

Ruth Candler 0:10

Welcome to W&L after class, the lifelong learning podcast. I'm your host, Ruth Candler. Today, I'm talking with Rob Straughan, the Crawford family dean of the Williams school and Professor of Business Administration. With almost 24 years at Washington and Lee, Rob brings a wealth of knowledge and insights about the unique interdisciplinary approach of the Williams School. In this episode, we'll delve into Rob's journey at W&L Now, the evolution of the William schools' distinctive approach within a liberal arts curriculum, and the exciting initiatives on the horizon, including the plans for the new Williams school building. So, whether you're an alum nostalgic for your time on campus or a prospective student curious about the W&L experience, I hope you enjoy our conversation about education, corporate responsibility, and the dynamic future of the Williams School. So, Rob, I'm looking forward to our conversation today. Thanks so much for joining us.

Rob Straughan 1:05

Happy to be here. Thanks for the invitation.

Ruth Candler 1:07

You came to W&L almost 24 years ago. And I'm curious to how you arrived at Washington and Lee and what drew you to this community.

Rob Straughan 1:17

So, my undergraduate experience was at Baylor University. I went into the industry for a brief period after I graduated from Baylor, and then I became curious about the potential of a career path and higher education. That led me back to graduate school. I moved back to Houston from the Midwest, where I had been working for Shell, my first teaching position; after I completed whatever it was seven years of graduate study, I thought it was my dream job. I had an opportunity to go back to my Alma mater, and I joined the faculty at Baylor. And I had a lot of good experiences there. I had an opportunity to really get grounded and see what it meant to be a college professor. But one of the things that is characteristic of a lot of universities is you're hired to do a very particular thing. And my interests began to evolve away from the very specific subfield that I had been hired to focus on. And that led me to begin looking for opportunities where I could explore that a bit more fully. And I saw an ad in the trades for this little school in rural Virginia that I literally knew nothing about. There was one colleague at Baylor, who I had confided in that I was testing the waters. He had grown up in North Carolina. And when I asked him if he knew anything about the school called Washington and Lee, he laughed and literally looked at me and said, that place is a perfect fit for you. And let me know if you apply because if you don't, I may. And I did, and I went through the interview process. And one thing led to another, and I

ended up getting the opportunity to move here. So, my family and I moved in the summer of 2000. My wife and I are both Texans and still think of ourselves that way. So that was a bit of a change.

Ruth Candler

Little cooler, too, I would imagine.

Rob Straughan

Better climate, all the all the way around. And we've fallen in love with the place. We've been really blessed to have raised our kids here, to continue to live here, and to make a home here.

Ruth Candler 3:42

So, when you first arrived at W&L, you were teaching courses in marketing, management, and international marketing. At that time, were you also teaching courses in socially responsible business practices, or did that come later?

Rob Straughan 3:55

That came later. My training is in marketing; I worked in marketing with Shell. It was actually the opportunity to focus a little bit more on international issues that led me to come to W&L. That was what I wanted to do more of at Baylor, but there was already somebody else doing that work, and it would have been redundant. So, I got here, and that was my primary focus both in terms of my teaching and my scholarship for probably the first six or eight years that I was here. During that time, we began to see the emergence both in academic business circles and certainly in the practice of business of growing concern about environmental impact, social impact, work-life balance, and a lot of different issues that we now understand comprise this idea of sustainable business strategy. And I began looking into that, and it was in 2011, I believe, that I offered, along with Elizabeth Oliver, in the accounting department, a co-taught course on that topic in our spring term that involved taking students to Copenhagen and exploring with first-year students this debate about what the mandate for businesses, particularly corporations is. Is it simply profit maximization and stock price maximization? Or do they have a broader obligation to deal with the environment, social impact, human rights, and so on?

Ruth Candler 5:35

Was that first class an eye-opening experience for both you and the students?

