

Interview with Dr. Kline Harrison

Associate Provost for Global Affairs, Kemper Professor of Business at Wake Forest University
By Paul Stroebel

PS: I am Paul Stroebel, and I am here interviewing Dr. Harrison on January 31, 2011. So, to start off, maybe you can tell me a little about your background: where did you grow up? Tell me a little about your family, maybe.

KH: Ok, I was born in north-eastern North Carolina, and I grew up right across the state line in Virginia. I grew up on a farm. I have an older brother and spent all of my life on that farm until I went away to college. I went to UVA as an undergrad, and then went to work for their extension offices in D.C. for three years. Then [I] went to University of Maryland and got my PH.D., and worked for three years as a consultant until I came to Wake in 1990.

PS: What about your parents, could you tell me what they did?

KH: My dad was a farmer and his dad was a farmer, and his dad was a farmer; so there's a whole history of farmers (actually from both sides) and my brother is a farmer today. So I am the oddball who went academic instead of agrarian. My mother was an officer in a bank, and which [what] I think is cool about that is, she is in her late 70s now, and for her era to be an executive in a bank, was pretty unusual for a woman. So I've always thought that's pretty cool that she was ahead of her time in terms of being in the business world and in terms of being a career mother, woman.

PS: Definitely. Schooling: did either of your parents go to college or are you first generation?

KH: I'm first generation, and even among some extended family. Yes, I was the first generation going to college among my immediate family. And in my broader extended family (with my first cousins and all of that), I'm the first to have a PH.D.

PS: So did you expect your brother to go to school like you? Is he older?

KH: Yeah, he is older. My parents had always encouraged us, expecting, thinking we would go to college. He looked [at college] first in high school and then he told my parents...he said, "If you send me to school, it'll just waste your money because I'm just going to come back here and farm. This is what I love to do." And my parents said, "If that's what you want, well then we support that." So he really had no interest. This digresses a little bit, but I still say he is smarter than I am. I have knowledge in one specific area; I mean that is what a PH.D is, to get knowledge there. But, I mean he has great common sense, he's knowledgeable of current events, and I just think in many ways he is overall much smarter than I am.

PS: Interesting. Would you say that your childhood shaped what you do now?

KH: Yeah, definitely. I always liked school, and I always liked being involved in organizations at school and things like that. In high school, I was elected president of the student body and I went to this leadership training workshop/camp for the summer and just thought it was the greatest thing. The next year I was a group counselor--a group leader. The next year, I was training the group leaders. And so, early on, I was really teaching management and didn't realize it at the time, and [I was] loving it.

I go off to college and start looking at the business major and see the area of management had all of these things I had been doing in these leadership programs. That's why I chose to major in business management, because it overlapped there. Then my junior year in college, (maybe senior, but probably junior) I suddenly realized that I could teach management, which could combine the things I really like: teaching with these topic areas. And I had never really considered that that was a potential career...and then I had this epiphany that I could be a college professor and teach what I love. Also, the fact that I found out you could get a PH.D without getting your MBA made it more attractive, so it was either junior year or early senior year that I decided I was going to get my PH.D in business management and teach.

PS: This kind of goes back, but did you know what you wanted to do when you were young, like [when you were] a little kid?

KH: No, I think I went through different phases. I remember [when] I was real little I wanted to be a doctor. Then I went through this phase where I thought I wanted to be an actor. Then it was a phase where I didn't know what I wanted to do and kind of did business, looked into business. Oh--I had worked at a bank in the summer and I thought, "Well I'll just go into business even though I don't like banking", and then it just kind of came to this. So yeah I had different ideas, but not at a young age that I was this definitive.

PS: Ok. So college is when you said you decided to be a teacher--why? Because you thought you'd like to teach?

KH: No, because I loved what I did with the leadership workshops and the training and teaching the group leaders, preparing them for leadership. So I knew I liked that element, so it was more or less seeing the parallel of teaching business management with this leadership training that I had done. That is the reason why I chose it.

PS: Ok. Can you tell me about your job, [and] what you do now as Provost of Global Affairs?

