

All Abroad!

An interview with Rollins College President Lewis Duncan

LEWIS M. DUNCAN has served as president of Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, since 2004. He serves on the American Council on Education's Commission on International Initiatives and the Association of American Colleges and Universities LEAP (Liberal Education and America's Promise) Presidents' Trust, and is current chair of the Associated Colleges of the South and president of the Southern University Conference. In 2010 he was a member of the Institute of International Education's U.S. College and University Presidents' Delegation to India.

Duncan is the former dean of the Thayer School of Engineering at Dartmouth College and provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at the University of Tulsa. He holds a doctorate in space physics from Rice University. He also previously served as a research scientist and section head at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, Carnegie Science Fellow at Stanford University's Center for International Security and Arms Control, and associate dean of sciences at Clemson University.

IE: What inspired you to develop The President's Internationalization Initiative at Rollins College? What are its components?

ROLLINS: When I arrived at Rollins in 2004, we were in the process of affirming our institutional mission as "educating students for global citizenship and responsible leadership." International programs and globalization were, and continue to be, very much on the minds of academic leaders and faculty as an essential component of a twenty-first-century education. However, the steps necessary to implement this progressive aspiration as a discernible part of a modern liberal education were less clear. Through a quality enhancement program, derived in large part through our accreditation reaffirmation self-study and with strong faculty leadership, we established goals for increased opportunities and support for our students to under-

take international studies, implemented an inclusive program for faculty and teaching staff to share in regular international scholarly experiences, increased the number of international students within our student body, and enhanced the visibility of existing international diversity across our campus community.

IE: How did the campus community react to it? What about your trustees?

ROLLINS: The Rollins academic community has responded enthusiastically to these efforts, assuming leadership of many of these programs. The trustees also have openly embraced the importance of this initiative in support of Rollins' expanding global ambitions.

IE: A component of your internationalization initiative strives to enable every faculty member to have an international experience at least once every three years. Why did you think it is important for faculty—not just students—to have international experiences?

ROLLINS: Symbolic leadership has always had great value in a teaching environment, and within a college community our faculty represents the most evident role models for our students in reflecting our institutional values. While encouraging Rollins students to pursue greater opportunities in international study, it



Lewis M. Duncan, president of Rollins College

was equally important to support our faculty in pursuing their own international experiential learning. Several faculty leaders were already pursuing innovative approaches to more widely engaging the academic community collectively, resulting in pilot programs for both faculty language instruction and at least one shared international trip.

Many colleges have competitive programs providing for faculty international travel and study, but typically such programs can only support about 10–15 percent of the faculty for such travel, and typically each year it is generally the same cohort of faculty who successfully apply and receive these funds. While there also may be a small percentage of faculty who

have little interest in such programs, it was my sense that many more faculty would be interested in participating in structured international scholarly experiences if barriers to participation could be greatly reduced. A program was envisioned to support every faculty member and every staff member who interacted with students in a teaching capacity, including athletic coaches, for example, to have regular opportunities for such international scholarly experience.

Of course, cost is always a constraint on such ambitions. At about this same time, Rollins was fortunate to receive a magnificent bequest from the estate of George Cornell amounting in total to more than \$100 million. While a significant portion of

this bequest was restricted for specific programs established previously, we also have committed an annual discretionary allowance that has been used to fully fund our international travel initiative.

IE: How many faculty members at Rollins have participated in the opportunity to have an international experience since the initiative, and what kinds of experiences have they had?

ROLLINS: Over the past six years more than three-quarters of our faculty and a significant number of teaching staff have participated in at least one of these trips, and more than half in two or more, conducted either individually or more often in groups of ten to fifteen participants. Organized and led by the faculty and administered by a faculty advisory committee, we intentionally have given strong preference to trips emphasizing parts of the world with which we are culturally less familiar, or which have increasing importance in the education of graduates for the challenges of the twenty-first century. As a result, we have sponsored multiple trips to South America, Asia and Indonesia, Eastern Europe, and Africa, and even last year a group trip to Antarctica.

Faculty teams propose, solicit participant interest, and then implement these trips as shared scholarly experiences, combining academic, cultural, and experiential programs into an intensive several-week visit. Before each trip, the faculty and staff hold study sessions, either weekly during the semester before the trip or intensively over the few weeks just before a trip, in order to adequately prepare for the upcoming programs. Participants share tutorial lessons across the breadth of their disciplinary expertise as applied to the areas to be visited, enriching the overall experience for everyone involved.

Response to such trips has uniformly described them as “transformative.” Partnerships have been established with academic peers and institutions across the world, international experiences have expressed

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themselves both directly and indirectly in our on-campus teaching by a process some faculty have referred to as “osmosis,” and the international ethos of our campus has become manifest and palpable. Furthermore, an unexpected but significant benefit of the program has been the development of much stronger inter-campus interdisciplinary relationships. Every institution is seeking ways to encourage faculty and staff to work together collaboratively outside of their traditional disciplines and departmental structures. These teams of faculty, traveling and learning together, have bonded through shared friendships and common experience, leading to a proliferation of interdisciplinary interests and cooperative opportunities.

IE: How do these international experiences for faculty influence their teaching after they return?

