about it. I've been pleased to hear Lynn [Lendley C.] Black [the Vice President for Academic Affairs] say he's looking at the committee issues and whether it's necessary to have all the committees.

DY: He said that two or three years ago, I think.

KK: And I'm on a new committee that he's asked me to be on.

DY: I've done the same thing, Katherine. I mean, when asked to be on these committees, I say yes simply because I think, "All right. Here's a voice; maybe I can make a difference." I don't know whether that's going to happen or not or whether it's the same old, "Okay, you spend your time on a committee and then what? Where does it go? What's the point here?" Thank you for articulating that. You're preaching to the choir.

TS: I think I've pretty well gone through my list of questions.

DY: Me, too. It's been so interesting.

KK: Well, thank you for inviting me.

INDEX

- American Red Cross, 19
- Anderson, Jeffrey F., 4-5
- Aust, Charles F., 4

- Berry College, 6
- Black, Lendley C., 24
- Board of Regents, University System of Georgia, 11

- Cobb Christmas, 18
- Compassion fatigue, 11
- Cognitive affective learning, 12-13, 18
- Council on Foundations, 11

- Dabundo, Laura S., 20
- Dominick, Joan E., 3, 7

- Gentile, John S., 3
- Georgia State University, 1, 11
- Governor's Teaching Fellows, 13
- Graham, Franklin, 19

- Hill and Knowlton (PR agency), 1, 10
- Hoerrner, Keisha L., 5

- Kaspers, Candace, 4
- Kennesaw State University
 - Communication Department, 3-6, 14
 - Heavy service load, 5, 13-14, 23-24
 - Intellectual climate, 13-14
 - CETL (Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning), 14, 23
 - Scholarship demands, 14, 24
 - Student writing ability, 16-18
 - Part-time faculty, 17
 - Continuing Education, 19
 - KSU Press, 20
 - Faculty Development & Awards Committee, 23
 - Grant programs for senior faculty, 23
 - Senior Faculty Advisory Council, 23
- Kinnick, Jordan, 3, 10

Kinnick, Katherine N.
Education, 1-3, 7
Public Relations work, 1, 11-12
Childhood, 1
Part-time teaching at Kennesaw State, 2-3
Hired full time at Kennesaw State, 3-4
Reflections on teaching at KSU, 5
Collaboration with colleagues, 6
Service learning, 6-7, 18-20
Strengths as a teacher, 6-7
Mentors, lack of in graduate school, 7
Editor of high school newspaper, 7, 9
Heritage in journalism, 7-8
Reporter for NATO newspaper, 9
Preference for public relations over newspaper reporting, 9
Gender, Race and Media course, 12, 18, 20
Scholarship and teaching, 14-15
Master teaching, 15
Senior thesis course, 16-17, 20
Involvement with Samaritan's Purse, 19
Mentoring students, 20-21
Career goals, 22-23
Service as interim chair, 23
Service on Faculty Development & Awards Committee, 23

Kinnick, Nile, 10, 19
Kinnick, Owen, 3, 10

Levingston, Bari R., 4
Lyon, Lisa J., 5

McMillan, Elridge W., 11
Miller, Cheryl K., 20-21
MUST Ministries (Ministries United for Service & Training), 18, 19

Neil, Freya, 1, 8
Neil, George, 8-9
Neil, George, Sr., 8-9
Noble, Linda M., 23

Operation Christmas Child, 19

Philadelphia Inquirer, 8
Princeton Packet, 8

Samaritan's Purse, 19
Schwartz, Alan, 4

Simcoe, George, VI, 3
Smyrna, Georgia, 19-20
Southern Education Foundation, 1-2, 11
Southern Regional Council, 6
Summerville, South Carolina, 2, 20

University of Georgia, 2-3, 10, 21-22, 24
University of South Carolina, 1

Welch, Richard F., 3-4
Will, George F., 18
Witt, Leonard, 6

Yow, Ruth C., 6