KH: Yeah. Well, I guess there are two ways to think about it. One is the responsibility and processes that I would say are involved. If you looked at a job description, the responsibilities are that I oversee the center for international studies. So that office that works with students studying abroad...that office comes under my purview. The Wake Forest international properties such as the Flow House in Vienna, the Casa Artom house in Venice, the Worrell

House [in London] and our center in Salamanca (and our new center that is getting ready to open up in Nicaragua)--all of those fall under my purview. Then, more broadly, my charge is initiatives focused on globalization and the internationalization of campus across the academic units.

So I try not only to support the college of arts and sciences, but [also] the schools of business, divinity, law, graduate school...I even liaison with the medical school on ways in which we can pursue global initiatives that would be beneficial to the university. So that's sort of content, but a lot of what I do in that process is, it's a lot of relationship building, it's a lot of budget management, it's also being a cheerleader at times, getting people excited about things. It's also ensuring [that] what we do is strategic with the University's plans and goals. So it's not just doing things ad hoc...part of my role is how do things fit into the big picture. Part of what I do is I have to be aware of the big picture, make sure the things I'm pursuing are part of that big picture.

PS: Would you say you have a typical day? Or can you describe a typical day?

KH: Yeah I'll try to do my best. So a good amount of my time is spent traveling. I would probably say if you look over the course of a year I'm probably gone the equivalent of maybe eight to ten weeks a year. So that's a big factor in it overall. So if I'm not traveling, I'm here on campus. My typical day is I get into work at 7:30, and I probably deal with emails until ten or eleven, not just emails but paperwork. Then lunch. Then the afternoons are typically all filled with meetings. Every afternoon I'm meeting with someone or about something or whatever. My assistant and I set it up that way because I am best in the morning with dealing with emails and getting those out of the way and then doing the meetings in the afternoon. So I mean, those are really probably the two areas: paperwork in the morning and meetings in the afternoon. But then the nature of this job is such that, other people are working in the afternoons and may need something in the morning, so it's rare that I don't go home and spend maybe an hour on emails at home.

PS: When you travel is that mostly meetings and meeting with people?

KH: It varies. I would say the majority is meetings but sometimes it's attending conferences. That's a part of it. Yeah, because the others are meetings where I am building relationships with new potential partners that we may be working with, or meeting with our staff at the houses (the properties). So yeah, most of those are for meetings. A small portion would be conferences.

PS: Ok. So do you still do anything with the business school specifically? Are you still involved with them in any way?

KH: Not in a significant way as far as administrative responsibilities or teaching responsibilities, no. I still oversee--but this is really for the college and the business school--I still oversee the global trade and commerce minor. That's one administrative teaching

responsibility that I retain. So sometimes students still have questions about that, so I deal with that...or if there are administrative decisions that have to be made with the minor, I deal with those. But with the business school, it's primarily still involved with tenured faculty reviews and tenured faculty decisions. So as a tenured faculty member and a full professor of the business school, I still stay involved with those duties associated with tenured decisions and things like that.

We have different majors within the business school. One of those is the Business and Enterprise major and when there are decisions about curriculum and content I try to go to those meetings because that major is near and dear to my heart. So I try to attend those decision making meetings on that major.

PS: What would you say led you to move from teaching to administration?

KH: I never really intended to. When I came here it was, "Ok what do I have to do here with regards to research so that I could [can] just teach?" All I wanted to do at first was to just teach. I really didn't get into this profession to do research. It came with the territory and I paid my dues. When I was working on my PH.D, I really didn't get that excited about research. But then when I got here and I found that I could just research the things that were interesting to me as opposed to [how] at some institutions there are expectations that you have to publish in this journal, you have to do this...I felt more of a freedom here at Wake, so I actually started liking research. In fact when you look at my CV, there were 5 years before I was tenured, and then 5 more years before I became a full professor and I had more research the 5 years after I was tenured than I did in the years before. So that kind of shows you how I got interested.

Anyway, all of these things I said unintentionally happened, so after I got tenured the dean of the business school at that time approached me about being the equivalent of department chair for the business major. I just went, "Oh, ok", because I really liked her and it sounded like it could be fun and I do like those aspects. And then that evolved into being associate dean there before coming over here. So I can't say that I sought it out but I knew when I took it on it would be a good fit. I really like organization--organizing things and all of that. So I knew it would fit but I didn't actively pursue it, until this job. I did actively pursue this job...I wanted this one.

PS: Do you miss teaching?

