

MELISSA COURSON

March 26, 1997

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Mame Warren,
interviewer

Warren: This is Mame Warren. Today is the 26th of March, 1997. I'm in Lexington, Virginia, with Melissa Courson, who is the champion, the star, the hero on campus this week, I think, because you put together a terrific Fancy Dress. I'm someone who enjoyed herself thoroughly on Friday night. But before we get started on Fancy Dress, I'd like to ask you a couple of other questions, like where did you come from in the first place?

Courson: I'm from Atlanta, Georgia.

Warren: How did you decide to come to Washington and Lee?

Courson: I came to a Summer Scholars Program here, the summer before my senior year, and up until then had not really considered W&L that much, I suppose, except for the fact that my stepmother's father went here and really wanted me to look into W&L. So I came to summer program and just had a great time, met lots of neat people, loved the campus and loved the faculty, the professors that I had that summer. Then I ended up applying to W&L and got in.

Warren: Oh, that's real interesting. You're the first person I've talked to who came through the Summer Scholars Program.

Courson: In my class, there were five or six of us. One of the girls I lived with, in fact, was a summer scholar at W&L. We weren't great, great friends at Summer Scholars, but now we live together. So it's neat.

Warren: That's wonderful. So the program really is a conduit to bringing students in.

Courson: Oh, definitely. I think a lot of the people I know in younger grades, too, there's definitely a good handful from each year's summer scholars' class that end up applying and coming to W&L.

Warren: So did W&L then become your first choice?

Courson: Well, actually, I still, all of my life I wanted to go to the University of Virginia, because that's where my dad went. So I ended up applying to W&L and Virginia and a handful of other schools, and got into both schools, but in the end just decided I wanted a smaller school. My sister goes to UVA, and she loves it. I know I would have loved it, too. It's definitely fun. I love – can't imagine being anywhere but W&L, and I also like going to UVA to visit her, too. So she came to Fancy Dress last weekend, which was fun.

Warren: Oh, great. So you both have the best of both worlds.

Courson: Right. We see each other a lot, but I can't imagine being anywhere but here. I love W&L.

Warren: So why do you love W&L?

Courson: Oh, I just think – I love the smallness of it. I love the fact that I know the president and his wife, and they have me and my roommates over for dinner. I love the small classes and the sorts of people that I've met here and the opportunities that I've had to chair something. I like Fancy Dress, a school-wide event that had I gone to a bigger school, I probably would not have been involved in. I just love all the things I've been involved in here. I think it's just such a neat place.

Warren: Are there any particular teachers who have made a difference for you?

Courson: Well, I'm an American history major, so Professor Holt Merchant is my advisor, and I've taken pretty much all of his classes, and I've really enjoyed those. Also Professor DeLaney, I've taken a couple of classes. I enjoy the History department so much because the teachers are such good lecturers and they really make it interesting and enjoyable, the history enjoyable, I think. They make it interesting. I enjoy listening

to—Professor Machado is a great lecturer, too. I like his anecdotes and his stories. He's just really funny.

Warren: Like what?

Courson: Well, I just took a class on the New Deal from him last semester, and he had several speakers come in that lived through the Depression and the New Deal, and they told stories. I can't remember any specifics right now, but he really made the stories he told come to life with the way he described them and the way he framed the stories.

Warren: That would make a difference.

Courson: Right.

Warren: And how about Holt Merchant? Tell me why you like him.

Courson: Well, I actually had him in Summer Scholars also. He was the head of the Summer Scholars Program when I was here, but I had him in my class. He's just such a fascinating lecturer, too, I think. He really, again, brings the history he teaches to life, just the way he talks and the way he moves through his stories and stuff. My dad came to an Alumni College program and had Professor Merchant and also just really enjoyed him. I enjoyed having him in the History department. He's my advisor, so I've taken most of his classes.

Warren: I like both of them a lot, too. I've known Barry for a long time.

Okay. Well, let's move right on into Fancy Dress. When did you get involved the first time?

Courson: Well, I applied for the committee my freshman year, just to be a member of the steering committee. I was one of only, I think, two or three freshmen. My roommate, my next-door roommate, knew the chair, so she encouraged us to apply. I thought it was such a neat thing to work on. I worked on the memorabilia and the teeshirts that year, but I just thought it was such a neat activity to work on here at W&L. So then I applied again sophomore year and was on a decoration subcommittee. Then last year I was in charge of all the memorabilia.

