

ROLLINS

A L U M N I R E C O R D

FALL 2004

Lewis Duncan Launches New Era at Rollins

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PHOTO BY SPENCER FREEMAN
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It takes a rocket scientist to run Rollins...

LEWIS DUNCAN LAUNCHES NEW ERA AT ROLLINS

Lewis M. Duncan, Rollins' 14th president, took office on August 1, 2004. Born in West Virginia and raised in Texas, Dr. Duncan is a self-described member of "the Sputnik Generation." His childhood fascination with satellites and the space program guided his educational and career paths. And while today Duncan is literally a rocket scientist, he is remarkably down to earth. Warm, friendly and approachable, he was attracted to Rollins because of the College's commitment to excellence, innovation, and community. He is a cheerleader for the value of a liberal arts education and Rollins' role in raising the issue of how to make liberal education relevant for the 21st century. Assistant Vice President of Public Relations Ann Marie Varga '82 sat down with President Duncan (he actually prefers to be called Lewis) to learn more.



*Choose the things that you do based upon what you really love doing...
I think your interests and passions probably evolve as you work through
different phases of your life; but once you've found them, invest yourself.*

Why Rollins, why now?

I believe you make the big decisions with your heart, and this felt right.

What appealed to me about Rollins was that, for 75 years, beginning with the conference led by John Dewey in 1930, Rollins has regularly asked, how do we continually renew the purpose and execution of a liberal education? At Rollins, we ask the question, which is far more than many other schools do. To talk about a practical liberal education, in almost every other liberal arts college, would be considered an oxymoron. Many schools teach a curriculum derived from the early Greek philosophies of purity of thought, but a Platonic education is one that's purely intellectual, not one that leads you to look at applications to real decisions in your lifetime. The idea of a practical liberal education is actually revolutionary.

I also like the idea of a school this size, because we can have some experiments, like the Rollins College Conference (RCC), which helps entering students adjust to college life by teaming them in small groups with a faculty member and two upperclass students to explore a topic of mutual interest through reading, writing, and discussion. Those kinds of classes offer the opportunity to synthesize what a liberal education is about. The RCC should help students move from an educational system in which information is pumped into them, into the college world in which we're trying to make them critical thinkers. We want to help them embrace the idea that you have to be a learner for your entire life. We'll help them figure out how to not only assimilate all that knowledge, but then distill from it their own informed opinions. And even more importantly, help them decide how they intend to act on those

opinions to follow their passions, but to do it in an informed way, so they will become participants, not just spectators, in the issues that shape their lives.

I keep being asked, why a liberal arts college? I was offered presidencies at colleges that were very good science and technology schools, but I never felt comfortable with that because I like bringing the message of science and technology to the humanities. I was also offered presidencies at schools that were in trouble. Rollins is in great shape and well regarded, and it's an honor to have been selected to lead it to even greater levels of excellence and distinction.

When you were on campus considering Rollins, what were your initial impressions of the College?

One of the things I liked, which began with the search committee and was reinforced with all of my visits to the campus, was just how much of a community this is. The faculty, staff, and students all seemed to enjoy one another and respond to one another in the way an extended family would. I found that enormously

appealing. It provides a safe environment for intellectual inquiry and honest disagreement, which is exactly what a college is supposed to be.

I had some question about an oft-repeated phrase of "taking Rollins to the next level." You see far too many colleges and universities talking about becoming the next great "fill in the blank"—whether aspiring to set new standards in higher education or to redefine higher education, or for the bigger universities, becoming the next great research university in some particular field. I didn't feel that so much here, and, in fact, I found among individual conversations a lot of resonance with "Why not make Rollins the very best that it can be?" Let's not aspire to be something that we're not, but really make Rollins the very best learning community it can be.

Your presidency began with a great deal of sound and fury—three hurricanes! How would you characterize the experience?

People kept reassuring me that this wasn't "normal"—I asked them to tell me when things got back to normal, since I hadn't had a chance

to know what that was. When it appeared that Hurricane Jeanne would follow Frances's track toward Florida, I began to think this was becoming personal!