KH: You know, I get that question often and I have to say that, it's not that I don't miss it in the sense that I really enjoy what I'm doing. It's just that I'm having so much fun right now that I don't think about it, you know that I'm not teaching or anything. I think I would feel more angst about not teaching if I didn't still have contact with students. I'm the fraternity advisor for theta chi fraternity, and have been the advisor for 18 years with those guys and I still make that a priority. That's my touch point with students, [where] I feel like I have contact. Hopefully, I can have an impact on students through that venue rather than the classroom. If I wasn't doing that I think I would miss the interaction with students and so forth. But I can't say I go, "Ugh, I wish I

was teaching a class right now”, because honestly I don’t think about that. But the day I go back to the classroom I will be quite happy. Yeah, it’s not like I’m running away from anything.

PS: So back to this job. What would you say you’re favorite things are about this job?

KH: Well, there are two things. One is I love working for my boss, the provost. She’s just so high energy and I like what she’s trying to accomplish; I believe in her, and she makes it fun to work on her team. So I really enjoy that aspect of being a part of her team. But the other thing for me that makes this so much fun is I do like international. My PH.D was on cross cultural management training and I’ve always been involved in international so this just allows me to really put all of my energies towards that aspect that I like so much. But the thing that is most surprisingly enjoyable about it [is the fact that] I’d always been in the business school and I’m actually more of a social scientist than I am a business person...because organizational behavior, my area, is more really sociology, psychology, philosophy, anthropology-I mean it’s all of these social science disciplines. In the business school, we call it the soft skills versus the hard skills.

So I’ve really always had, maybe, a closer affinity with the school of social sciences and liberal arts. So coming here, to this position, has allowed me to interact with faculty across the college in a deeper way and more frequent way than I did when I was in the business school. I really like that I’m getting to talk to people about a variety of interesting things and different perspectives and all. So it’s--this might be offensive to my business colleagues--but it’s more intellectually stimulating because it’s just more variety. So I really like that, working with people from all of these different disciplines.

PS: Awesome. Do you have any advice for people going into this work?

KH: What I found was when I was in the business school and we would hire say executives to teach courses, is they would first think, “Oh I want to teach, that would be fun” and they don’t realize how much work goes into truly preparing for a class. They’ll often say afterwards, “I didn’t realize how much work this is.” Yeah...you know if you really want to be effective in the classroom there is a lot of preparation that goes into that. So I think my first advice for people thinking to go into the profession is don’t be deceived at how easy it looks when you’re in the audience and someone just gets up there and starts talking; it’s a lot of preparation that goes into that.

The other thing I think that people, who like I did [when] I first thought I wanted to be a professor... if you’re looking at it from a standpoint of teaching, [you need to] recognize there’s a research component and [what that research is] depends on what your goals are. If you want to be at a place like Wake Forest, you have to be able to do both really well: teaching and research. If you just want to teach, there are schools that are just focused on teaching, but they’re not going to be the caliber of Wake Forest. So I think people who are pursuing it need to know what their ultimate destination is because that depends on where they focus their energies and skills they develop. The other thing I would say is that there are some who pursue this profession because

they are really interested in the research side, and if that's why they're getting into it then I'd argue with them about the importance of teaching. That [teaching] you cannot neglect because you are going to be in a classroom and that's an important component of that. And I guess I think the other thing I would say is that people who pursue it need to recognize there's a service component, that you're expected to give back to the university as well. Now I answered that question with respect to becoming a professor, and I don't know if you meant for that frame of reference or this specific job.

PS: I mean, that's fine, because that lead you to this position.

KH: Yeah because I don't know what I'd tell anyone about preparing for this position.

PS: Yeah, no, that works well. So you were a teacher at Maryland for a while, right?

KH: I got my PH.D there, but while I was pursuing my PH.D I did teach.

PS: Ok, so what brought you to Wake Forest?

KH: Well after I finished my PH.D I was a little burned out on the research and getting my dissertation done because I'd gone through in the minimal amount of time that one could go through to get their PH.D because I just wanted to get out and teach. I get these obsessions about completing my goals. So I really went through that program quickly and I just knew I didn't want to do research so I decided I was going to do consulting for a few years. Not only to reenergize myself but also I felt like if I was going to go inside the classroom and teach business, the broader exposure I had to a number of businesses, I'd be better [able to teach] in the classroom. So when I was doing training development I would take jobs with a variety of organizations, from Fanny Mae to American Bankers Association to USDA to an environmental consulting firm--I was doing training across the board just so I could get exposure to different organizations and how they operated.