ROLLINS: There is no requirement that faculty teach a special course or make specific teaching adjustments based upon their international trips. However, there have been numerous reports by faculty of how they have used many of their personal experiences applied within their classroom discussions, and also within their advising of students. Furthermore, the sharp increase in interdisciplinary and team-taught multidisciplinary courses, as well as the design of a new coherent interdisciplinary general education curriculum, have reflected the broadened collegial academic relationships fostered through these shared trips.

IE: What do you think has been the most successful aspect of The President’s Internationalization Initiative?

ROLLINS: The campus culture has shifted strongly toward an atmosphere of inter-

national awareness and action. Campus discussions, both formal and informal, include more global perspectives. Additionally, our Presidential Award-winning community engagement program has expanded to include international service-learning trips to destinations in Latin America, Africa, and even Nepal. There is an expectation now on campus for growing international enrollment, enhanced study-abroad options for both students and faculty alike, and expanding collaborations with academic institutional partners in South America, China, and India. So I would say the most successful part of the international initiative is the discernible internationalization of our campus ethos, and tangible progress in satisfying our mission of educating students for global citizenship.

IE: Approximately how many students at Rollins study abroad prior to graduation and how has that number changed in recent years?

ROLLINS: More than 75 percent of Rollins full-time undergraduate students have at least one study abroad experience before graduation, annually ranking in the top ten nationally within our Carnegie class. Participation has increased by more than 50 percent since the international initiative began. Two years ago we also had the most student Fulbright awardees in our Carnegie class. Additionally, 8 percent of our entering first-year class is composed of international students, nearly triple our class demographic of only a few years ago. Concurrently, international business has become our largest undergraduate major, and requires an international internship. Within the Crummer Graduate School of Business, every early advantage MBA student

[a full-time day program for recent college graduates and career changers] also has at least one international study experience before graduation, incorporating an international business consultancy into their trips.

IE: Rollins College’s mission mentions that it “educates students for global citizenship and responsible leadership, empowering graduates to pursue meaningful lives and productive careers.” What does it mean for students to become global citizens, and why is developing them a mission of the college?

ROLLINS: Rollins historically has promoted the educational goals of an applied liberal education. While directly related to the progressive educational philosophy of John Dewey and his association of democratic values with pragmatic liberal learning, this tradition in American higher education has its origins in the practical arts and sciences advocated by Benjamin Franklin and the Jeffersonian democratic ideals of an informed and engaged citizenry. Even in the most traditional sense, Americans cannot fully know what it means to be an American until they also understand what it means *not* to be an American, and this perception can only be fully appreciated through international experience.

In our twenty-first-century “flat world” context, the educational goal of active engagement extends beyond national boundaries to encompass a growing sense of truly global citizenship and responsibility, particularly given that many of the world’s greatest challenges, such as sustainable economic development, climate change, and public health, can only be addressed as global issues. Successful graduates must be prepared both to celebrate the enriching diversity of our many peoples and

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cultures yet also to comprehend the complex synergies of our technologically, economically, and politically interdependent modern world. Furthermore, we believe that an applied liberal education, with the applicable skills of critical and moral reasoning, quantitative thinking, and communication abilities, represents the strongest foundation for societal leadership and professional success in times of such dynamic opportunity, challenge, and global change.

IE: In 2003 Rollins opened The China Center at Rollins College. Why did Rollins choose to open a center on China? How has it influenced the campus community?

ROLLINS: The Rollins China Center arose at the opportunistic convergence of faculty

expertise, institutional ambition, and available resources, allowing us to move quickly to exploit important individual relationships of our faculty with key academic colleagues to establish partnering associations between Rollins and several leading educational institutions in Shanghai. In terms of seeking international collaborations, it also is helpful that Rollins has been ranked for the past seven years by *U.S. News & World Report* as the number one “master’s level” university in the South, in that institutional status is an important element in securing meaningful international partnerships. Additionally, we have lived up to our partnering expectations, with the Rollins China Center established in Shanghai and now hosting more than

a hundred Rollins students each year and having a permanent faculty and staff presence. As an example of how these programs have expanded beyond original concepts, next spring a Rollins music professor will spend the semester in Shanghai, and use wideband internet teaching technology to offer a course in ethnomusicology to students here at Rollins and at Southwestern University in Texas.

IE: Did you have any powerful international experiences as a student, professor, or as a higher education administrator that influenced your philosophy about higher education?

ROLLINS: Each of us is shaped in both substantive and subtle ways by our own personal experiences and education. In my case, part of my commitment to international education derives from my experience as a graduate student conducting research for most of two years at the Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico, immersed in a strongly Hispanic culture. Since then, through my professional research career, I have had many opportunities to visit and work at research facilities in remote—“radio quiet”—corners of the world. The value of international experiences and perspectives is irreplaceable, and cannot be learned from the comforts of an American classroom. And obviously, as a space scientist, I find the marvelous space-based pictures of Earth and the expansive universe beyond to be a constant reminder that we all share together a small, fragile planet, unbounded by the artificial geographies of our national identities, the economies of social class, or the tyrannies of race, politics, or culture. Truly global citizenship and responsible leadership within this world we share seem prerequisite to our very survival and future prosperity.

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