Rob Straughan 5:39

It was what you know, anytime you teach a new class, you're trying to stay a half step ahead of the students. And add to that the logistical challenges of international travel

with students; I had done that on a very small scale a couple of times not related to classes. Yeah, it was equal parts exhilarating and terrifying as to how it was gonna go. But it was fabulous. And I learned how much you can bond with students and bond with them in a more holistic way, a different way if you're spending most of every day with them in a country that's unfamiliar on some level to all of them and to me as well. So, we've taught that class a number of times since it was interrupted by the pandemic. We're not going to be able to offer it this year because of obligations we have on campus. But we'll be right back at it next year.

Ruth Candler 6:39

A little later in the podcast, I'm going to ask you a little more about that. But to backtrack just a little bit. You mentioned your career working for Shell's oil refining and marketing division. Can you explain just a little more of what drove that transition? You talked about that transition to teaching? But then, what about that transition to administration?

Rob Straughan 7:01

Yeah, in some ways, the sort of industry experience drove that I loved being a rank-and-file college professor. You get to work with amazing students, and you get the freedom to explore topics in terms of your scholarship. It's very fulfilling. But there was also still a part of me that was a business person. And the opportunity presented itself, I believe it was in 2003, the associate Dean's position in the Williams school opened up. I had a chat with Larry Peppers, longtime Dean and a great mentor of mine, frankly, about whether that is something I should be thinking about. And truthfully, my thought at the time was I just wanted him to know that I might be interested in that down the road. So, I was a bit surprised a week or so later when he called me back and said he would like me to consider taking the job right then. But I trusted him he wouldn't he wouldn't have asked me if he didn't think I could do it. And so that was my first foray into academic administration. And I served in that position for 12 years along the way, Larry, you know, I learned a lot directly from Larry. I learned a lot observing Larry, sort of indirectly. And when he announced his intention to step away from the Dean's position after, frankly, a remarkable 29 years. They're not getting 29 years out of me. Let's be clear. I had a decision to make that I did want to apply for that position. And I decided that I would. I was the national search. So, I was, I assume, one of many candidates who went through the full interview process, and I ended up being appointed Larry's successor beginning in 2015.

Ruth Candler 9:02

So, you once mentioned that the Williams School's positioning within a liberal arts curriculum is unique among its peers. How did it evolve into the interdisciplinary approach that it offers students today?

Rob Straughan 9:15

It is, I think, unique. I think it's part of what makes Washington and Lee unique in contrast to, for example, our other highly selective liberal arts peers, but also the liberal arts focus making W&L unique in contrast with schools like the University of Virginia and William and Mary and, and others with whom we compete for students and for faculty. The origins of the Williams School might surprise a lot of folks. The idea was taken up by the trustees in 1905. It was approved and began to operate as one of the two undergraduate academic units the following year, in 1906. It evolved from what we would now know as the departments of economics and politics. At that point, the focus of much of the work done in those two areas was on political economy and the development of human capital. You know, we are coming out of the Industrial Revolution and all of that. The business part of it evolved from a simple offering of two classes. As I understand, I haven't done the primary research on this. So, this is oral history. But as I understand it, the two business classes at that time were bookkeeping, which you could imagine tracks with our current emphasis on accounting, and penmanship with dementia penmanship 10:46), which I found really novel; I think I learned this from legendary Economics Professor John Gunn. And if I ever have time, I probably should go over to Special Collections and dig through old core schedules and catalogs and see if that is the case. So the departments that we now have, two of them, would have been there at the very beginning; the departments of accounting and finance and the Department of Business Administration have evolved from those two humble courses at the beginning.

Ruth Candler 11:22

So, Rob, you've touched on the Williams school being different than business schools at other institutions. Could you expand on that just a little bit?