My family and I stayed with the students in the Cornell Campus Center during Charley, and the Bush Science Center during Frances and Jeanne. I want parents to know that we're taking care of our students the same way we care for our families.

It was an unexpected welcome, but one that actually introduced me to the Rollins community at its best. As a newcomer, I found the way everyone stepped up and got things done was exceptional. Rollins is an extraordinary group of people—students even offered to help groundskeepers clean up the campus, and volunteered in Winter Park. We have a lot to be proud of; I am honored to join a community like this.

It's early...and you said that your only plans right now for Rollins are to listen...but we have to ask: Do you have a vision, do you have plans for Rollins? How do we, as you said, become the best Rollins we can be?

Fast Facts **Lewis M. Duncan**

In academe:

Rollins College: President

Dartmouth College: Dean, Thayer School of Engineering

University of Tulsa: Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs; Acting President; Dean, College of Engineering and Applied Sciences

Clemson University: Associate Dean, College of Sciences; Professor of Physics and Astronomy

In research:

Co-principal investigator for an ongoing U.S.-Russia-Kazakhstan collaboration, involving construction of a major new research facility for mapping of radio emissions from cosmic ray induced atmospheric breakdown

Principal investigator for Department of Commerce / National Institute of Standards and Technology investigations in nonlinear radiophysics

Principal investigator for National Institute of Justice study on counterterrorism emerging technologies

In science:

Los Alamos National Laboratory: Section Head, Space Science and Technology, Division of Earth and Space Sciences

National Astronomy and Ionosphere Center: National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow

In public policy:

Fellow, National Energy-Environment Law and Policy Institute

Fellow, Thurmond Institute of Government and Public Affairs

Carnegie Science Fellow, Center for International Security and Arms Control, Stanford University

At home:

Wife, Paula Hammer, a Ph.D. counseling psychologist; a struggling-young-artist stepson; three teenage daughters; and a dog named Bailey

Fun Facts

Favorite book: I have hundreds—favorite topics: science, philosophy, policy, leadership

Favorite movie(s): old B-grade science fiction

Favorite sports: volleyball, jogging, surfing, sky diving (retired)

Favorite vacation spot: Orlando!

Can't be without: Diet Coke

Hero: Growing up, it was General Robert E. Lee. I appreciated his combination of leadership and integrity, and also the conflicting emotions of duty and loyalty to country and state. In college and since: my thesis advisor, Dr. William E. Gordon, the person who imagined and built the Arecibo radio telescope, the world's largest radar-radio-telescope, in Puerto Rico.

What would you want for your epitaph? "I'm not done yet!"

I plan to listen and stimulate conversation by asking questions and convening various groups on campus. I think a new president has an opportunity to revisit how things are done—in many cases to reaffirm our traditions and in some cases to find new ways of doing things, which are different because the times are different. I'll listen and ask questions, and actually those are two very different things. I think you can exhibit a lot of leadership by asking the right questions.

Can leadership be taught, or does it come from within?

Leadership is an action, not a position. Can you teach people to act on their passions? I think so. You can help them learn to have the courage of their convictions. I think that's one of the outcomes of being a well-informed critical thinker—that you have a strong sense of what you're doing and why you're doing it. Leadership is something that can occur at every level in an organization and at every phase in your life.

When did you know you wanted to be an educator?

I knew I wanted to be a scientist when we started putting satellites into orbit and my parents took me out into the West Virginia night to watch the satellites overhead. There were a lot of kids my age in school who did well in science and math for whom space was the obvious place to go, the so-called "Sputnik generation"; we were raised on the space programs. The opportunity to go to Rice [University], which has an affiliation with the Johnson Space Center, and to be a graduate of their Department of Space Science and Astronomy, was like a dream come true.

I left Rice with my Ph.D and went to Los Alamos National Laboratory, which is kind of like a university without students. At that time, it was the penultimate research facility and I worked on satellite systems that served national security needs. I greatly missed students, so I mentored students while I was there. At the same time, I realized that I was very well educated as a scientist, but what I was doing was part of a larger national security function that was equal part policy making, of which I knew too little. I took a leave from Los Alamos to become a Carnegie Science Fellow at



President Lewis Duncan and his wife, Dr. Paula Hammer

SPENCER FREEMAN

Stanford. The purpose of that program was to take a couple of mid-career scientists and have us take and teach policy-oriented classes in the Center for International Security and Arms Control. [Astronaut] Sally Ride was the other Fellow in that program while I was there. The Stanford program fulfilled one of my ambitions, which was to better understand the other dimensions of the work I was doing at Los Alamos, and also led to my decision not to return there. I don't think there was an epiphany, it was more of a path.