It was around last year that I decided that I thought I'd like to apply for chair. At that point I wasn't sure how huge an undertaking it was, but now I definitely know, but I still love doing it and would do it all over again. I also applied to be chair last spring term, my junior year. You have to interview with the EC.

Warren: How competitive is that?

Courson: Well, I think it depends on year to year. I mean, there were probably four or five of us that interviewed, and I'm not sure in other years if it's different. Sometimes there might only be a couple of people that apply, but you definitely have to interview with EC. They ask you a pretty rigorous set of questions about whether or not, you know, what you feel you learned from being on the committee before, and what you think your strengths are. So you have to – I would say it's a pretty rigorous interview, although I knew all the people that were interviewing me, so that was good. Most of the people I interviewed against, or interviewed with, had probably had a similar experience on the committee, had been on the committee since their freshmen year or had done a lot of work with the committee. So I was definitely excited when I was chosen.

Warren: Why do you think they chose you?

Courson: Well, I think that I'm fairly organized and come across as – the people that were interviewing also knew me through other activities and could see that I was definitely organized and would be able to delegate to a committee of forty-five, and to manage the big budget and to manage all the different aspects of Fancy Dress. Because it's not just decorations or teeshirts, it's everything. It's meeting with the administration; it's scheduling with the athletic department; it's getting the tickets printed. So it's a lot of different areas, and I just think that they thought I would be able to manage all of those pretty effectively.

Warren: Well, they were right. One thing that I'm interested in, because I'm looking at the broad sweep of history, I've seen some photographs of Fancy Dress in recent years,

and I came over a couple of times while you all were finishing up the decorations, and it looks like a pretty feminine endeavor these days. Is that true? Have the women taken over Fancy Dress for the most part?

Courson: That's funny. We were laughing about that last week. We were wondering when W&L was all male, who did the decorations. Somebody had told me that some of the housemothers had done a lot of work. I'm sure the decorations were not quite as elaborate then, obviously, just because the budget was smaller and it was all boys. I'm sure some of the stuff that we do is probably just not feasible with boys.

I don't know if women have taken it over, because Joe was chair two years ago. Last year the vice chair and the chair and the auditor were all female, but my freshman year they had a – when Joe was chair, his vice chair was a male also. There are still males on the committee. The boys, the guys that did all the construction for me this year are all male. I don't think females have taken it over, but I definitely think that there's a definite feminine influence in all the decorations, I mean, just as far as the creative aspects, the details of the carousel horses and stuff like that, this year especially, you could tell that females did that.

But I'm not sure that – next year if we maybe may have a male chair, maybe. I wouldn't say that females have taken it over. But I definitely think that the decorations have gotten a lot more elaborate and maybe a little more creative since the days that W&L has gone coed, since women have had the opportunity to work on it.

Warren: I don't know. I've seen a lot of photographs of what it was before, and they did a pretty spectacular job back then.

Courson: I wonder who did them. I would like to see those photos, too.

Warren: You will. They'll be in the book. I'm interested in this big committee you were managing. That's a lot of people. I look at that list, and there are a lot of people on that list. How did you do it?

Courson: Well, we've had the committee since October, so we set up an e-mail distribution list, and I made it clear to them when meetings would be every week. We pretty much told them that attendance was mandatory. We had them write us excuses if they couldn't come, just because if they don't come to meetings, you can't communicate with them, obviously. I can't take the time to call every single person that hasn't been at the meeting.

But, I mean, for the most part, the way the committee works is there's the chair, the vice chair, and the auditor, and then there are forty-five people other than that. We split up the decorations into the corners of the gym, in the big gym. In the small gym is one person. Then the hallway and the entrance and the balconies. There are seven different decorations areas, and they each have a subcommittee of two members under each of them.

Then invitations are one other area, memorabilia, publicity, construction, and the guy that books the bands, or the person that books the bands. They each—I mean, I didn't directly have forty-five subordinates. I had more people. There's definitely more of a chain of command where they reported directly to me if they were having problems in their specific area, or if their subcommittee members were not pulling their weight and hadn't been helping them out. So I kept in close contact with those other—the subcommittee chairs. The subcommittee members were under them. I had a great committee. I couldn't have done it all without them, done anything without them. They were very creative and organized and enthusiastic.

