

**Ruth Candler** 00:15

Welcome to W&L After Class, the lifelong learning podcast. I'm your host, Ruth Candler. In every episode we'll have engaging conversations with W&L's expert faculty, bringing you again to the Colonnade even if you're hundreds of miles away, just like the conversations that happen every day after class here at W&L. You'll hear from your favorite faculty on fascinating topics and meet professors who can introduce you to new worlds and continue your journey of lifelong learning.

Today, we'll be talking with Mark Rush, the Waxberg Professor of Politics and Law and the director of W&L's Center for International Education. Mark has been with Washington and Lee since the summer of 1990, and has written extensively on U.S. politics, constitutional law in the United States and Canada, elections and democracy around the world, and global affairs. His writings have been published in numerous scholarly journals and in media outlets such as The Hill, The Washington Post, USA Today and a number of Virginia publications. From 2010 to 2013 he served as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. Thanks for joining us today, Mark.

**Mark Rush** 01:22

Good to be here.

**Ruth Candler** 01:24

Mark, you've taught courses in both the politics department at W&L and the Law School. Politics and the law, some would say that it's a bit of an oxymoron these days. Are politics, especially political campaigns, still governed by a firm set of enforceable laws?

**Mark Rush** 01:40

I think in general terms, sure. There are certain things you don't touch, you know, certain subjects you don't talk about. You leave people's families and kids out. But politics has changed tremendously over the last 50 years, just due to the, I think, the tremendous infusion of money, the breakdown of the political party system, and more recently, just the impact of technology. So the rules are changing. It's a new landscape. And I don't think anybody's really got their hands around it completely.

**Ruth Candler** 02:10

You've written extensively about election reform. With the upcoming election in mind, I'd like to ask for your insight on a couple of things. First, what do people usually mean when they say election reform?

**Mark Rush** 02:22

Well, the cynical answer is it's when they want to change something on the status quo that they don't like. But usually when you hear discussions of election reform it... they focus on the role of money in politics, gerrymandering, most recently the Electoral College. Right now they're talking about, well, not exactly election reform, but altering the manner in which we appoint Supreme Court justices, all in the name of what folks contend would be a better democracy. I think you'll find that election reform means making democracy run the way I want it to, not necessarily make it run better.

**Ruth Candler** 03:01

In 2019, you wrote a fascinating piece on the Electoral College in which you argued that no matter how we structure our voting, somebody is going to feel shortchanged. Is that a backhanded endorsement of the Electoral College? Or do you agree that those who may say that the Electoral College has outlived its usefulness to our democracy?

**Mark Rush** 03:19

it's not so much a backhanded endorsement of the Electoral College itself. It's an antiquated way to elect the president. We could alter the rules of the Electoral College without too much difficulty. States could allocate their votes proportionally, some do already, among, you know, to the candidates, that would make it reflect the popular vote a little bit more. In other cases, you know, we could say just have a direct popular vote. That would require, unfortunately, a constitutional amendment. And that's just extraordinarily difficult. So within the confines of the rules of the political system, seeking a constitutional amendment can be a lifelong challenge, whereas simply changing the manner by which votes are counted might make things work a little better.

The big problem with the Electoral College, though, is the way it delivers votes is based on the representation in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Your Electoral College votes in the states are the sum total of two senators plus your representatives. And so that's why people complain. Wyoming gets three Electoral College votes, which is ridiculously disproportional. Whereas even California with 55, 56, 57 is relatively underrepresented. Folks claim now this is unfair, because it tends to favor the Republicans. That's true; Republicans tend to do better in smaller states. But that doesn't mean the Electoral College is biased.

And so I think if you were to get rid of the Electoral College, or perhaps change the vote counting rules, it would generate other pathologies, other strange outcomes that somebody would complain about. So while I think it's not a bad idea to discuss getting rid of the Electoral College for the president, I... it's unlikely to happen anytime soon. So we need to work within the political system better.

