UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE
ROSEWORTHY AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

This is an interview with David John Purdie on the 29th of August 2023, at the Roseworthy campus. David is the manager of the residential Roseworthy College and has a lot to do with students. He's been here over 13 years, so we're looking forward to hearing the modern update of what's happening at Roseworthy. So over to you, David. What brought you here in the first place?

Thanks for having me David. Yeah, I've been part of the University of Adelaide for 28 years now and spent 15 years working at the University North Terrace campus, and my background is largely a finance and commerce background. So, starting in finance, working my way up and becoming a finance manager, working for different departments and divisions within the university and yeah, toward the end of 2010, the opportunity came about for the role of a new principal or the manager of the Roseworthy Residential College. And yeah, took the opportunity really for a bit of a tree change. I'd been working in finance but also really enjoyed the relationship side of that particular role and providing service to the clients including the current residential college, one of my clients and yeah, it was a big decision at the time, although I've always been an Adelaide boy living around sort of 35-40 minutes from the campus. The position was an on-campus position, so it was on call 24/7 living on site, and so yeah, had to think about it quite carefully. Came up and scoped out the schools, had two young boys at the time and my wife. So, I had to sort of move the family and look at the impact that it might be for them just changing their both primary school age at the time, changing schools and a new place of kind of residence and being available to students 24/7 and the impact that might have just on my personal life and on my family's life. But yeah, I sort of took the punt and yeah made the move and commenced in the role in basically the start of January 2011 there. You know, it was an exciting time, I guess, for Roseworthy in many ways because we had just constructed the new veterinary health center. There'd been the decision in 2008 to establish a, you know, a veterinary school in South Australia for the first time. And so, I saw with the role and opportunity and some upside I guess to the campus in terms of its potential for growth and increasing student cohort, a very diverse student cohort. And so it was, yeah, it was the opportunity to really come, I guess, and be part of the creation of something. So, the school had just been kind of formed and was being formed into the new Animal Veterinary Sciences School. We were punching out new curriculum. We were looking at rejuvenating some of the facilities around the campus. I knew that Roseworthy had some great history in agriculture and oenology, winemaking. You see some very famous names on the honour boards at Roseworthy. So, I knew it had a very impressive history and was known across Australia and internationally. And I guess it was the opportunity to come and be part of something exciting, something new with the development and commencement of the veterinary school and also to be part of a community. So the university is quite a big organisation. We have lots of students and lots of staff, lots of opportunities. But I saw Roseworthy as a real, its own unique community, largely because of its geographical kind of position. And it was close enough to the mod cons of kind of the city and Gawler and those conveniences but also just far enough that yeah, you had to look at creating and building relationships with staff and students. And so, I saw the opportunity of something, yeah, pretty special. So yeah, made the move in 2011, moved onto campus and it's all kind of gone from there.

So, you were living in the House on the Hill as we [old collegians ie] would know it, The old students, The old principal's residence?

That's right, the house on the hill. So, I was there for, I was there for 11 years. So Covid and the requirement and really the growth of the campus too in that all rooms have been filled on campus for a number of years now. So, we've been taking back and repurposing houses that were originally available for staff or even for postgraduate students and offering them to kind of undergraduate students because of the growth of the campus. So yeah, I was there for 11 years. It was a great opportunity for the kids and my family. I guess in some respects, you know, kind of growing up on the campus and some of the facilities that come with that. So, they got to run around on ovals and tennis courts and swimming pools. And I guess having the farm, you know, around our house was lovely to be able to wake up and see cows and sheep and go for a walk and see the horses and alpacas. So yeah, it was a good experience. And the house on the hill was certainly serviceable. And, you know, being one of the original dwellings on campus, it was quite an honour and a privilege to live in that house for, you know, for a number of years.

If only walls could talk, you would have had some interesting insights into the past.

Absolutely!

So, let's talk about the students. When you first start, I suppose it's the student's life on campus has changed a bit as the courses have changed but when you first came here and let's talk about the progression of I guess I know you've innovated a few ideas and so forth, some of the things that they do and what it's like to be a student on the campus these days.

Sure, David. It was a real eye-opening experience for me when I started here because I'd probably be honest, I was pretty naive coming in. I'd worked in a lot of administration and thought I understood the university quite well. But the whole notion of a residential environment, a 24/7 environment, the college environment and having young kids at the time and not teenagers and kids in their early 20s as I do now. So, it was a new experience learning about the student life cycle, the student behaviours. It was an interesting time that I came because there was still a little bit of unrest. The university had moved agriculture from Roseworthy to the Waite campus, so a lot of the steep history at Roseworthy, which had been built around oenology winemaking and agricultural science had largely been moved to Waite. And so, my first year on campus and in this role was the last year of the agricultural students. So, they were third year Aggies that were here. They gave me probably a bit of a hard time, to be perfectly honest, and I completely understand that because they saw, I think the campus probably, you know, the opportunity, they really enjoyed their time at the campus and they would have probably loved agriculture in many respects to stay out at Roseworthy because they would have had the full the live-in experience. But yeah, but it was the establishment, I guess, of a new cohort of students. So, it was vet students, it was animal science students. And then we formed two new programs in my time here as well. So, animal behaviour