Warren: I'm interested in breaking down the room into the four corners. Did people come in with drawings? How do you know what they're going to be doing?

Courson: We also have a decorations coordinator, after the three, the chair, the vice chair, and the auditor. She definitely—I depended on her so much. She would help us tie everything together to make sure that the gym was going to flow, to make sure that all the different decorations people did come in with drawings, and talked to

construction about what they wanted, and gave to construction definite drawings. She definitely knew more specifics about decorations probably than I did, just because she had been working directly with the decorations chairs since the beginning. I mean, I had, too, but she had a better idea of what specifically they were going to do in each area.

We required them to come in with drawings, and they turn in a budget that has to be itemized as to exactly what they need and the price of it. They definitely have to put a lot of time into thinking, creativity, into what they want to do in their corner. And then, of course, we want to make sure that the four corners don't look disjointed. In fact, the front two corners by the stage, they pretty much did them together. I mean, they combined their efforts and combined their committees and did them together, just so they would flow better.

Warren: How much is decorations that are created here, and how much are rented and brought in?

Courson: I think it depends on year to year. This year, just because of the theme and the way that things worked out, we did rent a lot of the big animal-sized figures, the Enchanted Castle, which is in Natural Bridge, they guy there made the horse and the tiger and the big man on stilts. He just let us rent it, which was great. But then everything else in the big gym, the fire truck, and the fire tower, and the cages, we built that all. It does depend on year to year, depending on what the theme is, as to how much the committee actually builds and how much we rent. The carousel horses in the small gym were not ours either. Other than that, we made pretty much everything.

Warren: Did you all create the idea of the tent and the small gym?

Courson: Yes.

Warren: That was spectacular.

Courson: I got my pictures back just from when I was in there in the afternoon, and I took a picture of the ceiling, which looked so neat.

Warren: It was just magical when I walked in.

Courson: It looked neat with all the lights. And the red, I mean, how perfect for our theme that the drapery guy could do that.

Warren: Who accomplished that?

Courson: This company out of Roanoke. It's called Hollins Exhibits. It's just a pipe and drape company, and they – last year was the first year we draped the gym. We used to paper the walls and do all sorts of things like that. That just is so time-consuming. Not only does the pipe and drape look nice, it takes so much less time to clean up than tearing all the paper down. Apparently they've also run into problems in the past with the paper not being flame-resistant and having the fire marshal almost call off the ball in the afternoon of. So the drapery makes it so much easier on us and the athletic department and the people that clean it up.

Warren: Well, it just was magical.

Courson: I liked it. Everybody said the red and white was so neat, and apparently the sound guys, or the band guys – I think it was the sound guys said that they had been doing Fancy Dress for so long, and that was the best that they had ever seen the small gym look. I thought it was neat.

Warren: It was only my second one, but I said, "They're going to have to go a long way to beat this."

Courson: It was neat. It lent itself so well to our theme.

Warren: How did you come up with the theme?

Courson: Well, every year we have people submit applications. We ask them to put just three possible themes on their applications. Then we compile a list of a hundred or more that have come up during applications, and then the first couple of meetings we discuss them and we narrow them down. We narrow them down to ten, and then we narrow them down to five.

The circus has always been one that comes up, it seems like, in the top five or top three, but the argument against it has always been it's not elegant enough and it's not sophisticated. But this year we just decided that it would be something neat to do, and I think we definitely made it so that it wasn't—I mean, Fancy Dress is definitely an elegant and sophisticated thing. But, you know, it's nice to have a fun theme that people are going to recognize bright colors and easily recognizable figures and stuff like that. We chose it probably right before Thanksgiving and were brainstorming ever since about how to carry it out through the gyms and through all the memorabilia and stuff like that.

Warren: How do you keep it a secret?

Courson: Well, we just encouraged the steering committee really to not tell anybody and to not tell their roommates, just because it is neat. I think that's one of the neat traditions about Fancy Dress that creates more excitement about it. Of course, by the time invitations go out, some people know, and some people try to guess all year what the theme is. But it's just neat to keep it a secret and build up excitement about what the theme is going to be, so when people get their invitations they can figure it out. So we just really encourage people not to tell anybody, but inevitably people find out, but that doesn't really bother me. It's nice just to attempt to keep it a secret for as long as we can.