You were the first in your family to graduate from college. Why you?

I think in my generation there are a lot of young people who were first-generation college graduates. In less affluent families, there weren't a lot of opportunities to go to college. Our fathers fought in World War II, and even if they had had the means and opportunity, there was something else happening to change the circumstances of their ability to go to college. After the war, many of our parents started putting their lives back together instead of going back to school.

It was important to our parents that my brother and I receive a good education. They did everything to provide for that. We moved to Bellaire, Texas, primarily based on a Sunday news supplement that described the Bellaire magnet high school as one of the top math and science high schools in America.

What's the best advice you ever received?

My father always told me to find the things that you really love to do and then do them to the very best of your ability. He never pushed me to be a doctor or a lawyer or a scientist, but if I wanted to be carpenter, I should be the very best carpenter that I could be. Choose the things that you do based upon what you really love doing, and that may even change during your lifetime. I think your interests and passions probably evolve as you work through different phases of your life. But once you've found them, invest yourself. I give that same advice to others all the time.

If you were to look down the road, what would you want your legacy to Rollins to be?

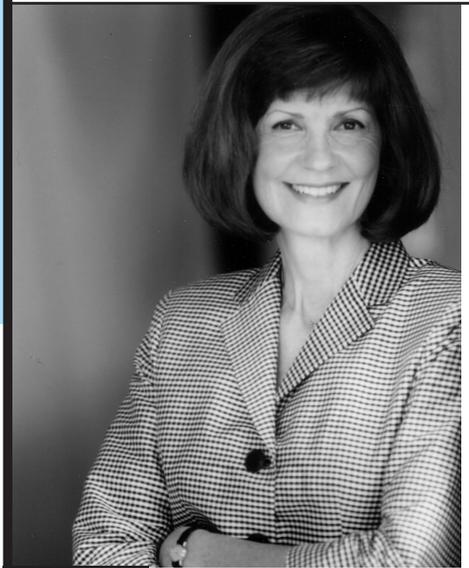
I would like to leave it a better place than it is today. And that's actually quite a challenge, because it's a wonderful place today. This is not a campus in crisis and so what's asked of me is to continue to build on the very positive trajectory that it's on—to find ways of enhancing what we do, not redirecting it.

I don't think we're going to get bigger, but we can get even better. I think the quality of the students and the faculty will continue to improve. I would hope in my presidency that Rollins will continue to move from being a really good regional college to being even more recognized on the national stage as a first choice of students hoping for a quality liberal education. I'd like us clearly to be first in Florida and among the finest nationally. [R](#)

SEARCHING FOR DUNCAN

A glimpse into the process of finding a college president

By Lezlie Laws, Professor of English



Lezlie Laws

Stage 1: Getting Elected

I had only done it as a favor to Barry. “Just let me put your name on the ballot, Lezlie,” he said in an upbeat phone call. “You probably won’t get elected anyway.”

Poor Barry, as president of the faculty, it was his burden to govern 180 strong-willed, independent-thinking, and often outrageously outspoken members of the Rollins College faculty. It wasn’t an easy job, but if anyone was up to managing the enigmatic beast of a college faculty, it was the inimitable Barry Levis, a scholar of the English monarchy, and on rare occasions, known to be rather outspoken himself.

I knew I wouldn’t be beheaded if I refused his request, but I also knew there was no way I was in a position to serve on the committee charged to find Rollins’ 14th president.

“Oh Barry, do you know what my coming year is like? It’s packed to the gills.”

“I’ll bet I’m not the only one in the group who made a silent petition to a higher order, asking to be guided by wisdom and honor and integrity. I know this because someplace very early in the meeting process, I saw egos pushed aside; I saw personal agendas give way to community; I saw 13 people commit themselves to seeking the highest good for Rollins College.”