and also, veterinary technology. So, all of these programs that are associated effectively with animals, with sort of vet being, I guess, the sort of flagship program. And it brought with it, you know, a large change of students. So, we're talking about very, very high achieving students in year 12, very high Atar scores, a much larger international cohort. So, the Vet program taking in students, you know, between sort of 20 to 30 international students per year. So, it certainly added a new mix and diversity to the student group that were on campus. But I guess what I did, what I did see early on, I think I mentioned it previously, but it was just the importance of building, you know, building a community. And in terms of people who are coming to study at Roseworthy and many moving away from home for the first time, really trying to support students deal with that, that notion of isolation and homesickness, whether people are moving, you know, some are moving an hour up from Adelaide and others are moving from, you know, Western Australia and Queensland and then others coming from know the country regions or overseas. So, very diverse mix of students with varying degrees of needs. But I think the one thing that seems to bond all students together was a just living, living together in the same environment. So that meant studying together, it meant socialising together, playing sport together, hanging out, going through life's ups and downs together, and seeing the real closeness of that could be experienced for that and genuine care and concern of students for, you know, for each other and also for their general love of animals. So, you always sort of had this common bond of why students were here. They're all caring about animals and looking at studying the same thing. And then this notion of students, you know, kind of living and spending all of their time together. And so for me, it was a real opportunity to look at that life cycle process of a student coming in, you know, being welcomed to the campus by our student leaders, you know, settling into rooms, making and building some relationships with families because you want mums and dads to know that that this is somewhere that, you know, I can feel like my son or my daughter is going to flourish, that they're going to do well, that they're safe, that they're supported. So, a bit of reassurance to parents building some frameworks that did, you know, provide a, you know, a safe and welcoming environment for students. You know, that starts with orientation week. So there's still a few you know, there are a few probably rituals and events and activities that were here when I got here that don't happen anymore because probably the world has changed a bit and things have moved on and certainly around some types of behaviour and then there's other things that that actually have kind of, you know, stood the test of time and, you know, and if they're done the right way can be fun and create some real bonds between students so often after that particular week of orientation week or as many people call it now Welcome Week. You know, it just provides the opportunity that when students start their program the first week of academic teaching, you know, they've made some friends, they've maybe had a little bit of fun. They feel comfortable in their surroundings. They feel like Roseworthy is a place that they can hopefully call home and that they're ready to get into their studies.

Can you give me some examples of some of the things you do in the Welcome Week?

I can, I can. So, you know, everything nowadays from just, you know, we've got, we're lucky to have the pool here. So, we'll have you know, we'll have a swimming carnival and some novelty pool events. We have now what's called a UV or a paint party where everyone kind of comes dressed in white and then gets splashed with a whole bunch of UV colour. And again, we have food and then some dancing and is always a lot of fun when everyone's sort of glowing, glowing in coloured paint. We've, we still have the Iron Guts championship which is generally like a bit of a food eating competition to see who can be the champion of that, each particular year. We do everything nowadays, we do everything from kind of a wine tours to movie nights, a night, probably a night at the pub. Yeah, dinners and really an opportunity for people generally to just get to know each other. So, we'll always add some, some sort of welcome, yeah. Some welcome games into those activities just so that people, you know, it might be a challenge of going and finding somebody with the same initial as you or same hobby or the same dog or cat name or anything that involves students having to probably get a little bit out of their comfort zone and going and making some new friends and meeting some new people. And generally, yeah, by the end of the, and we have a welcome dinner at the end of the week, which is always a lot of fun, all dressed in pink and black colours. So, everyone comes in their pink and black attire and gets them used to the kind of the Roseworthy, the Roseworthy colours and yeah, just to really create that sense of community and that sense that you know, you've got a real opportunity to. Yeah, to meet some new people to learn a lot about, you know, different backgrounds and different cultures. And so, you know I'm a firm believer that the residential students and the college students get to really yeah, grow and develop I guess, during their time at studies because they have these opportunities to whether it might be dealing with a little bit of conflict, whether it might be forming some new relationships, whether it might be taking on leadership, whether that be in college roles or in sport. They really get the opportunity to kind of, yeah, step out of their comfort zones, take on some responsibilities, learn a little bit about you know what it's like to lead people and manage people. And a lot of them are learning about how to look after animals, but it also gives them the opportunity to deal with the human element and people because they're going to be dealing with, you know, animal clients down the track. And that's built into a lot of their curriculum. But yeah, they get to, they just get to have that experience of really, you know, meeting a diverse group. And we've been lucky enough to have some relationships that have, you know, started at college and stood the test of time and Roseworthy marriages and Roseworthy babies and not all necessarily do stand the test of time and that's just all part of young people growing up. But yeah, we've got lots of people that have actually found their life partners here at Roseworthy and during their studies and yeah and ended up moving on from Roseworthy and yeah buying houses and working in similar fields and yeah staying together as life partners. So, it really provides that opportunity for a pretty special environment.

You said that when you first come here, there was the remnant of the old animal science?

Agriculture.

Yeah, and that was their last year, I think? So was the tavern still around then or was...

It was, it was!

When did that finish?