Warren: So are there any good themes out there that you all rejected that you think might show up in the future?

Courson: There's a lot of Mardi Gras and sort of a Mardi Gras atmosphere, and then casino and sort of Las Vegas, Monte Carlo. That always is one that comes up. We wanted to stay away from a geographical theme this year, just because two years ago and three years ago, we both did the Arabian Nights and then the Paris theme. There are so many great geographical themes. The Seven Wonders of the World always comes up. There are definitely lots of neat geographical areas that you could do a

theme on that haven't been done in a while. There's endless possibilities of themes. It's just a matter of finding one that you can carry out through the gyms and find enough decorations, find enough things to decorate about, and be able to carry it out through the decorations and the memorabilia, and invitations and stuff like that. So there's lots of fun themes. I'm sure I'll hear what the themes are the next few years, and I'll be able to say, "Oh, we thought about that one, but decided not to do it," and what if we had done it?

Warren: Do you think you'll come back?

Courson: I'd love to. I imagine on the hundredth annual Fancy Dress they might have a big celebration. I'd love to come out to that. I definitely – Fancy Dress is such a neat thing. Some of my friends that were alumni came back this year and had even more fun as alumni than they did last year. Not even more, but a lot fun, too. So I'd definitely love to come back.

Warren: Do you know – I'm sure you do – that originally Fancy Dress started in fancy dress, in costumes. In the years that you worked on Fancy Dress, was there ever a discussion of trying to bring back costumes?

Courson: No, it's never come up in the steering committee. I got interviewed for the *Ring-tum Phi* last week, and she asked me if I thought that costumes could come back, but I'm not sure how feasible that is for the entire student body, but I think it would be neat to try to do it one year. I'm not sure, again, how feasible. It would be neat, I think. I'm not sure if everybody would really want to do it or if they'd cooperate. But I think that's a neat, such an incredible thing that it used to be a costume ball, and that people used to bring in dates and bring in costumes, and have the costumes waiting for their dates when they got here.

Warren: And they rarely fit, from what I understand.

Courson: Right. It sounds like that's probably a big risk you take, but it would be interesting, definitely, to be able to do that again.

Warren: Well, the pictures are just marvelous. I'm really pushing hard and hoping that we'll do it in 1999, for the 250th anniversary.

Courson: Right. That would be neat.

Warren: I think that would be a blast, maybe reestablish the tradition. But I'm sure you're right. I'm sure it's going to be a very expensive thing to do, to bring in all those costumes, but I think it would be a lot of fun.

Courson: It would be fun.

Warren: So what's next in your life? Where are you going to take all these management skills you've obtained?

Courson: I'm going to enjoy spring term and enjoy all my free time for a while, but I'm planning to go home for the summer and travel and sort of goof off and enjoy my last free time. Then in the fall, I'm moving to Washington D.C., to work for a law firm as a paralegal. I lived there last summer and worked for the same firm. I know I don't want to be a paralegal for the rest of my life, but I know I can do it for a year or so and sort of establish some contacts in Washington or figure out something else I want to do, whether it be there or whether it be back in Atlanta.

Warren: Are you thinking about law school?

Courson: I'm thinking about it a little bit. Honestly, I don't want to go right now, but maybe working in a law firm will change my mind. But I do want to go, or maybe I will say, no, you definitely don't want to go to law school. I don't think I want to go right now, but I haven't ruled it out. So I'm very excited to be going to D.C. There are so many fun young people and so many W&L kids there. I'm looking forward to life after college, even though I know I'll be missing it next year.

Warren: From what I hear from especially recent alums, you'll be missing it.

Courson: Oh, I know. My friends all say the same thing, but definitely you're always ready to move on to another stage in your life, I guess.

Warren: So what other things, besides Fancy Dress, have you been involved in here?

Courson: Well, I'm a member of Kappa Kappa Gamma. That's definitely been a big part of my college experience.

Warren: Why?

Courson: Just because of the leadership opportunities I've had there, the friends I've made, just the things I've been able to do through Kappa, or through the Greek system in general, I suppose. I mean, just being involved with girls with other similar interests, and the experience of going through Rush, and then conducting Rush on the other side has helped me learn a lot about human nature and about different kinds of people, I guess. And also just the philanthropy opportunity that I've had through Kappa, going to the Mayflower and making valentines, and carving pumpkins with them.