Rob Straughan 11:32

Sure. I mean, for one, I don't necessarily think of the William school as a business school. That has a certain connotation to me, as a business professor, and having worked in what I think of as much more orthodox business schools. One of the reasons I think of us as somewhat broader is the inclusion of the politics department, which is very unusual. I've not come across any other colleges or universities where the politics department is housed alongside areas like marketing, finance, accounting, and so on. But I think it goes beyond that. Even if we look at the business program that we offer itself, I'll credit my colleague, Amanda Bauer, who I think you've had on the show before

Ruth Candler

Yes, she has been on the show.

Rob Straughan

For after many years of the two of us working together for helping me to clarify my understanding of my point of view, she had a planning retreat a number of years ago and said that we don't aspire to be a business program at a liberal arts school. We aspire to be a liberal arts business program. And I think that changes the way we imagine our curriculum; it changes the way we deliver the curriculum. I think we're much more comfortable living on the frontier of what it means to be a marketing professor or, a finance professor or a management professor than I ever would have been at one of the more traditional, quote, business schools.

Ruth Candler 13:15

It sounds like this approach gives our Williams School students an edge. Could you speak to that or give us a couple of examples about how that might be?

Rob Straughan 13:24

I'd like to think it gives WL students an edge, not limited simply to William school students. So we talk a lot about a contemporary interpretation of what a liberal arts education is and make no mistake, we are a liberal arts university, and even our business program and our journalism program and our engineering offerings and so on are informed by the liberal arts core of what the university seeks to be. In terms of how that integration of some of these, I don't know, so called pre professional topics, works with traditional disciplines in the humanities, sciences, social sciences, and so on. I think each of those areas brings a slightly different focus. And the students, if they're taking full advantage of it and moving back and forth through different disciplines and different groupings of disciplines over their time here, they learn to define problems and address problems in a more complete way than I would have learned as an undergraduate student who was basically locked in the business school from my sophomore year through graduation. I think the ability of our humanities faculty to lead students through an exploration of how problems are framed in multiple ways that would contrast a little bit with the way a traditional business course might approach problem-solving is really important for a student who may be a business major. I think the access to some business classes that might provide maybe a bit more applied opportunity, I would hope, is viewed as important for a history major or, philosophy major, or any other discipline. So, I really think the university is at its strongest when all of these areas are operating well in. The students are taking advantage of the breadth of the curriculum rather than pigeonholing themselves in a single area of study.

Ruth Candler 15:44

Yeah, so much more well-rounded student. So, I'd like to return to our discussion about the spring term. Studying abroad seems to be so much more prevalent than it was when I was in school. Do you know how many students approximately study abroad?

Rob Straughan 16:00

I don't know the exact number. If I had to guess, I'm going to say it's it. If you define study abroad, in terms of our spring term abroad classes that we offer, more traditional semester-long abroad, and some of the summer programs that have evolved, I would say upwards of two-thirds. It's definitely a key part of the student experience here.

Ruth Candler 16:24

And am I correct in thinking that Washington and Lee is moving toward making that available to all students?

Rob Straughan 16:30

Yes. For those that are familiar with our strategic plan, one of the key initiatives, and it's one of frankly too that I think the if we fast forward 40 or 50 years, will be viewed as a major game changer. One of the key initiatives is providing students with the full W&L experience. The reality is that a lot of these international programs are expensive. Some of that cost has traditionally been passed on to the students participating choosing to participate in those programs. And the fact of those costs is that it excludes some students from participating. President Dudley made a decision a number of years ago with respect to spring term programs to provide funding that he had available to him to ensure that any student who wanted to participate in a spring term abroad program could do so. That was a great step. But we also have summer programs, we have domestic travel programs, we have programs that aren't in the spring. And we want all of our students, if we can get to this full W&L experience goal, to have full access to those.

Ruth Candler 17:47

Wasn't this the first year as well that all students had the opportunity to attend the first-year experience?