I'd never intended to leave D.C.; I was just like, "I'm here for good and I'm going to have to find a teaching position in this area". Then I had some relatively minor health problems but in that process I started reassessing: "What am I doing, what's important?" and (I'm a Christian) [I] started praying a lot and then I had this epiphany that it was time to leave D.C. And like that, I was ready to go. That's so unlike me to have this total change of heart or perspective, but it was like, "I'm ready to go". My family is very important to me and so I knew wherever I got a job I needed to be in driving distance of my family, so basically I took a map, "Here's my parents", did a radius within driving distance of the weekend of them and looked at Universities within that geographic area. The reason I feel there is divine intervention in all of this is because the year I decided I was going to start looking for a job was the year the association (where management PHDs go to find jobs) conference was held in D.C. that year. So I was able to go there.

Wake Forest had been in that range, and one of my professors had told me she thought there was an opening at Wake Forest so I looked. She thought at the graduate school, but anyway, it turned out there was an opening in Calloway at the time. So I applied there, had an interview with the dean at the time and a lot of universities saw my having done consulting as a negative because they thought I wasn't serious about academics. So [when] the dean of Calloway at that time said, "I see you have an interesting career path, you've done consulting, tell me about that." I thought, "Oh jeez, here I go again". So I explained why, just like I did to you about getting the exposure and all of this and then I'm just like ok. And he said--he paused--and said he did the exact same thing after he got his PHD. So I was kind of like "Ka-ching!" Then I came here, had a great interview and was waiting, and all of my eggs were in this one basket. I had talked to one other school at that conference and as I'm talking to the guy, I mean, I sat at the table, and we both said, I don't think this is a good fit for me. I just wasn't interested and we just ended up talking about something else. All my eggs were in this one basket and it came through and so it just goes back to I felt like I was meant to be here. For me to give anyone strategic advice is, [well] I kind of feel like it was out of my hands.

PS: Very cool. So how long have you been here now?

KH: This is going on my 21st year, so I came here in 1990.

PS: What would you say you like the most about being at Wake Forest? You've probably already touched on this a little.

KH: Well for me it's a sense of community, being a part of this community. When I think about opportunities elsewhere, (you know, career aspirations and things like that), the sense of community and feeling part of this community is so strong for me that it would be very difficult to leave. It's the people--it's the students. That's why I use that broad term: it's the community. I don't know how else to say it.

PS: Yeah definitely, I know what you mean. So what do you think you'll be doing 15 years from now?

KH: Wow, that's a hard one. (laughter) Right now I want to stay in this position as long as possible because I'm just loving it. But things change and I'm not saying I'll always feel this way--just like I said I never want to leave D.C. and then I had my epiphany. But right now I want to stay in this position as long as possible because it's a good fit and then I probably would go back to the classroom. I don't know if I would pursue other administrative positions, but let's say I can imagine being back in the classroom 15 years from now. But what I foresee in the long run is being more involved with service learning and service trips and giving back in that way and help facilitating that. One of the things I'm doing now is in Nicaragua I'm doing a leadership development program for high school students and helping them develop leadership skills, and hopefully having an impact [so] that they will be future leaders of their country.

I'd love someday to have some kind of foundation where we can get funds and go around and provide leadership training to high school kids, or maybe even college kids in developing countries, or something like that. Let's say I'd like to see myself 15 years from now, whether I'd be in an administrative position or not, I'd be heavily involved with service and service learning from an academic standpoint.

PS: That's awesome. I think that's a good answer. Back to you and about your life, do you have a family? Wife or kids?

KH: Nope, I'm single. Which makes this job kind of an ideal fit for me, with the travel and things I don't have those obligations and I have cousins, who are like nieces, nephews and it's kind of like being the grandparent where I get to spend the time but not have the responsibility. So it's a pretty good.

PS: Ok, very cool. Do you have any special hobbies or interests outside of your job?