“Listen,” he said, “it’s really important we have a varied slate. Just let me put your name on the ballot.” And somehow, though I’m sure he didn’t repeat the line, I heard: “*You probably won’t get elected anyway.*”

For some good reason I can’t recall right now, I was not able to attend the faculty meeting when my colleagues voted to determine who would represent us on the Presidential Search Committee. This, of course, was a grave mistake on my part.

That afternoon, a colleague from environmental studies approached me, put his hand on my shoulder, and said, “Don’t worry, Lezlie, you’ve had a nice, strong career here at Rollins; you may be able to weather this blow.” The grim news finally hit me: I had been elected. Damn that Barry Levis!

Stage 2: Sizing Up the Committee

Now don’t misunderstand. I’m a woman possessed of a deep sense of responsibility, especially when it comes to my work. So once elected, there was no question that I would serve with enthusiasm. I walked into the first meeting of the committee with high hopes, but definitely wary of the people sitting around the table. Imagine aligning the wide array of agendas represented by the members of this committee: two faculty from Arts & Sciences, one from the Hamilton Holt School (myself), and one from the Crummer School; two students; the president of the Alumni Association; four trustees, including our committee chair; a senior administrator; and a senior staff person who provided administrative support for the committee. I looked around the Rice President’s Dining Room, where we would meet and deliberate for the next six months,

and knew I was looking at the dream team or the creamed team. In a matter of months, we’d know which.

In many ways, of course, our job was incredibly easy. Rita Bornstein was leaving Rollins having made extraordinary improvements on all fronts. Everyone agreed: the College is poised to move to the next level of excellence. It was clear: our new leader will have the lovely opportunity of moving on up the educational mountain with all the equipment and support necessary to reach the next visible peak. And while the notion of “moving to the next level” became a kind of mantra for us in our deliberations, it also became a burning question, each member of the committee forming a slightly different answer. Faculty wanted a higher bar for academic excellence.

Administrators wanted a deeper financial base. Students wanted a stronger sense of community. Trustees wanted an outstanding national reputation. The jockeying to defend agendas began. Those early discussions were certainly cordial and professional, but don’t think for a minute that the articulate and thoughtful people around that table were not employing their most persuasive rhetorical skills in an attempt to secure their map for the new territory we would soon enter.

Stage 3: Being a Committee

We met often in those early weeks. And you must know this: we were scared. We did not want to make a mistake. Much more than our own egos was on the line in the work we would do around that large table in the Rice President’s Dining Room; many lives and a whole institution would be affected in the coming years by the efforts we put forth over the next few months. We wanted to get it right. And so, long before we ever examined the first letters of application, much less talked to candidates, we talked about Rollins—what it is, and what it can be—and we talked about ourselves—who we were, and who we wanted to become. We talked, we argued, we instructed each other gently, and we listened deeply to one another. And I’ll bet I’m not the only one in the group who made a silent petition to a higher order, asking to be guided by wisdom and honor and integrity. I know this because someplace very early in the meeting process, I saw egos pushed aside; I saw personal agendas give way to community; I saw 13 people commit themselves to seeking the highest good for Rollins College in the spirit of cooperation, collaboration, and

service. Respect sat largely at the head of our table. We became a committee in the highest sense of the word.

And then came the hard work. Hours and hours of perusing materials, calling references, conferring with members of the Rollins community, all in an effort to identify those few persons with the right stuff to lead Rollins in the next decade.

Stage 4: Finding Duncan

Months later, on a chilly Friday evening in February 2004, sitting in a windowless conference room at the Hyatt Hotel in the Orlando International Airport, we met Lewis Duncan, dean of the Thayer School of Engineering at Dartmouth College. Our conversation with him was the first of 10 more conversations we would have over the course of three days with 10 remarkable men and women, each knowing that becoming president of Rollins College would be a professional coup.