Rob Straughan 17:56

It was, yes, that's a program run out of student affairs. It used to be known and still gets talked about as pre-O, meaning pre-orientation. It's been rebranded a bit; it's referred to as the leading-edge program. And for many, many years, roughly half of the incoming first-year class would participate. And it was really driven by just how much space they had in the different programs that comprised that pre-orientation experience. The Board of Trustees stepped up a few years ago and said, this is such an important program. It's such an important way that students begin to build community among themselves as they go through that sometimes scary transition from high school to college that every student should have access to it. So last academic year, I believe funding was made available to ensure there was capacity for 75% of the first-year class. And this year, and every year going forward, the expectation is that the full class will participate. And I think it's noticeable in terms of the interactions that we see among the current first-year students.

Ruth Candler 19:09

Especially these students are ones that are coming out of being in high school during the pandemic. So those social relationships are very important. Let's go back to your spring term course in Copenhagen. What topics are you exploring with students during your time there?

Rob Straughan 19:28

I think the official title of the course is International Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability. And it draws off of, as I explained earlier, this trend of companies really beginning to ask what is our obligation. Is it simply to maximize the traditional accounting measures and financial measures? Or do we have an obligation that extends beyond that? There are some companies that were trailblazers in this regard, one that a lot of people think of in terms of social consciences, Ben and Jerry's. They were here on campus a year or two back to give a talk. So, we look with our students. And I should note, if I haven't, the course is restricted to only first-year students. So, these are students who have probably not had any business education up to this point. Maybe they've had an Intro Economics or Intro Accounting class. But it's not an expectation. We look at the debate that's been going on, going back to, you know, the 60s or 70s, about what the sort of obligation of a corporation is. We look at different frameworks that have been applied in recent years to help us understand the broader social and environmental implications for businesses. Then, we spend a good deal of time looking at specific companies. First companies that are primarily US based. And given that most of our students are coming from a US-centric background, they know these companies, and they probably understand the mindset of these companies and their industries on some level. Then, we began to look at a number of Danish-based companies, often operating in the same industries, looking for points of comparison, in contrast. What begins to emerge there is some clear indication that these Danish companies often are interacting with their shareholders, with their customers with the

general public in different ways because of their understanding of this sort of social environmental obligation. When we get to Copenhagen, we visit the Danish companies that we've studied, and the students get direct interaction with some of the senior managers that are driving the sustainability efforts of those companies. Some of the students are really motivated by what they're learning. Others question it, and that's fine. Our goal is not to indoctrinate students into a particular point of view but to allow them to explore this debate in sort of real moments. And I think it's fascinating to watch how they individually respond to these visits.

Ruth Candler 22:35

So, is Denmark still pretty much the world leader in that area?

Rob Straughan 22:43

It's on the shortlist, for sure. I think Denmark and the Nordic countries collectively, have been grappling with this. And part in this goes back to my, I would say, earlier parts of my career where I was looking at a lot of international research and conducting International. It goes back in part to some of the cultural norms that drive institutions, including business. Drive, the politics of those countries, drive the religion and culture small see, meaning, you know, arts and, and expressions of what it means to be to be human. So, I think the institution of business and the specific businesses in Denmark and the Nordic countries evolved because a lot of this is woven into their society and has been for a very long time. But it's worth noting that when the EU began to explore requirements for companies in terms of sustainability reporting, they more or less adopted the requirements already in place in Denmark, so why reinvent the wheel? And so, I think it is fair to say that Denmark has been and remains a leader in this regard.

Ruth Candler 24:01

So, it sounds just a little different than our corporate America. What challenges and impressions arise when American students engage in Denmark in regard to the context of sustainable business practices?