**Ruth Candler** 04:59

Given the closeness of our recent presidential elections and the partisan bitterness they seem to inspire, I have to ask, are close elections a good thing in a democracy? Or would it be better if the outcomes were more definitive?

**Mark Rush** 05:14

I think that's really an... It's an either/or question. It depends on what you think is best for elections, best for the people in a democracy and so forth. I think close elections between or among political parties that are not polarized are a good thing. If the people we elect get along, like they did once upon a time, then close elections are good. You see good, spirited competition, ideally, between good competitive candidates. You don't want blowouts all the time because then there's really no point in voting if you know who's going to win.

What I think is, you know, the issue right now is that close elections in bitterly partisan times mean that you can swing from a pretty strongly left-leaning Democratic administration to a pretty strongly right-leaning Republican administration with just a few votes. And under these circumstances, that's not

necessarily good for politics. So again, good competitive elections, it gives people a reason to come out and vote. You want to have good candidates slugging it out so that no matter who wins, you can be confident that they can govern the country or the state or whatever.

But unfortunately, right now, we're in a time of intense polarization. And as we see with Congress, we see with the relationship between Congress and the president, there isn't much bridge building going on. So partisan... Partisanship, polarization result in really bitter feelings after close losses, because people don't have any hope that we can move forward. We hope that changes. I just don't know what's going to change the character of American politics in any time... in any way anytime soon, to make it good to have close competitive elections again.

**Ruth Candler** 06:54

So are there reforms that we should be considering to the electoral process?

**Mark Rush** 06:59

Some of the reforms I'd consider would be just to get rid of the way we elect our congressmen and legislators. We use what's called the single member district, it's called the winner take all system. If you look across the country, virtually every legislative or congressional election is completely uncompetitive. There's no reason to vote; you know who's going to win. You can use multimember districts where people get to vote for three or four or five people in any level of government. The Constitution doesn't forbid it. This has been used in cities, it's used in other countries, it's in use now in different cities across the United States. And what it does is it just gives voters more of a choice, it gives them a reason to come out and vote.

Right now, you know, if you're in a district, that's represented by a strong Republican or a strong Democrat, there's no reason for Republicans to vote, say if it's a strong Republican district, because they know who's going to win. There's no reason for the Democrats to vote because they know who's going to win. At least if you have multimember districts, Republican and Democratic voters might be able to vote for more than one candidate, more than one party. This could build bridges, not only across the parties, but even across the races. Right now, districts are drawn to make sure that racial minorities are able to get their candidates selected. Those are some of the least competitive districts out there. To give those voters a meaningful vote on Election Day really would be in keeping, I think, with, say, the Voting Rights Act. So that I think is the most important reform we could have.

Also trying to find a way to control the role of money in politics. It's just that the law has become so complicated. In the United States, political money is considered to be political speech, and so you can't really restrict it very easily. The result is that there's just an incredible amount of money in politics. The most powerful voices dominate the conversation and you really don't get much in the way of deliberative democracy, discussion of issues, so many voices are drowned out. But these are great challenges. Changing the mechanics of an electoral system that supports candidates right now who like the status quo, and changing a system that gets incumbents returned to office at incredibly high paces thanks to campaign spending. It's going to be really hard to change that, because a lot of people have a vested interest in the status quo.

**Ruth Candler** 09:15

Two weeks ago, Mary Anne Franks, an internationally known expert on the topic of civil rights and technology, gave our Constitution Day address. She's also the author of the award-winning book "The Cult of the Constitution: Our Deadly Devotion to Guns and Free Speech." You stated that "Her work is vitally important as the nation learns to address the impact of technology on the interaction between civil liberties and civil rights." New communication technologies, like Facebook and Twitter and Instagram, are creating new challenges to our legal system, especially as our laws apply to political campaigns. What are your thoughts on this?