What then, you surely are asking, set Lewis Duncan above the other fine candidates we met with that weekend? Lewis Duncan is a rare bird, for sure. Even in an aviary of high-powered, impeccably trained academic specimens, he has many more beautiful feathers than most. He is a scholar, an intellectual, an engaging thinker; he is a curricular innovator and a talented teacher; he is a knowledgeable, articulate, and forward-thinking defender of the liberal arts; he has demonstrated success in development; he is a savvy manager, a consensus builder among divisive and diverse groups.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Rare and wonderful qualities, to be sure. But when it comes to choosing a president for the institution that you love, a place you have given much of your life to and have such very high hopes for, such qualifications are simply a requirement, not a luxury. In the search for our lead-bird, we were in the enviable position of being picky.

We were looking for something that we knew wouldn't be discernable in the written materials, that special quality that distinguishes excellence within a group of highly qualified peers. In the end, we knew that visionary leadership cannot be quantified, classified, objectified. There was some additional quality, some mysterious element, we wanted to see in our next president—something we struggled to put into words: passion? intensity? engagement?

creativity? vision? We danced around and around trying to identify it. Let's just call it the X-Factor. And then, somehow, amazingly, at the end of our conversation with Lewis Duncan on that Friday night at the Hyatt Hotel, we knew we had just spent two hours with a person possessed of that quality. And though I'm not able to put a word to that quality, I can tell you what the effect of it was on the whole group. We left that conference room wanting to be better people ourselves. We left energized and hopeful. We left even more deeply committed to the powerful work Rollins College is doing in the world. The work of training minds, and opening hearts, and leading young people to engage intelligently, compassionately, even wisely, with a complex and challenging world.

Here are three characteristics Dr. Duncan demonstrated for us over the course of the several visits we had with him. These qualities, in part, define the Duncan X-Factor.

1. A wide-ranging intellect. As we listened to Dr. Duncan talk in that first interview, I think every member of the committee was struck by his remarkable understanding of the history of ideas and of how the liberal arts tradition is driven by that history. He spoke eloquently about liberal education in a classical sense, and also described liberal education in the light of 21st-century geopolitical, social, and cultural structures. Of all the candidates we reviewed, Lewis Duncan (a rocket scientist!) spoke most passionately, most clearly, and most innovatively about liberal education.

2. A genuine interest in pursuing knowledge, understanding, and wisdom with young people.

As the interview continued, Dr. Duncan showed how much he loves leading students into his world of ideas. He spoke of his own teaching, his informal conversations and interactions with students, his involvement in campus life. The student members of the committee were beaming. He told us about his own rich intellectual life, his development of new courses, his research, and most interestingly to us, his annual challenge to immerse himself in a week-long study of something entirely new.

3. Finally, a profound sense of the challenges of our future on this planet, for us especially demonstrated in the course he teaches called "Technology and the Future of Human Society."

Who are we? What is good for us? How shall we conduct ourselves? What can/must we become? These are the questions that have shaped the liberal tradition for centuries. Lewis Duncan showed us the importance of addressing those questions to our future, as well as to our past. In his welcoming lecture to the Dartmouth Class of 2004, he said: "Ours is a world in transformation, a world of changes that—perhaps within the lifetimes of our children—promise to eclipse all others in the accumulated history of our civilization."

As the committee deliberated, calling upon the collective intellect and intuition of the various constituencies we represented, we recognized Lewis Duncan as the president to walk with us into the brave new world.

And you know what? On March 19, 2004, when Lewis Duncan was formally announced as Rollins' 14th president, I was standing out on the Jane Moore Johnson Plaza in front of the Cornell Campus Center cheering him with the rest of the Rollins community, feeling oh-so-relieved to be finished with the six-month-long search, and actually thanking Barry Levis for putting my name on that ballot. ■

Search Committee Members

Rick Goings, *Trustee*
 George H. Herbst, *Vice President for Business and Finance and Treasurer*
 J. Scott Hewitt, *Associate Professor of Education*
 James M. Higgins, *George D. and Harriet W. Cornell Professor of Innovation Management, Crummer Graduate School of Business*
 Lezlie D. Laws, *Professor of English*
 Sarah Ledbetter '05, *Student Government Association President*
 Thomas R. Moore, *Associate Professor of Physics*
 Blair D. Neller '74, *President, Rollins College Alumni Association*
 Charles "Chad" Stewart '04, *Interfraternity Council President*
 R. Michael Strickland '72 '73MBA '04H, *Trustee and Presidential Search Committee Chair*
 Christabel Kelly Vartanian '68, *Trustee*
 Kathleen M. Waltz, *Trustee*