Rob Straughan 24:14

One of my favorite moments when we travel with the students is the arrival at the airport. I'm not a huge fan of airports. Let's be clear. But for some of these students, it's the first time they've traveled internationally. And I always try to make sure I'm in the front of the immigration line ahead of all of our students because I want to clear first and watch their faces as they come through the barrier that when it dawns on them, they're actually this is actually happening. And you see these big smiles, and they were looking around, so for some, it's just this idea of being a global citizen, and it becomes



very real in that moment, and it's fun to share that. In terms of the topic of the call. Our visits to the companies, but also our visits with some of our faculty collaborators over there. And our cultural tours exploring medieval Copenhagen and castles and art museums and so on is they see this theme of Responsible consumption responsibility to the world around you in all of the things that they're encountering, it's not just about what's written in some company's corporate report, or what some manager is saying during a two-hour discussion of corporate strategy at Novo Nordisk, or, or Pandora, for example. And so those are interesting moments. We coordinate with a partner program over there and an opportunity twice during our two weeks for the students in groups of three or four to go have dinner with a Danish family. And they're very anxious about this at first, and it ends up being one of their favorite things. When we do it the second time, they, it can't arrive quickly enough. And in those conversations, you know, the Danish families are wanting to understand these crazy Americans. But they hear discussion of politics and responsibility to their neighbors and their society, which I think makes the thematic element of the course.

Ruth Candler 26:28

So, regardless of what or where a student studies, what is it that you hope every student learns from studying abroad?

Rob Straughan 26:36

Take risks. I think, when you engage in discussions, whether it's about politics, or religion, or corporate responsibility, or whatever it might be across cultural barriers or boundaries, one of two things is going to happen. And they're both good outcomes. One is, you're going to consider alternative points of view alongside your own points of view and conclude that you are more confident than ever about your own perspective. That's fine. But you will understand that there are others who think differently or view matters differently. The other possibility is that you may question your own points of view, and they may evolve. And that's beautiful, right? I didn't study abroad. As a student, I had an opportunity, and I passed on it. Fortunately, my professional journey afforded me the chance to travel abroad a little bit later in life and begin to do so regularly. And yeah, my points of view on any number of things are affected by the countries I've been in, most notably Denmark.

Ruth Candler 27:52

Our students love our spring term classes. So, thank you for giving us a glimpse. Let's shift our focus now to our campuses ever evolving infrastructure. I've been at W&L for about ten years, and there seems to always be renovation or construction. I know our listeners would like to hear about the plans for the new Williams school building, its features, and the timeline for completion.

Rob Straughan 28:18

Yeah, this has been a project that, depending on when you identify a start date, is either five or six years in the making or 25 years in the making. If you ever visit a college campus, and there's not construction going on, you should be very wary of that campus, and that's a good point, you're they are probably falling behind. It's just a reality. When you've got so many different functions, housing, classrooms, you know, support functions, and so on, you have to be building and renovating continually. So, when I arrived in 2000, the Williams school was housed almost entirely within what we now know as Huntley Hall, but generations of alums will simply know it as the sea school. And if you go back even further, it used to be the University Library. Our programs began to grow at a noticeable rate, and by growth, I mean student interest enrollment and the number of majors. And as we responded to that, that meant a number of faculty, and we were outgrowing Huntley. We cannibalized spaces that served an important purpose, but we determined that we needed more offices and classrooms. In the short run, we decided we could sacrifice certain functionality for the sort of core requirements of offices and classrooms. And 2005-2006, we began to engage the university in discussions about what many will know as the old Co-Op building, which had been standing empty since the Elrod Commons opened in 2003. We received approval to renovate that building to create more office space. There are no classrooms in that building. There are some students' study areas, but no classrooms. It was something of a bridge project because we knew the colony renovations had to be a high priority in the years to come. So, we completed that in 2007, and that gave us some capacity to house the growing number of faculty that were necessary to teach larger and larger numbers of students in the four majors in the Williams school. But we were, again, out of space, and we knew we could see it happening ten years ago. And so when the strategic plan was approved in 2018, one of the key capital projects in that plan was the expansion and updating of spaces for the Williams School. We've gone through numerous iterations of what that means and ultimately approved the construction of a new building on Nelson Street, where Baker Davis and Once Upon a Time Gillum stood. And that project, the ground was broken on that this past summer in August. That's a two-year project. It's about a 42,000-square-foot building that will house combinations of classrooms, faculty, and staff offices. And one thing I'm really excited about is regaining some of the community spaces that we've cannibalized over the last 20 years. Once that building is complete, we will move all of the people currently in Huntley Hall, which includes me, out of Huntley Hall, and we will begin to gut and renovate Huntley Hall to bring it into a 21st-century version of itself. That is still remaining part of the William still remaining part of the William school. That's another two years. So that takes us to the summer of 2027. If everything remains on schedule, then a lot of us will take a deep breath and relax. It's exciting. You know, frankly, Huntly has served us well up to a point. But teaching styles have evolved since it was last renovated in the late 70s into 1980. That's when the commerce school moved into what is now Huntley Hall. And we need classrooms that offer more flexibility to allow for different teaching styles. As I noted, we've cannibalized almost all of the community space; we're

