

TRANSCRIPT: JARVIS E. MILLER INTERVIEW

Jarvis E. Miller · Former President of Texas A&M

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An interview with Mr. Jarvis Miller. President of Texas A&M University. Miller is a 1973 graduate from Texas A&M and an inducted member of the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry

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Dr. Jarvis Miller | Transcript
Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry | Department of Agricultural Economics | Texas A&M University

Would you please introduce yourself?

I'm Jarvis Miller, class of 1950. I'm a third-generation Aggie. My father was in the Class of '26 and my great uncle was in the Class of 1900. I graduated here in 1950 and went from here to Purdue to do graduate work. Graduated from Purdue with a master's and a Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics.

How did your agricultural economics degree prepare you for your future leadership positions?

Well, I majored in, originally here in animal husbandry and my junior year, I decided to change to agricultural economics and the program that was best indicated for me was agricultural administration. And that's a general degree that gives you a broad view of agriculture. I had some very good professors, both in the department and in the Department of Economics, that broaden my vision. And so, I left here, I think pretty well prepared to do a lot of things. And my time at Purdue enabled me to specialize, to develop more depth in agricultural economics. And so, I felt qualified then to take a range of activities. When I went to work for the Agency of International Development, I was able to get some interesting administrative experiences. And again, I, I was the leader of our program in agriculture there. So, I had responsibilities for people in animal science and range and forestry and other areas of agriculture, and my training here had given me the opportunity to see all of those in perspective. And so, I think it helped me to be a better, more effective leader of the program there.

Would you tell us a little about your time as president of Texas A&M?

It's an Aggie's dream, although I had never had it, I never – never expected to be named president. We had a Texas humorist visiting campus one day, and I was walking across campus with him. He said, "Are you an Aggie?" and I said "Yes." He said, "Man, you done died and ascended without dying." (Laughs) So, that puts in perspective an Aggie's dream to be president. The relationship with the students was the most rewarding, fulfilling part of the job. Relationship with former students, as everyone knows that our former students are very loyal to A&M. So, I had a really great experience with them. And then, working with the people of Texas, across the state from Amarillo to The Valley to Beaumont to El Paso. It was a tremendously rewarding experience.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced as president of the university?

Well never knowing what was going to happen the next day. (Laughs) Particularly in intercollegiate athletics, the NCAA was a, was a real problem for us. University of Texas controlled the Southwest Conference. They were very effective in taking care of their programs and willing to let us take the fall for things. The, just the problems of dealing with the legislature, for example, having to sell programs that you knew were, were great programs and trying to get support for them. The occasional problem with the, with a student, which was rare but was a, was a problem and it one that, that was hard to deal with sometimes, both from

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the tragic as well as the people getting in trouble and that sort of thing. But all, all in all, it was a very rewarding experience.

You have had a highly varied career. What personal aspects helped you maintain your flexibility?

Well I, I think some of it goes back to my parents who, for example, encouraged me to read the National Geographic when I was a child growing up. During the war, my father was in the Navy, and we moved, and I got to school three different, in three different states. I think that showed me that I could do, little boy from Orange Grove, Texas, high school graduating class of 16 could make A's in Baptist Junior High School in San Francisco, for example. So, I got to feel some self-confidence and ability to regularly relate to different people. My international experience – I'm bilingual, so I was able to relate to people in those countries, and I think that helped me to, then when I got back here, relate with people across the board. So that plus my rather broad training was a big advantage.

How were you able to manage time for family, work, and other priorities throughout your career?

I'm not sure how to answer that. The, I suppose, the military science courses gave me a background, as I say that was the only management training I had in my undergraduate career. Studying economics and the value of time and the, the opportunity cost of doing things and not doing things, all of that factored in. And I had a, I have a very supportive wife. And so, it just seemed to work naturally. I'm not sure that I can give specific rules.

What advice do you have for students looking to match your own successes?

Well, apply yourself, look for opportunities to broaden your horizons. Study abroad is a good one. Participation in the extracurricular activities. The Corps of Cadets, in my case, was an important factor. Gave me leadership, gave me some management training, in fact, at the undergraduate level, it was the only management training that I had. So, I attribute some of my success to that. But take advantage of the opportunities that you have. And try to get acquainted with your professors. Relate to them outside of the classroom or outside the course. And, as I say, you just look for opportunities to do things.

Thanks for listening

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