**Mark Rush** 09:55

Well, first, her book is tremendous. It's aggravating, it's inspiring, you will read it and you will scribble all over it. Mine is dog-eared. It's ruined because I was taking so many notes and marking it up. She has really struck upon a chord, which on the one hand deals with the current dominance of white male power in American politics, but, I think more importantly, the extent to which the rules of the political game clearly manifest a particular bias right now, which is made worse by the power of money, the power of technology and the way we regard speech right now.

And what she's really come upon is, she has a wonderful description, she says, thanks to technology, the power of the individual is so great, and the power of the powerful individuals are so great that their exercise of their civil liberties such as their right to speak, is now a threat to other people's right to privacy, to their right to equality. You know, good examples of this are just people doxxing or trolling others using Twitter or whatnot. There's no escaping that. I mean, that happened here in the wake of the Red Hen, all of a sudden, we became beseiged with people trolling. There was no refuge, and you can't fix it. Once that speech... Once that speech is projected, you can't just simply respond with more speech and mend the wound, the damage is done. Perhaps even more obvious: one of Mary Anne Franks's principal targets is just revenge porn. You can't just simply rebut that. The damage to a woman is done once that is out there. There's no fixing that. You can't erase that from the web.

And so what Franks has said is that the law needs to catch up. Technology has amplified the power of our rights. She touches upon religious freedom as well, in this respect. Our extreme interpretation of speech, which basically embraces anything now, how you dress, how you act, how you work, how you move, if you carry a gun, makes it very difficult to restrain gun ownership. And therefore, when these rights are exercised, other civil rights really are damaged. There's no protection. Once your privacy is breached, it's done. You can't unbreach it.

And so what she speaks to also more generally then is just the fact that cyberspace, the internet, social media is this brave new world, we really don't know how to address it. The existing legal rules don't apply well in cyberspace, they apply well on terra firma. And so in the same way, I think, the best metaphor for this is, as the courts came to deal with notions of the telephone, and privacy, and how it can be breached electronically 100 years ago, now they have to deal with those same questions, but sort of on warp speed in cyberspace, which is infinitely big. So it's fascinating stuff. This is the new frontier in the study of the law. And Franks really is on the cutting edge of it. So it was great to have her here for Constitution Day.

**Ruth Candler** 12:59

So you also used the word "frustrating" in describing her book. Why was it frustrating?

**Mark Rush** 13:06

I think it's frustrating, because on the one hand, I found that she makes tremendously important points that really affect—I think that I told her this, when I met with her—I... she's really taking on the foundations of Western liberal political thought. This transcends the American political landscape. This is really liberal... how we want to think about Western notions of individual rights, the role of the state, and so on and so forth, relationships among people.

But the book is so focused on the American political stand that I think it misses an opportunity really to take on the broader subject of just liberalism. And the whole idea, the marketplace of ideas metaphor, all of this, she's really taking on in this book, but in focusing on the United States—it's fine, she makes a great argument—but I think her argument really transcends just the domestic political system. So I'm looking for the follow... I'm looking forward to the follow-up book.

**Ruth Candler** 14:08

Thanks, Mark. That's a fascinating look at the inner workings of our political system that aren't always as visible to the average citizen. I'd like to pivot now and talk about some of the other hats that you've worn, both as director of the Center for International Education, and as dean of the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates.

Let's begin with the W&L Center for International Education, known affectionately here on campus as the CIE. I'm impressed by how the center not only creates opportunities for W&L students to study abroad, but also helps bring students from abroad to study at W&L. The CIE has also hosted several seminars and is co-sponsoring this year's Mudd series. And I understand that once people are allowed to travel again, there will be a visiting scholars program established. How has all of this come about?

**Mark Rush** 14:59

Well, this really began with, frankly, the support we had from some grants to develop additional opportunities overseas for students to do summer research, summer service, and so forth. We've brought in some tremendous new staff, folks who've just been very aggressive in their support for the expansion of study abroad opportunities. We've made new connections with new providers and new universities across the world. Really, it's just, it's wonderful just to be able to take advantage of the resources we have here. And we've got some really talented people in the office, who just make it look easy to make connections with partners around the world.