Yeah so, I guess it is one of those things that I'll kind of be remembered for in some respects, good or bad, but I guess, you know, the changing of the guard from agriculture through to animal science and veterinary science meant a large change in the demographics for the campus. So, you know, Roseworthy College being a male only college and campus up until the 70's with the invention or introduction of the you know the veterinary school we went from kind of even being that sort of 90% male / female demographic through to around 75% female demographic. So, while we had the tavern and the tavern was, you know, was had its benefits and it's use, you know, it's uses, and we could have some bands in there and have some good functions in there, and it was even an opportunity for some staff, you know, knock offs. And we had quiz nights in there and balls and those sorts of things. It probably just wasn't sustainable from a commercial perspective in terms of it being run as a tavern. So probably going back around to or would have been reasonably early in my tenure, probably around 2015, 2016 I think, we ended up turning the tavern into a gym. So, we renovated it into a pretty, pretty specky gym and it's yeah, it receives a lot of use from all of our students now. And we've got the, you know, the ability to have a licensed...the dining hall in the Roseworthy College Hall here is licensed and effectively has become the sort of catering cafe bar operation for the campus, yeah. Within the residential, within the, the college hall here now. So yeah, so, the tavern was a loss in some respects, and I still would love to have one because of some of the functions and that you can kind of bring to the campus and even from outside community and, you know, sports groups and those sorts of things. But yeah, I think we were just sort of moving in a bit of a new direction at that point. And the, the gym's been well received.

Okay, so that, so how many sorts of residential students were here when you started? And I guess it's progressed over time as well. So, what, set me through that sort of change?

Yeah, so, when I started, we were at about a half, we were about 50% capacity. So, we were at about 100 at the beginning of 2011. At one-point pre the establishment of the vet school, I think we dropped down to close to 50 students, so the campus was in a pretty precarious position I think around, just not enough critical mass here to sustain everything from student support services and student unions and yeah, services activities, the dining hall, the cafe. So, it had slowly started building its way back up when I commenced in 2011. So, we were at 100 residential students and at that stage we were able to accommodate families and academic staff. So, we had lots of academic staff coming into the Vet Program from overseas. So, from all sorts of different areas from North America to Southeast Asia so, to the UK and Europe. So, a lot of specialist academics needed to come and kind of find somewhere to settle down for three months, six months before they sort of, you know, made their grounding close to campus. So,

we'd often accommodate academics, and we'd accommodate families here. So, we're able to do that probably for my first three or four years on campus. But slowly we kept building increased student numbers, increased reputation of the College again. And within sort of four or five years we were back to 100% occupancy. So, just under...

Which is how many?

So, just under 200 students that reside here, about 200 beds. And so, yeah, we've been pretty much full for the last five or six years now. Each year, you know, with a small wait list of students looking for places on site, which has meant that some students have found their place to study at Roseworthy by living in Gawler or living in the Barossa Valley or Roseworthy, some a bit closer to the city, some will commute. Even some of our international students, like places like Mawson Lakes and sort of halfway between the city and campus. But yeah, we had the growth of the college to get back to full occupancy. And what that brought back to was some opportunities to re-engage in some other student life. So, you know where we used to have, for example, a male football team which had stopped by the time I had arrived because again, we just didn't quite have the numbers. You know, we were able to then morph into running our own internal netball competition with, you know, with eight netball teams, all of Roseworthy students. Being able to put in two volleyball teams into the local volleyball competition in Gawler, having a women's and a men's basketball team playing in Gawler. So, you know playing touch football and AFL nines as we do now on a Wednesday evening with our own internal groups. So, we've been able to really, you know, bolster some of our sports again, which has been really good and hold a lot of our internal competitions. So, one of the first activities I did when I when I got here, the sports courts and the swimming pool. So, there were some facilities that were quite rundown. And so, you know, we've been able to kind of reline the swimming pool, kind of restore the grandstand. We were able to refurbish all of the tennis and basketball netball courts. So, we did that pretty early on to provide an opportunity for students' day or night to be able to go down and flick lights on, you know, find someone to play tennis with, do some basketball or netball practice. We run an annual doubles and singles tennis competition. So yeah, I saw sport as being a real important element of the campus. A, it brings people together, particularly just playing any kind of team sport and team environment. Yeah, provides an opportunity for people to really form close bonds and close friendships and then just the mental health aspect. So, you know, Vet is a very challenging program and so is animal science, animal behaviour, vet tech, all of our programs dealing with, you know, injured animals and a lot of care and compassion is sort of natural elements of our student body. And so just providing some physical opportunity to play sport, to sort of blow the cobwebs out the gym. We have running groups as well on campus. One elite runner actually this year who's representing the State in cross country running, which is quite incredible and managing that with her studies. So, yeah, we're able to really focus on rejuvenating a lot of the sport programs. So, while they might not be the same sports that was perhaps being played back in the agriculture days and when we were predominantly male students, it's just yeah, it's just morphed into some different sports that meet our current cohort.

Okay, let's work through the residential students like, they come here as a first year, do they have... I know you have residential blocks and houses. What's the sort of process as they move through to be more senior students?