KH: Well if I start to describe it then it starts to sound like it's very boring because what I love to do and what would be my hobby would be travel and that's incorporated into my job. So that's a big aspect. I really like to read. I like suspense novels; I'm a Grisham, David Baldacci, all of those, espionage and so forth. Just sit me down. That's why I like being on planes so much. I also love really good movies and I'm pretty selective of what I watch on TV and movies, but thank God for Netflix. I can just sit back and be quite happy with that. The thing that I think has a unique aspect is I'm really interested the resistance movement in World War II. So I really like, and I have a pretty large collection I guess, as compared to the average person, of books on first-hand accounts of people who either escaped or were part of the resistance movement in World War II. A lot of those were published in the 50's after the war, so whenever I'm traveling in cities I try to find the rare books store and try to see if there's a cool book that is no longer in publication or in print that I can read about. Or even people who escape from concentration camps and those kinds of things, so that's kind of an unusual thing that I like to do.

PS: That's very interesting. This is our last question. So in our class we're talking about the "American Dream." So could you maybe give me your idea of what you think the "American Dream" is and do you think your living the "American Dream" yourself? I realize it's a very big question.

KH: Wow, that's a powerful question. (laughter) Well the second question is easier to answer because I do feel like I'm living my dream. I just can't imagine it being any better. All of the things I like to do, I get to do. So I'm living my dream. But is that the American Dream? I'll just sort of say the things that are coming to my mind without trying to figure it all out. But anyway, the things that comes to mind as part of the American Dream, when I hear those words are *choice* and *opportunity*. I think that people first of all have the opportunity to grow, to develop, to become more and to see that they have the potential to perhaps advance and improve their socioeconomic status... that they have that opportunity. And sometimes, you know,

opportunities may be out there but do people have the choice? Sometimes it's not just dangling the carrot, but they actually have the option or the choice. But anyways I think it is both choice and opportunity that make up those two things. Then I think part of the American Dream is having a sense of security and I think that varies for different people. But I think that's part of the American Dream. I've always heard this and I think for people that have children it may be true, but that they are able to provide for their children and enable their children to be better off than they were and I think that's probably, most people feel part of the American Dream.

PS: I think that's a phenomenal answer because, I mean, it hits on a lot of stuff we've been talking about in class. With opportunity and choice, and even that sense of security it hit a lot of things.

KH: Well good. Because for me it's like I could be making all of these choices and having these opportunities but if I'm taking all of these risks and I don't have this sense of security then I don't know if I'd feel like I'm really living the dream. Because the dream is being comfortable I think.

PS: Definitely. And I think like you said...I think if you're living your dream, then that's part of the dream.

KH: Yeah, and see that's where I think of all of those things and I've been blessed with all of those things, you know. I've been given opportunities I could never imagine. And actually I have a philosophy, and I tell this to the fraternity guys when they graduate. Disraeli, the British statesman, I don't know if you've heard of him, but anyway he has a saying: the secret to success in life is for a person to be ready for when his opportunity comes. And I remember in college that I had that on my board and everything and then what I came to realize is that we can't create opportunities, only opportunities can be given to us. I mean, I couldn't create this opening for the professor in the Calloway School. I couldn't create that opportunity, you know. So I believe that only God can create opportunities but what we have is if we want to succeed, we have to be ready to seize those opportunities when we're blessed with them. So I think that's what we should constantly strive to do, to prepare ourselves and be the best that we can be so we can take advantage of those opportunities. I've been blessed with some great opportunities and try my best to be prepared and worthy of those and then once I'm given them, the way I sort of show my appreciation for those opportunities and blessings is to work my butt off. (Laughter) I try to prove that somebody made a wise decision.

PS: Alright, Well thank you so much. That was great, great answers and stuff.

KH: Well, it was kind of fun.

After the interview had ended we continued to discuss some things. Dr. Kline talked about how as a kid, he never wanted to have sleepovers and he really didn't like leaving home. He said he wouldn't even stay with his grandparents or cousins because he didn't feel comfortable leaving

home. He talked about the irony of how now he is gone so much and loves to travel. This was interesting and very well could have played a role in why he enjoys his job so much today was the observation that I made. He talks about how conquering this became a sense of accomplishment and how it was something he really had to work at, conquering this fear.

I then asked him if he thought his parents were supportive of his going into college and not farming like the rest of his family. He told me that they were always supportive and could tell he would not be a farmer from a young age. Then he talked about how his family notices now how much time his job takes up, but how he is happier than ever because he really likes what he is doing.

Then I asked him if he thought growing up on a farm impacted his work ethic. He said he thought it definitely did and talked about how all of the members of his family were hard workers and that played a large role in his values today. The interview was then concluded.