Warren: who's "them"? Tell me what Mayflower is.

Courson: Mayflower is the nursing home here in town, and we go there to make valentines this year, and every other year we've gone to do pumpkin-carving. It makes them smile, and it's neat to be able to go there for forty-five minutes and be able to affect them that way.

Other things, being a leader in the sorority and being an officer, working with the fifteen other officers to direct and run the chapter, I've learned a lot about working together with a group like that and being able to cooperate and being able to all use our interests for the best of the chapter. I've learned a lot about just being a leader, delegating to a committee there, on a much smaller scale than Fancy Dress, but, still, to get to conduct initiation was my job, and that was a big job, and obviously something very important to the life of the chapter, so I'd be able to delegate and to encourage the entire chapter to participate in activities. And just the friends I've met also through Kappa have been really neat. I love being a part of the Greek system.

Warren: Was there ever a point where you questioned whether you wanted to be in a sorority? Was it a decision for you?

Courson: Well, no, I don't even think it was a decision. Just coming from the South, sororities are sort of a big deal. My mom was not in a sorority, but most of my friends' moms were. I definitely knew that I wanted to at least go through Rush when I got here, just because it wasn't until January, and so being here in the fall made me see the kinds of girls that were members of the Greek system, and I knew it was something I wanted to go through, and then never had any doubts about rushing or pledging Kappa.

Warren: Tell me about Rush. What happens during Rush?

Courson: The freshmen dorms, the freshmen girls are just so chaotic and everybody's nervous. It's very hectic, and you don't get any work done because you're going from party to party. It's a neat experience, let alone the fact that you meet so many upper-classmen women, as a freshman, in January. I didn't know a whole lot of people, just friends of friends that I'd met during fall term. So it's an opportunity to meet people, and then to be able to see these same people. In a big school, you probably would never – you could feasibly not run into people you'd met during Rush, but here just because it's so small and such a tight-knit community, you run into the people you've met the very next day on the Hill or at class. It's neat to be able to, at least, even if you didn't end up pledging your sorority, you still end up building relationships with these people that you've met. It's not nearly as competitive here as Rush is at a big school, or nearly as exhausting, I don't think. I would recommend it. It's definitely a neat experience, let alone the fact that you're just going to meet people. It's something neat to do, I think.

Warren: Now, the women were having Rush in January?

Courson: Yes.

Warren: But back then weren't the men having –

Courson: Back then, men had fall Rush.

Warren: So what was that like?

Courson: Well, the guys had gotten to school and within two weeks had pretty much pledged their fraternity, you know, that they were going to be a part of for the next four years. So all fall term they were busy with pledge stuff and busy with their pledge classes and their pledge brothers and their fraternity brothers. We were not part of a Greek group yet, but there wasn't any sort of conflict between guys and girls. It didn't create any sort of problems having them Rush in the fall, and having us Rush in January.

Warren: So how did you decide which sororities to join?

Courson: Well, just through the week of Rush, I had met—I was just so impressed with Kappas, the way they put on Rush. You could tell that everybody just got along really well, that they weren't putting up a front, it didn't seem like, for the rushees, when I went through. The girls I knew fall term, a lot of them were Kappas. I just was impressed by the way they interacted with each other and interacted with the rushees. Everybody seemed very comfortable and at ease with one other and with us as rushees. I just decided, I thought that was a group I wanted to be a part of.

Warren: So how would you characterize the various sororities?

Courson: I think that—I mean, there are probably definitely stereotypes about the four sororities, or five sororities now, excuse me, now that Kappa Delta is here. But I think that all in all, I mean, W&L sororities are very, are probably are fairly homogenous because the student body is fairly homogenous, and that the five groups of girls, I think, get along really well. Of course, there are rivalries, and there's competition during rush, but I think as a Panhellenic Greek system here, I think we're pretty lucky to have five groups of girls that are all outstanding women, in parts of all groups, and everybody seems to get along fairly well. The campus is not divided among the five sororities, I wouldn't say, at all. I mean, there are definitely rivalries, obviously, but there are going to be rivalries during Rush. But I think we're lucky to have five such outstanding groups on one campus.

Warren: So are you going to characterize them for me?

Courson: Well, I just think they're simply stereotypes, but they're not – of course, not blanket stereotypes. I don't know.