Yeah, so, generally speaking, and we offer kind of the two types of accommodation on campus. So, the residential hall one, which has 70 individual bedrooms and dwellings and then the remainder of the properties are essentially three and five-bedroom houses across in the Custance Centre and also what we call the campus houses, which are yeah, on the eastern side of Mudla Wirra Road and some other houses that are dotted across the campus. So, generally speaking, we like to put our new undergraduate students into the residential halls and the dorms. And that way that's, it's quite often a very social environment. It's a very well supported environment. So, students have appointed senior resident leaders who undergo a full week of training prior to our orientation week. So, they're trained in a whole range of areas from kind of mental health, to do a full two-day mental health first aid course. They're trained in things like drug and alcohol education, you know, bystander training and consent training, which is really important for our students in terms of building healthy and respectful relationships. First aid training, sort of a full day of senior first aid training, and we'll do event sort of management training. So, how do we structure good healthy events that achieve what we're looking for in terms of students having fun but doing it, you know, in a respectful and a safe way. So, in the residential dorms, yeah, students have basically, there's four leaders for the for those 70 students. So, they get really well looked after and supported and their basically their first port of call if they're having some issues adjusting to life on campus. As I said a bit of the homesickness or yeah, just yeah, being away from home, learning a little bit of responsibility, getting to and from the campus and into Gawler and all of those sorts of things. They've got some students that they can look to and you know some peer leaders and also a bit of help academically. So, how do I tackle certain courses and subjects and how do I get into good study routines? What's going to be, you know, beneficial for me to do to be successful academically? So, often they'll come into the residential halls. They'll spend sometimes a year or two years in the residential halls. Vet Science is a six-year program. So, some of some of our residents do stay with us not all of them, but some will stay virtually the journey from the time they commence full time at Roseworthy, which is second year of the Vet program, right through to the final year of the program where they undertake their student rotation. So, some will stay up to five years. I have had other students just through leave of absences or personal, you know, personal circumstances, staying anywhere up to kind of, you know, six or seven years. Some students did one academic program and then transferred into the Vet Program. So, I think I've probably had someone who stayed here eight years, you know, which is a long period of time on campus. So, generally they'd spend two years in the halls, make their friends, work out who they might like to live with if they're going to stay longer on campus. And then they'd apply for a room or a house, you know, generally as a group of students to say, you know, "We've got a good group who we think will study well together, live well together and be able to support each other and could we apply for a house the following year?"

So, do they have to pay for that or is it the same?

No, no. At the moment it's all same fees and same services. So, students get you know, we probably had, you know, we've gone from back in the old days, I guess it was probably three. Three meals a day, seven days a week, you know, 21 meals. Yeah, 21 meals for the week. Whereas we found that our model or the model that we've used for the last 13 years that's worked well has been to, to provide resident dinner catering for students Monday to Friday. Quite a few students do you know, head home on weekends. So, anyone who's sort of Adelaide based will often head home and play maybe some sport or catch up with mum or dad or a partner on a weekend. So, the campus kind of sort of halves a bit on the weekends. So, we say students self-cater for their weekends and their breakfast and lunch and then we all come together for a nice dinner in the evening time.

On Saturday and Sunday?

No, not on the weekends. So, on Monday to Friday.

So how do the students in the accommodation blocks, you don't really have a kitchen and so how... do what do they do?

Yeah so, we've got in the residential dorms we actually have we have four, there effectively broken into four wings and we've got kitchenettes in each wing, and then we've got two full kitchens in what we call our big kitchen, which is the student main kitchen, which is the sort of social precinct for the students staying in residential Hall one. It's a couple of kitchens, big tables, lounges. We've got, you know, sort of TV in there and a donated pool table actually from ROCA [Roseworthy Old Collegians Association] a full-size pool table as well. And that's their kind of social space. So, on the weekend, the... particularly the international and interstate students that are here and country students, you know, they'll often cook their meals together, you know, watch a movie together in those spaces, do a little bit of debrief before they start their week.

Okay. now, what's it like for the for the male students? It's sort of reversed because before they used to dominate, now they're the minority here so it's a different game for them as well. So, what happens? How do they get on?

Yeah, look, it changes and each year level is slightly different. So, while there is a very distinct trend that there are more, you know female students than male students in the program, some years there's more than others like our latest group. I think out of about 100 vet students, I think there's about nine, nine to ten males. So that's a very heavily dominated female cohort. I think that the male students, you know they're able to form their own group for some things, for example, so they you know, they'll have their own basketball team, and they'll head out and spend some time together. But I guess, you know, the

nature of the campus and the community is that everyone really yeah, everyone really gets along. And most of our activities are really kind of centred on being very gender neutral and really inclusive. So even when we organise social sports, we play mixed netball, we play mixed touch football, we play mixed AFL nines, we do mixed social tennis tournaments, we play mixed volleyball. So, most yeah, most of our activities are actually, you know, or certainly our intra campus activities are, you know, are mixed, which works really well. And then, I guess they get the opportunity through our annual event which is still on the calendar and probably our biggest sporting event for the year being the Waite versus Roseworthy sporting event is where we will play a game of women's AFL, a full game of women's AFL football, of men's AFL football, of women's netball and of mixed netball. So, we actually have four sports that we have between the Waite students and the Roseworthy students. The irony is that the Waite students are effectively all the students that used to be associated with Roseworthy because that's generally the students that are studying ag and agricultural science. And that's a really yeah, that's a really nice day. They come up in the afternoon, we play all the sports, we do, we do medals for, you know, best on ground and everyone has a big barbecue and then we have a marquee and usually a band or a DJ and a bit of a dance afterwards.

And what time of year is that?

Yeah, that happens in October every year, yeah and its a, yeah, it's something that everybody looks forward to. Covid, Covid kind of stopped, the events happened every year. The camping side, so Waite students would often camp the night here so roll out their swags and tents, you know, safely on the oval and camp for the night. So that stopped for a couple of years over Covid and then it recommenced 2022, last year.