reintroducing that so students can interact with one another and with faculty. In fact, faculty can interact with one another in ways that would be very different than sitting in office hours, for example. That's a major goal of both of these projects, both the new building, and Huntley, so they'll there will be an enormous increase in community space.

Ruth Candler 33:14

So, you teach corporate social responsibility and sustainability. And so, I'm sure my next question is top of mind for you. How will the new building align with the university's sustainability goals?

Rob Straughan 33:27

Yeah, it's top of mind not only for me; I would say it's top of mind for many, if not all, of our faculty. It's something we've talked about during the sort of brainstorming that led to various proposals for the building. Maybe the most important element that's been incorporated into the new building project is the Nelson Street project. I'm not an engineer, so I may not have the terminology exactly right. But infrastructure, referred to as low temp hot water, which will allow W&L as a campus to, over a longer period of time, replace its steam-based heating system. It's a much more energy-efficient approach to heating; it will not only lower costs, but it will lower our carbon footprint, as well. And so, as they're constructing this new building, they're building a lot of the necessary infrastructure into the building to allow other buildings as they are renovated to be converted from the old heating system to the new heating system. Beyond that, we're looking at things like finishes what this is; this is actually pretty common in interior design now. What are the materials being used in these finishes? How are they sourced? What's the impact on the environment for using this tile on the floor versus this other tile on the floor? And that's sort of, frankly, the stage we're at right now in terms of the new building we're looking at. We're looking at that level of detail to finalize it within the next few weeks.

Ruth Candler 35:01

So, I've enjoyed walking by the construction site on a daily basis, and we've got cement walls and lots of things going on. So, thanks for helping us better understand that.

Rob Straughan 35:12

It's been fun to watch it begin to rise from the ground.

Ruth Candler 35:15

So, before we wrap up today's episode, I'd like for us to learn a little more about you when you're not on campus. You've lived in Lexington for almost a quarter of a century. What do you enjoy the most about living here?

Rob Straughan 35:29

I grew up in and spent most of the first 30 to 35 years of my life in large urban cities. But my family roots are in a small town in West Texas. I did spend a lot of time visiting grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, and so on in these two small towns out in West Texas, and when we moved to Lexington 25 years ago, it was my first experience of what it's like to be in a small community where you really get to know the place beyond your immediate, you know, driveway property lines, and so on. And that's been a fun experience for my wife and I. We raised our two boys here. They were, I don't know, seven and three when we moved, and this is home to them.

Ruth Candler 36:21

So, you and your wife Leslie, a golfers who won the last game?

Rob Straughan

I did.

Ruth Candler

Is she going to agree with that?

Rob Straughan 36:28

She would agree with that. But she will probably beat me in the next three or four. So, I got lucky this past weekend. It's generous to call us golfers, perhaps. We enjoyed getting out. It's a way to enjoy the outdoors. Let's just say our game is lacking in a certain way. Well,

Ruth Candler 36:52

Well, from someone who can only play putt-putt, I would call you a golfer. I know you enjoy traveling; what would you say are your top three places that you visited? And what is still holding that number one spot on your bucket list?