Warren: I'd rather have a woman characterize them for me than asking a man to characterize them for me, but I understand if you're not willing to do it.

Courson: Well, I just don't want – I'm not exactly sure how I would characterize all five of them, so I'd better not leave anybody out.

Warren: Okay. I'm interested in that Rush Week, because when I first arrived last year, I can remember one night as I was leaving work, and I often work late, one night as I was leaving work, everybody was all dressed up, and it was a weeknight. And I'm going, what's going on here? Everybody looked completely different than they had two hours earlier. What's going on there? Take me to that whole thing.

Courson: Well, there are four rounds of parties. That's right, four rounds of parties. They get progressively – the parties get smaller in number as the sororities release girls, and girls release sororities. It's a mutual selection process, so there's a mutual release going on. So they get smaller, and they also get more formal and longer periods of talking. The first night is just very casual, just sort of an open house, is what it's called. Most of the sororities have a little song, a little ten-minute song program at the end of the night. Then the second night is skit night, which is a lot of fun, because you get to see, I think, the personalities of a lot of the girls, in the skits that they do.

The Kappas do a Kappa bandstand, which is a lot of fun. We have four different decades of – four different groups representing the decades of their songs and their dance routines and stuff like that, and that's the most entertaining night for the rushees and for the chapter, just because it's so fun to be able to get up there and perform like that, and just knowing that you're having so much fun. The rushees can tell that you're really enjoying what you're doing also.

Then the third night is sisterhood night, which is a little more serious. There's less rushees there, because people have been released and girls have released sororities that they're not necessarily interested in. So they don't go back to all of them. And then the last night is called preference night, and it's probably the most serious. Some groups of women really put on pressure on the rushees, and others sort of just make it known that they want you to be there, but they don't pressure you. That depends on sorority to sorority, I think. I think our group does a really good job of not pressuring the rushees, just making them feel really welcome and having them feel like they know that we really want them there, but we're not going to hate them the next day if they don't pledge Kappa. That's something that I pride Kappa on. I think that's a really neat way to do it.

Warren: Now, I'm trying to understand. This is happening campus-wide during one week?

Courson: Right. Well, it's changed—

Warren: So how do rushees be five different places in one night?

Courson: Well, because they have forty-minute parties. You have a forty-minute party, and then you go take a ten-minute break and go to the next place.

Warren: So these skits get done over and over again?

Courson: Well, when I went through Rush, I think they did the skits four times.

Warren: In one night.

Courson: In one night. And then my sophomore year, I think we still did it four times in one night. And in the last show they finally have cut the number of—as the number of girls disappears, or as the number of girls lessens, they allow the sorority to have fewer parties. So last year we only had to do it three times, and this year we had to do it three times. So by the last party, you're pretty punchy, and everything's funny. Everything's very exaggerated, I think. But it's a lot of fun.

Warren: Well, thank you. That really helps me. I've been trying to understand that.

Courson: You have an alternate. I go with a Rush group, and you have a rotation group, or you have a group of freshmen or rushees that you're in a group with, and you all go the same places together.

Warren: I see. So you're assigned by Panhellenic.

Courson: Right.

Warren: Into a group?

Courson: Right.

Warren: To move around as a unit?

Courson: Correct. One night you may go to Kappa first and [unclear] last. And the next night you may go to Pi Phi first. The order varies every night, also.

Warren: Okay. All right. Well, this makes a lot more sense to me. Thank you, Melissa. This has been very mysterious to me. I came through college in a time when sororities practically didn't exist. They didn't exist at my school. So it is Greek to me. So this is very helpful to me. So have you been involved in any sports?

Courson: Not varsity sports, but I've played intermurals through the sororities.

Warren: What kind of sports do the sororities play?

Courson: Well, the Women's Intermural Program is trying to gain strength and get a lot more participation. I think last night the girls played some indoor soccer. I think basketball is very popular with the girls because it's fun to get out there. I played basketball in high school, but I haven't played here, obviously, competitively, but it's fun to be able to get back out there and play. We went bowling for IMs the other night. We also have touch football and soccer and various other sports. Those are sort of fun. That's an area where the sororities get really competitive, just because it's fun to get out some aggression and get out there and be competitive, even though you know once you walk off the court it's all going to be fine again and you're not going to be carrying any grudges. But I haven't played any varsity sports or any competitive sports here, but I played IMs and definitely like to exercise a lot.