And so is that just before the semester ends or...?

Yeah, pretty much so it'll be for this, in this calendar year, it'll be what we call week 11. There's 12 weeks of sort of academic teaching this semester, so it's kind of a week before they finish. They have one more week of teaching before they have an opportunity for swat vac and completing their exams and their academic studies for the year.

Okay, now we've talked a lot about the residential students. Now what sort of ratios is there for outside or outside students who come here on a daily basis?

Yeah, well, that's a good point and I guess there's probably well, there is ...there's far more day students now than there is residential students. So, if you look at our current statistics, we've got close to a thousand students that do come across or that are undertaking activities of study out here at Roseworthy. So, some are involved in the Vet Program, others animal science, animal behaviour, vet tech, some coming out to do courses associated with agriculture. So, livestock production and some other courses that we

do still run here. So, for example, the agricultural students will be here maybe a day or two days a week as they approach their second and third years of agriculture studies. So, it's not that we don't see the agricultural students, but they're just not here full time to be able to stay within the, you know, within the residential college anymore. But I guess what you find is that, you know, students are looking for different things with their study experience. So, some of the some of the residents are here because they really do want the community that comes with that, the opportunity to kind of make university as you know, a sort of big part of what they do and of their life. And there's other people that are studying that might be a bit more mature age. We've got people with children who are studying. We've got others who are, you know, got quite a lot of work commitments or outside sport commitment who are happy to come to the campus, I guess, undertake their core activities, either their lectures or their tutes and pracs and then sort of head home to their life away from campus.

So, the... so how do people travel here? They come up by train or bus or what happens.

Yeah, so at the moment, no it's one of the challenges we do have is that there isn't public transport to Roseworthy. So, Roseworthy, the University puts on its own inter-campus bus services between the Waite campus, the North Terrace campus and Roseworthy campus. So, that runs each day, Monday to Friday, mornings and afternoons. And then we also put on a shuttle bus, a free shuttle bus, for students to be able to get to the Gawler train station. So again, morning sort of afternoon and evening so that they can get to and from Adelaide if they need to. Other students will drive, lots of car parking spaces which is a benefit that we have, not one of the challenges that we have in the city. So yeah, a mixture of carpooling, driving, taking the bus and then those students that live and reside here.

So, with the...with that sort of or you say the residential was one group and then the day people, is there a sort of a demarcation between the two, like do they see themselves as being different?

Probably, they probably do in that I think generally what happens and we have a lot of life that occurs on campus and, you know, things from quiz nights to, as I say, our sporting events, our Waite-Roseworthy event. Some stuff is just college specific. So, run by the college for college students and then other activities are actually run as, as all inclusive, you know all students can attend. But certainly, I think what you find is that the residential students seem to you know, they seem to be the epicentre, or they seem to create, I guess, a lot of the life that happens on campus. Some students might find that hard in terms of the day students who perhaps don't quite feel part of that, and some don't want to because they're quite happy with, yeah, with coming to campus and then heading home. But certainly, there is, there's just a closeness I think, that you get from, you know, from living next door to people from sharing house with people, from going on morning runs, swims in the pool, catching up at the gym, debriefing your day. You know, each night at the dinner, at the dinner table or in the dining room, you know, there is just the closeness that does come from being residential. So, certainly there's no intention in that all of our

students are, yeah are treated the same. And we have a big ball you know run by the student association, ABSA, recently had 450, you know, attendees, students...

That was here?

It was at the Hilton. So, and that's all students, all partners, staff and so, yeah, it can be a mixture of, activities that, that all students, you know, will go along to. And then there'll be some, some Roseworthy College specific activities for people who are just kind of here.

Oh yeah so, a while ago you talked to me about the influence of Covid and the ongoing implications of it. So, let's walk through that a bit more.

Sure. I mean, 2020 was you know, was a very difficult period for lots of industries and for universities. It was really tricky in terms of obviously students that had to return home to their place of origin and we had to then kind of morph into online teaching in a very quick fashion. So, our academic staff did an absolute fantastic job under, you know, really trying circumstances to move a lot of their content online so that they could actually continue to teach students. And but being a face-to-face program, very challenging to teach our students without them actually physically being here. So come March of 2020, many students returned home and within the college, too, we probably went down to about 50 students again that decided to stay in college and the other remaining 150 odd decided to go home to their states of origin or to their, you know, to wherever their family support was during those sort of real intense periods of lockdown. So, that was tough, and it was challenging. But we yeah, we were able to teach, you know, as best we could online during that period of time. We continued to run the dining room. We had students coming in and, you know, masked up and social distancing and receiving their meals and wandering back to their rooms. And we had specific, you know, specific isolation wings. So, the old house on the hill became a became a Covid house where students would test positive and go and spend their isolation periods in that particular property before returning back to their dorms and houses. So, there was, you know, it was really intense amount of support. We, of course, had to get students back from interstate. So, we would... we actually co-opted a hotel in the city that we could actually fly students back in or they'd drive back in, do their two-week isolation period in a hotel in town, and then come back onto campus. So, a real challenging, yeah, a real challenging period. 2020, 20/2021 difficult as well. And then, yeah, slowly coming out of that and into, I guess, you know, some normality again. But it was a real interesting environment because colleges are places of community. They're places where you come to gather, where you want to have interaction with people, where you want to meet people. And so, trying to enforce some rules on some young, some young students to be able to say, well, I'm sorry, but you can only have, you know, four people in that room or ten people in that room. If you were using the, you know, the square meterage rules that were in place by governments at the time, you're not allowed to go and visit people from other houses or your hall's people have to stay together your house people have to stay together. You can't go and visit a home and then come back to campus! You have to stay at one or