Rob Straughan 37:08

Well, for me, Copenhagen is almost a home away from home. I've been going to Denmark on a pretty regular basis, meaning many times a year, for the better part of the last 12 or 15 years. So that would have to be there. One of the more interesting trips that I was lucky enough to take, and it came from one of my connections in Denmark, was a trip 10 or 12 years ago to Greenland. And Elizabeth Oliver, my colleague and partner in crime and many collaborators on campus, and Chris Connors in the geology department. And I had the opportunity to spend about a week in Greenland. And it was just a fascinating place. The sort of collision of nature and colonialism and indigenous communities and economic and political opportunity was fascinating. And I'd love to get back there sometime in terms of the bucket list. I've never been able to get to Australia or New Zealand simply because it's so far away that I feel like I need two to three weeks to make it happen. That would be on there. I've heard from so many people that Egypt is a place that should not be missed.

Ruth Candler 38:37

Yeah, that would have to be my favorite destination. So, students. What do you enjoy most about working with undergraduate students? And are there any important lessons that you've learned from them?

Rob Straughan 38:51

Absolutely. In terms of learning from them. One of the things that I think W&L encourages allows facilitates for students is the opportunity to make connections between topics or areas of exploration that most schools I don't think would allow or would encourage. And those work their way into classes in unexpected ways. And in those moments, if I'm teaching the class, I'm sort of rocked back on my heels when a student makes a really astute observation that they may draw from a religion class and brings it into a discussion that we may be having about marketing strategy and why a particular company is promoting their products in the way that they are. That certainly wasn't my educational experience as an undergraduate, and it happens pretty frequently. In terms of the joy of working with students, it's just seeing what they can become, and they continue to amaze me. I was talking with Carla Murdoch and the cognitive and behavioral science department. She made the same observation the other day that sometimes the best thing we can do is just step back and be amazed by what the students are becoming during their four years here. So, we get the opportunity to live vicariously through their successes and sometimes struggle with them as they're struggling as well. But that's probably my favorite thing.

Ruth Candler 40:33

So, if you had to give one piece of advice to students, what would it be?

Rob Straughan 40:38

I think I would encourage them to maintain an open mind, not only when they arrive but throughout their four years here and beyond; I think our students tend to be planners. And that can be a good thing. But it can also lead them to put guardrails on their experience that would result in the missing opportunities that could be epiphanies. And Mark Connor, you know, former colleague, a longtime member of the English faculty and Provost here, used to tell students – "leave room for the accidental." Maybe that's a final class that rounds out your schedule. Maybe on the front end, you're not so excited about it, but it could turn your world upside down. And I think that's great advice. I would encourage students here and alumni beyond to continue to leave room for the accidental. It might take them to really interesting places.

Ruth Candler 41:42

That's a great thing for us to end on. Thanks so much, Rob. Thanks for joining us today.

Rob Straughan 41:47

Happy to do it!

Ruth Candler 41:47

And that's a wrap for today's episode. A big thank you to all of you for tuning in. Before we go, I'd like to remind you to check out our website at [wlu.edu/lifelong](https://wlu.edu/lifelong), where you'll discover a wealth of lifelong learning opportunities. Be sure to explore our show notes for today's episode with Rob Straughan. And while you're there, take a moment to meet the incredible individuals who make this podcast possible. Behind the scenes, we have the technical wizardry of Jim Goodwin, our masterful technical producer, and the infectious beats of our brand-new theme music. Well, they're the handiwork of a talented Cleveland Candler. Yes, I may have called in a family favor on that one. And our scripts come to life through the skillful writing of Kelsey Goodwin. We're also incredibly fortunate to have W&L alumni Eric Owsley, jury socket, and Kelly Melbourne, who serve as our strategic advisors. Until next time, let's remain together, not unmindful of the future.

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