Warren: I think that whole program is really great.

Courson: The men's IMs programs, they get really competitive. They keep point totals and everything, but guys' IMs, especially basketball, I know, gets really competitive. But, again, it's something once you – nobody holds over any grudges after they leave the court.

Warren: So how aware are you at this point, ten years, eleven years later, that this place was once all male? Does that theme still – is it still an undercurrent here, or is that gone?

Courson: I would say, I mean, I think it's still an undercurrent, but it doesn't make me uncomfortable. I don't feel any resentment from my peers, because obviously they all came to W&L knowing it was co-ed. I don't even get really a sense of resentment from any faculty members that I'm aware of. I mean, I'm definitely not uncomfortable. I think some older alumni, there could be some sort of not resentment, but definitely an awareness of change and an awareness of how different this place is since there are females here now. I mean, there's definitely an awareness of the fact that W&L was single-sex at one time just because of the traditions. For example, in the gym, all the athletic plaques are all-male teams, and all male members in the Athletic Hall of Fame. I'm not bothered in the least bit by it. It doesn't make me feel uncomfortable. I think the university does definitely celebrate now, celebrate the fact that there are women here, and the great strides that the women here have made.

You can't help but be aware of the fact that W&L was once all male just because of its history, but I would say it's such a neat place now for women to be, that I think that women, for the most part, don't feel resentful or don't feel any resentment from anybody here, I would say. I'm sure there are some that do, but –

Warren: How about relations with girls from the other schools, other women's schools?

Courson: Well, we joke about them, but everybody that – I've had the opportunity to meet a lot of girls from girl's schools just because of fraternities where I usually am,

there's a lot of girls from other schools there, and they're such neat people, too. They made the choice to go to a single-sex school, and that's wonderful. They come here to visit, just like if I went to a single-sex school, I'm sure I would come here to visit. So there's not – we joke about it only when they get dates to things and W&L girls don't. There's a little bit of resentment there, but for the most part, I mean, they're definitely neat people, too, and nice girls. I spend time with them. They're here, a lot of them.

Warren: I assume that Fancy Dress is a time when that gets to be an issue.

Courson: Yes, there are definitely a lot of girls from other schools here, and we always joke that we can tell when people are hunting for dates because they all of a sudden show up here en masse, with tons of girls in tow, to parties, the week and weekend before Fancy Dress, because they're trying to get dates. But that's sort of a joke. I like for them to come experience it, too. I think that's neat. And I would, of course, want to be here if I didn't go here, I'd be wanting to get a date to Fancy Dress or to any other date function. There's no hatred between W&L girls and "road school girls" at all.

Warren: One issue I didn't ask you about when we were talking about sororities, is the idea of sorority houses. What's the feeling on whether or not –

Courson: Well, I mean, we're all, of course, very excited and anxious about getting houses, just because the facilities we have now, they're just not adequate for what we need. They provide us a place to store things and to have meeting space, but the whole chapter can't even fit comfortably in –

Warren: What kind of facilities do you have?

Courson: We have suites in Gaines Hall right now, which has a bedroom and an office and a big living room. We are able to have our computer there and have a copy machine there, and keep files of all the paperwork that we need and storage space for Rush materials. So in that vein, they're excellent, because we used to have to rent storage space in town to keep everything. I mean, they're definitely a nice thing to have

and provide us with small meeting places and a bedroom for when we have Kappa traveling consultants come visit. They can stay there.

But to think that once W&L does decide to get sorority houses, all the women will be ecstatic, just because most of us have friends at other schools where they have sorority houses, and they just provide such a neat, a gathering place, a meeting place, a place to eat and socialize and stuff like that, that W&L doesn't have right now.

Warren: Is there a place on campus where you all are hoping the houses will be, or do you know anything?

Courson: Well, just from what I know, the proposed location is the area behind the law school. It's called the Piney Woods, it's sort of back behind the law school, near the student pavilion. It's very woody right now, but that obviously would clear it out, and I think that's great. That would be a pretty – not maybe ideal, but a good location on campus, because it would approximate everything. All the sorority houses would be able to be in one area, which would be sort of neat, and would probably foster a lot of Panhellenic spirit, I think. That's the only location I've heard of so far.

Warren: Are they going to build a second footbridge?

Courson: I don't know.