the other. You know, really challenging times for everybody and particularly young people who are potentially or are in the you know, that should be in the best period of their life in terms of young, healthy, you know, exploring the world and each other and the, you know, and playing sport and all of those things and having some fun and learning, you know, a really difficult experience, I think, for young people over those couple of years. And so, we did the best we could. We ran, you know, I think we ran 90% really of events. We did...we just had to do them slightly differently. You know, we had to, you know, take names at all of our events. We had to do all the Covid check ins at all of our events and activities. We obviously had sanitiser and social distancing. So, we moved all of our tables and reconfigured the dining room and other spaces to be able to make sure that we met all of those restrictions. So, we yeah, we tried our best over that Covid period to pretty much live as normally as we possibly could. We ended up yeah, we still played sports. We did, yeah, pretty much 90% of what we could do under the rules that were imposed at the time. But certainly it's... you can see some of the students coming into university now and even into the college and I guess those couple of years of particularly our Year 11s and 12s, who are now coming through university in the College of kind of being a little bit isolated, learning to kind of live their lives a bit through their, you know, their technology devices, you know, learning in an online environment, maybe not socializing as much in their, in those years. I think it's certainly created, you know, a bit of a change in terms of some of our engagement and not just here at college or universities, but, you know, I'm seeing it in some other facets of life and trying to get volunteers. And yeah, I think just getting back to pre-COVID normalities across the university sector and certainly within the college environment is probably going to take some time because we almost yeah, we almost had those couple of years of students where we, we were actively almost discouraging them from engaging in social activities and being around people. And I think that habitually some people have kind of got a bit used to that and a bit comfortable with that. And so, yeah, getting back into the pre-COVID fullness, if you like, of student life on campus, I think will take a little bit of time. It's getting there and I think it's certainly achievable again. But it might take a few years, I think.

Did you, did it affect the completion rates and that sort of thing?

A little bit. So, we probably had some students that did, you know, took the opportunity when they returned home and maybe some international students to return home to their home countries who decided, "Look, I'll, (you know) maybe completing my animal science or veterinary science program is probably, you know, not for me or change of circumstance," but having said that, our retention rate was across Roseworthy courses and programs was very strong. So, a lot of students that are studying animal related programs and veterinary science have... are very passionate about it. They've been wanting to do whatever since they were young. It's very competitive to get into the Vet Program. So often students have achieved a very high Atar. They've written applications. They've... we did have an interview process that we don't do anymore, but for entry into the Vet Program. But they've worked really, really hard. They've applied sometimes at multiple universities to receive the opportunity to study vet science. So yeah, we had a very high rate of students who returned. And even in that Covid year of 2020, within the college, I

was, I think I had maybe one or two spare rooms in semester two. But between March and July, for the start of semester two, I actually had the college pretty much full again, which was, yeah which was heartening. People wanted to come back. They wanted to engage back face to face. They wanted to complete their studies. And I think overall we've...yeah, we've had a very good return rates. It was challenging. We actually started. So, our new program, the Veterinary Technology Bachelor program, we started in 2020. So, the first year of that program we had some very good enrolments, and we had close to 80 enrolments that year, which was far surpassed what we were really anticipating. We were thinking maybe, you know, 40 so it was probably close to double that. We had a big commencement and a brand-new program and, you know, and Covid hit. So, we were establishing staff, we were establishing the curriculum. So, it was pretty tough going for those students coming into a three-year program having started in the Covid year. But we yeah, we did well. We had really good completion rates. The students, you know, to their credit, they really, they really hung in. They got used to online learning. They completed what they had to do. They came back; they engaged in the practical component of their courses. And overall, I think, yeah, we were quite lucky with students who have returned to study here at Roseworthy.

Okay, what about the staff? I have met some staff who were keen on...I guess the staff, I don't know. They felt different to the Adelaide campus staff, not as in the work, just that they felt because they were in a community setting or a more confined setting that was... they liked it and we're trying to promote some things like that. So, is that actually happened or…?

Yeah look, absolutely. I mean, you know, the reality is we are part of the University of Adelaide, we're part of a wonderful institution that has some, some fantastic history. But yeah, staff and students do often say, you say, where do you study or where do you work? And they will often say "Roseworthy", as opposed to University of Adelaide Roseworthy campus. Or there is a notion of something that does bind you together. Here at Roseworthy, it's almost a little bit hard to put a finger on, but you do you do feel that sense of community and camaraderie of the people that do study here and work here. As I mentioned, we had lots of staff that have come from other environments. So, a lot of our staff have come from interstate. Some have come from overseas. And I guess there's just the nature of, and while we do travel to North Terrace and even and to Waite [campus], so we actually have interactions across all, across all three campuses. There is something that does just kind of bind Roseworthy staff and students together. There are things here that, you know, we do an annual review, for example. So, singing, dancing, comedy routines, staff, students, you basically put in an act that we do every year and having, you know, staff, you know, and vet staff, you know, doing an ABBA tribute bands and things like this. It's just... it's things that you don't often see at maybe some of the other campuses or some of the other programs. A lot of our staff do get to know students really by name. They have smaller cohorts. So, you might be teaching a cohort of perhaps 50 students in that particular year level. And so, yeah, if