Matt Hawks, *Director of Human Resources, Committee Staff*



Three major hurricanes in six weeks. It sounds like the plot of a really bad disaster movie, but it also sums up how Rollins' new president, Dr. Lewis Duncan, was forced to spend a fair amount of his first two months at the College. The Rollins Alumni Record was going to press as Hurricane Jeanne drove through Central Florida, only three weeks after Hurricane Frances and the writing of this article.

triple Duncan's Double Duty

Friday the 13th...ah, the irony! Just 10 days before Rollins College was set to open up the 2004-05 academic year, Mother Nature had other plans...and her name was Charley. Rollins' Emergency Operations Plan Team closely monitored the progress of Hurricane Charley as it approached Florida's southwest coast. Approximately 150 early-arrival students and essential Rollins personnel were moved to the security of the Cornell Campus Center that afternoon, where they remained until Saturday morning, August 14, after the hurricane had passed.

Thankfully, there were no injuries and only minimal damage to the campus. Due to sustained loss of electricity, however, Rollins had to make quick adjustments for the new academic year. Orientation for new students, the return of upperclass students, and the start of classes were delayed. Following the hurricane, telephone and electronic communication was limited, so a "grassroots" communications effort was put into effect. Rollins' new President, Lewis Duncan, calmly rallied the troops, made swift decisions, and empowered students to get things done.

Under the guidance of Student Involvement & Leadership, 64 Peer Mentors made personal phone calls to every new and returning student to advise them of the new schedule. Student Government Association President Pierce Neinken '06 and a team of students handed out informational fliers to campus visitors to help facilitate communication. Fliers were also posted in key locations and the main campus phone line was used to provide updated information. For those with electricity and access to the



Internet, the Rollins College Web site supplied online status updates.

"I cannot even begin to tell you how impressed I was with the way the community came together to get through one of Rollins' toughest times," said Sarah Ledbetter '05, past SGA president. "I will never forget the experience for as long as I live—it was surreal. If there's anything I've learned in this, it's that we've got a great family here, and no matter what happens, we can get through it one way or another."

It went so well, in fact, that students had joked with President Duncan afterward about making the event an annual tradition. But as Hurricane Frances made her way toward the state of Florida, it seemed unthinkable that Mother Nature could make it a *monthly* tradition.

It had been just three weeks since Hurricane Charley had slammed into Central Florida—the eye passing right over Orlando. Charley's arrival was fast and furious. He hit in the middle of the night with hurricane-force winds that left the City of Winter Park and



surrounding areas with months of cleanup work. The tree debris still lined many of the area streets.

But here came Frances—a massive hurricane the size of the state of Texas—lumbering her way toward us. Rollins College now found itself faced with a familiar yet far greater challenge: this time, classes were in full swing and 1,100 students occupied the residence halls. Most students left campus, but nearly 300 Rollins students, faculty, staff, and community members spent the night in the Bush Science Center, which was dubbed the “Bush Hotel and Resort.” Movies, games, and an “Internet café” helped to pass the time. Frances was crawling so slowly that at one point she almost seemed suspended offshore. The eye passed south of Orlando and Winter Park, sparing the area from significant damage, but it took more than a full day to be completely free of hurricane- and tropical-storm-force winds.



Two distinctly different experiences, yet two very similar instances where the Rollins community came together in true Rollins fashion.

Perhaps Lewis Duncan said it best as he readied College personnel to face Frances: “It is in trying times that true character comes out...and the character of this community is remarkable.”

—Ann Marie Varga '82

Rollins appreciates the special efforts of: The Facilities staff, for their tireless and swift cleanup efforts; the Dining Services crew, for keeping students, essential personnel, and the Winter Park Police and Fire Departments well fed despite the challenges of limited electrical service and an ice shortage after Hurricane Charley; the Information Technology team, for getting systems up and operational so quickly; and the Residential Life staff and Campus Safety officers, for working diligently to keep our students safe.