Warren: I doubt it. I doubt it seriously. So at this point, to have parties, what do you all do?

Courson: Well, we have a lot of parties in the old Delta House, in the basement. The Delta Tau Deltas have left campus. That facility is now available to sororities to have parties in their basement. We either have them there, or sometimes we go to Zollman's and have them at Zollman's. When we have mixers, we generally have them at the fraternity house, with the fraternity we're mixing with, and that makes sense.

There aren't an awful lot of – we have a spring formal that we have outside at the Dell, which is nice, if the weather's nice. I mean, there definitely are still locations to have parties, just some of them are a little bit restrictive.

Warren: Each sorority has a formal in the spring, or do you do them together?

Courson: No, each sorority has a formal. I'm not sure that everybody else has a spring formal. We have a fall and a spring. I don't think everybody else has a spring formal. I mean, some people have had formals in January and stuff that we haven't had.

Warren: And you pray it doesn't rain.

Courson: Right. If it does rain, I think the pavilion probably would be the next location.

Warren: How do you book Zollman's?

Courson: I don't know.

Warren: Parties just seem to happen out there. I've been curious about that.

Courson: You might have to call Mr. Zollman.

Warren: There really is a Mr. Zollman?

Courson: There is a Mr. Zollman. I know there is. I've not met him or had any contact with him, but I'm pretty sure there is. It's not through the school, I don't think, that you book it.

Warren: No, no, I'm sure it's not, because it's private. But that's a big deal, if it's a private place.

Courson: Right. There must be some way to book it. I think you call Mr. Zollman.

Warren: Okay. I need to flip the tape over.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Warren: I have just about gone through all the questions I have. Is there anything you'd like to talk about?

Courson: No, I can't think of anything.

Warren: As you wind down your career, and you've had your great moment of glory.

Courson: Nothing else I can think of, necessarily.

Warren: Is there anything that you really wanted to do while you were here that you haven't been able to do?

Courson: Well, I ran for president of our sorority and lost to a really good friend of mine, but in hindsight, I don't know if I would have been able to do that and be chair of Fancy Dress, so I think everything happens for a reason. So maybe that was why that happened. I also enjoyed the leadership positions I did have in the sororities, so I wouldn't trade those for anything. Other than that, I applied for various committees. I'm very competitive. I've applied to give tours once or twice, and was not accepted on that committee. I always thought that would have been neat and a fun thing to do, but—

Warren: So you applied to the admissions department?

Courson: Well, it's called the Student Recruitment Committee. It's run by students, but it's connected to the Admissions Department. The numbers of people that apply for that are pretty large, the number of people they accept. But I definitely don't have any regrets. I've loved everything that I have done here and wouldn't trade any of my experiences for another one, I don't think, at this point.

Warren: So they probably have a test for that, giving tours, to see if you can walk backwards, right?

Courson: My roommate gives them, and also I've seen her having trouble walking backward.

Warren: I'm always very impressed. When they get to the curb, they keep right on going. How do they do that?

Well, Melissa, this has been really fun for me. I've really enjoyed getting to know you a little bit. Friday night I was just so full of admiration, and I said, "I get to interview Melissa on Wednesday."

Courson: Well, I loved doing it. It is nice to know. I mean, obviously, people appreciate Fancy Dress, because it is probably the biggest weekend of the year. But I enjoyed doing it, and I've heard nothing but positive comments. It just makes me feel

really good, and I am proud of myself about the fact that I was able to do that. I enjoyed doing it.

Warren: So you don't know yet who your successor will be?

Courson: No, we won't know until spring term, a couple – some people I know have talked to me. But it will be interesting to see who ends up interviewing. I mean, it's such a big time because everybody is sort of waiting to see what other commitments are going to be involved and definitely decide whether or not they're going to apply. I would have nothing but encouragement for anybody that wanted to do it, because it's so rewarding and definitely a neat experience to be able to work on this for so long, and then to be able to see it all come together at the last minute. I was in the gym until six on Friday, but I went up in the balcony, just by myself, Friday night, and looked out across the gym and just thought it was so neat. I was very proud of myself, and just thought it was neat to go look out over the gym and see everybody having such a good time and know how much of a part I had in it. I enjoyed doing it.

Warren: Well, you should. I'm glad you took that moment to enjoy it. Thank you, Melissa.

Courson: Thank you.

[End of Interview]