you put a little bit of effort in, you do actually get to really see students as people and not just student numbers. And as I say, there's been... you know, we do an annual staff versus student cricket match, for example. So, playing students, you know, with staff between staff and students, we've had annual soccer matches, staff versus students. One of our microbiologists, you know, still plays on the student basketball team on a Monday night and he's in his mid-50s. So, there are interactions that do sort of occur here through having a small, you know, a small community and when things happen, you know, whether it be a, you know, a tragedy of a student passing, you know, that we've had, and you know and a car accident situation or those sorts of things, It really hits home because most... yeah, most students get to know each other quite well. Most staff get to know students, you know, some of which on a real sort of personal level and so those things can be quite deeply felt. And our vet students and our vet tech students, when they get to their final years, they're in what's called our student rotation. So, they're actually in clinics. They're giving first opinion to, you know, consults to clients, and then they're sort of double checking those and referring them back against our, you know, our GP's and our clinic staff. So, you're actually working alongside our staff in those kind of final years so you're kind of in that bridge between student almost becoming kind of peer and then graduating. And now we're seeing the, you know, the wonderful sort of full circle, which is where we're getting a lot of our graduates come back and return and work here at the campus. So, working within our equine department or our small animal clinics and our GPS and quite a few of them are, you know, are our college students. So, spent a lot of time here, you know, as students were part of the community gone out and, you know, got a few years of experience in the industry, in the sector, and then they're coming back to, yeah, to, to teach, to demonstrate, to do PhDs and to work in our clinics. So, for some, the cycle of sort of being attached to Roseworthy continues.

Sort of like the old Roseworthy badge.

Yeah.

I mean like all the old collegians. If you've been to Roseworthy, then you're part of a family and that continues right through industry and it's quite interesting so it's nice. Do they... do they have reunions and that sort of stuff? How does it... I mean, a lot of them are spread all around Australia. It must be a bit hard.

Yeah, look, really, interesting timing for that David. So, our first lot of graduates, you know, who were in 2013, so the veterinary graduates are having their ten-year reunion this year and in fact in about a month's time. So, a whole group them hoping to get together as that sort of first batch of graduates. And they did the hard yards because they were, as I say, they were here when facilities were still being built. You know, we were still building an equine center, for example, when they were completing their vet studies, our first lot of graduates had to go and have their equine rotations off site. So, we actually sent them to Werribee across to Melbourne to be able to get some experience and teaching with horses. And so yeah,

we were still in that process of kind of refining curriculum, refining our, yeah, our infrastructure, building our staff capacity, building our services that we were providing to students. So, they were the kind of pioneers and they did, yeah, they did fantastically well to complete. So, it's going to be great. They're going to have a celebration. And then, you know, unfortunately, one of the members of that cohort actually passed away only a couple of years ago. And so, we're so yeah, they're doing a bit of a... her name was Sophie Putland. She has a Sophie's legacy has been started by her family in terms of making sure that people identify and recognize some of the stresses and strains that the veterinary industry are under. She was a wonderful student and staff member who did pass away. And so, they're doing a... I think the next day is actually the City to Bay fun run. So, there's a team of students who are going to be doing a run under the banner of Sophie's legacy is a bit of a memorial for her because the industry is a challenging one. We have you know, a shortage of vets across Australia at the moment. We have some level of, you know, naivety within the client community around how much it does actually cost if you have to have your animal treated by veterinary staff, there's no Medicare for animal health and you can take out obviously insurance but yeah sometimes vets are working pretty long hours. They're working pretty hard to look after clients and save animals and they can't certainly save them all. And so yeah, it can be a pretty, pretty tough gig. So, we're just trying to encourage certainly yeah, our clients and vets to really... and practice managers to really look after veterinarians, you know, give them appropriate opportunities to debrief cases, appropriate time off for their own kind of wellbeing, making sure they're not working, you know, too many hours. They're getting sufficient rest breaks and yeah and certainly educating our clients, if you're going to be nasty then you'll get blacklisted from a lot of our vet services. So, yeah, there's some of the challenges I guess, that we've had along the journey as well in terms of how we provide support to, you know, to our students as they undertake their programs. Because it's a tough... it's a demanding program. We have a support coordinator on campus. We have counsellors on campus. You know life can be challenging for students in terms of relationships and illness and family situations. So, as much sort of wellbeing opportunities we have to support healthy lifestyles for students to build resilience, for students to help them along the way. Then we really see that as an important part of our role both within the college and also, yeah, within all of the services that are provided to students.

Are you worried about the campus being invaded by a sort of I hear not gossip but rumours that some other faculties or programs might move out here which are not... non animal veterinary based like, because there's lots of room out here that some of the faculties are eyeing it off with interest.

I think that's potentially the case, but I actually think Dave that's a positive thing for the campus. I think the campus generally needs critical mass. So, we're at a thousand students now, close to 200 that live here. In an ideal world, I think we'd be double that. So, it'd be nice to have a couple of thousand students. It'd be nice to go and build some new, you know, residential accommodation and dwelling. And so, I think really the evolution of Roseworthy a campus itself will be, I think the integration with some other programs you've got a growing Northern population. So, you know, quite a lot of developments even in our sort of Roseworthy, the sort of Light [council] catchment area, little developments at Roseworthy

[township] itself and Two Wells and Balaclava and these sorts of places that are quite close. And then the extension of Gawler and into Hewett and other places. So, the North is growing, you know, the university is very keen to look at access and pathways for students from non-traditional backgrounds. Maybe, you know, first in family students that might be attending university. So, I think the natural progression, you know, probably for the campus, not that it's my decision, but I think that some additional critical mass and some more students it would bring more services. So, more opportunities to play sports, more opportunity to provide other catering services, more opportunities to have support for international students on campus. Those sorts of things would be the extension of some other programs potentially out to Roseworthy, yeah, there's some infrastructure that might need to be developed to enable that to occur. But I think even the relationship with the current faculty, which is science, engineering and technology, you know, we've got some engineering projects I think that are sort of making their way out to Roseworthy. And I think that's probably the logical direction for the campus. Yes, we've still got lots of space. We've got the farm, which is important and the Martindale relationship. So, we need to have for the vet school, you need to have horse herds and cows and sheep and alpacas and goats. And so, you know, we've got the piggery two kilometres away that's being run now by an external organisation. So, you'd need... we need to have the space is important and for teaching agriculture and for doing seed trials and all those sorts of things. But I think there is actually a lot of greenfield space here and I think, yeah, having some other areas of the university or even with the proposed Adelaide University, if the merger between University of South Australia and University of Adelaide occurs, I think it brings opportunities for the campus I reckon. And I think, they're positive.

We'll, we'll wind up soon David, but I forgot... we need to talk a bit about the Old Students Cup, which is been going now since, since you were here. So perhaps like to talk a little bit about that.

Yeah. So I think it was probably reasonably early after I commenced, that, and it might have even been when you were as president of ROCA [Roseworthy Old Collegians Association] David and we talked about the Old Students Cup, which because of the nature of programs kind of moving from Roseworthy to Waite and it maybe hadn't been issued for, you know, for a couple of years. And the way that, you know, there had been an establishment of new programs at Roseworthy and so ROCA yeah very generously donated and provided a new Old Students Cup that could be awarded to students. And it was quite broad criteria I think we made. We sort of discussed the, yeah, the criteria for awarding that particular cup and it was well the school do some, some academic awards and some merit awards, you know, which is really good but I think it was more about looking at awarding students that really, you know are great all-rounders in terms of students that live on campus that are part of the college. But that really support the student life of an activity that occurs at Roseworthy. So, people that put their hand up to be student leaders, people that put their hand up to run new events and activities, people that, you know, decide they're going to run sports out here and that take on, yeah leadership and so yeah and people that are just kind of you know caring and supportive and sort of look toward other people and look a little bit beyond themselves. So, we re-instituted that cup. I think it might have been 2014, perhaps the year that we that we re-

awarded that cup. And I think Francis Collette was the yeah, was the initial winner of that cup when we brought that back into existence in 2013.

2013!

2013, and so ever since we've, yeah, we've and sometimes it goes to an individual, sometimes it goes to a couple of students. Last year it went to a house of students which was, you know, sort of four students who would all spend quite a bit of time in various leadership roles and just, yeah, supporting activities. If there was a function, they were there. If there was a sport to be played, they were there. If there was some volunteering to be done, you know, they were there. So, yeah, just to really recognize the fact that the campus is it's bigger than just an academic community. I mean, the academic side is very important and we want to teach very good vets and animal scientists, animal behaviorists and veterinary technicians. And so coming out with, with, those academic skills are really important. But, you know, you have the opportunity to come out with some much wider and broader skill sets through being part of this community. And so, to see students supporting others, I know I think Molly Oshiro was one of the award winners who was, I think, our first international student to receive that particular award. She was a Japanese student who really just, you know, naturally looked after other international students and kind of made them feel, feel welcome and made them feel part of the community. And we're a really diverse community. And Roseworthy would be a pretty, pretty interesting place if you jumped off of a plane from Japan or Singapore or Malaysia or Hong Kong and you know, you flew into Adelaide and then you took an hour vehicle ride out to Roseworthy and looked around. You'd think, wow, this is a pretty interesting experience. This is a pretty interesting place I'm going to be studying at maybe for potentially for six years. And so, yeah, the opportunity to really build a, you know, an inclusive community within that environment and doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter what your background is, what your sexual orientation is, you know, this is a place where everyone can feel safe and feel comfortable to kind of express who they are. Then I think the Old Students Cup sort of really reflects the opportunity to recognize, yeah those students that just go a little bit over and above in creating the atmosphere and the environment that we really want to try and have at Roseworthy.

That's terrific. Okay, Dave, we'll finish off here. Thank you very much for coming in. And I think old collegians will be very heartened to know that the old Roseworthy spirit lives on and people like yourself are helping to perpetuate it. And I think the place is in good hands in terms of students and which is... that's a cornerstone of the place, and that's terrific. So, we thank you very much for the day and we'll look forward to hearing you on the web sometime.

No worries. Thanks for having me, David.

Okay. Bye. Bye.

END OF INTERVIEW

Interviewer: David Spencer
Transcriber: David Spencer (03/06/2025)
Transcription (54mim 20 sec) by David Spencer