And so as a result, not only are we coming up with new, you know, traditional study abroad opportunities, but thanks to working with a couple of professors—Hugo Blunch and Stephanie Sandberg—and with our study abroad director here, Cindy Irby, we are going to be opening, we hope, in January 2022, a six-month-long program for students in Ghana with faculty joining them in residence. We were going to try to do that this year in 2021, but COVID got in the way. We have a long-lasting relationship with... longstanding relationship with St. Andrews that we're expanding a little bit. We reestablished connections with Oxford. So we can send seven students over there every year now, and

we hope to increase that number. It's just... the university has just been very, very supportive, and understanding of the importance of international education as part of an undergraduate education. And so knowing that, it's been wonderful just to be able to take advantage of and seek out new opportunities.

And we've been successful so far. Really, the only thing stopping us from moving forward right now has been COVID. If we could get back into planes, we'd have students abroad. So it's exciting.

**Ruth Candler** 16:51

So what is it exactly about international education that you find so essential for students today?

**Mark Rush** 16:57

I think it's... It's just good, especially for American students, to get out of—whatever you want to call it, the crystal ball of their university experience. I mean university life in America is wonderful. But it's not necessarily the real world. And it's great to be able to get out of, say, a small college and go to a big urban university in some other country and see how all the students in other countries go to school and see that it works. Our model's good, their model's good. They're different. It is good, really, to gain firsthand knowledge and live, say, in a culture you're trying to study, to learn the language in the streets as well as the classroom. And just to get a sense of how, you know, the subtleties of different cultures make all the difference in the world. And if you understand the more subtle points than the rest of human interaction isn't such a big deal, it's much easier.

I think it's... It's important to actually experience, I mean, literally different days, different paces of days, different family interactions, different social interactions, and so forth. So that you come to understand another mindset. I mean, so like, you don't really understand the culture, I think, till you understand its literature, and you can actually read it and understand the mindset of the writer. If it's written in translation, it loses its, I think, cultural relevance. And so it's important to take advantage of this in the same way as you get out of the classroom to do a geology lab or a wet bio lab or something. Well, take advantage and do that somewhere else. See how people interact with their environments, and how they learn together, because this is the world we live in, it's more connected. The world is now in your face every time you log in. And it's important to understand that those images on the screen really don't necessarily represent clearly the smells, the sights, the sounds of the other parts of the world, and how people interact.

So it's just a tremendous opportunity. And what's great is we have the resources to send pretty much anybody anywhere. As long as the State Department lets us go there, we can send anybody to study abroad.

**Ruth Candler** 19:06

That's exciting. You mentioned W&L's longstanding partnership with St. Andrews in Scotland. Could you share that story with our listeners?

**Mark Rush** 19:15

St. Andrew's is probably one of our closest partners. That relationship with them began years back. The faculty in biology and chemistry wanted to make it possible for pre-med students to go abroad, get credit for the courses they were taking, and stay on pace to graduate and then go to med school. And one of the great challenges is that med school wants all of your courses to be graded with American grades and transcripts. And normally study abroad credit does not transfer a grade. And we were originally then able to organize classes there which our faculty would essentially draft and organize and then their faculty would teach, but we would oversee, and so that they were transcribed as Washington and Lee courses. And so that's really helped the pre-med students. That's continued. It's not as robust as it once was, I guess there's other opportunities, but we continue to send numerous students there, probably between six and 10 every year between the remnants of that pre-medical program and then just other students who want to take advantage of international studies there, the relationships.

I mean, it's been so robust that actually this year we were fortunate when COVID hit, we were able to call them because we knew that our incoming international students in the first year probably would not be able to get here due to visa restrictions, travel bans, travel restrictions, and whatnot. But the U.K. had lifted theirs. It was easier to get into the U.K. for international students. And so we sent most... We were able to arrange to send most of the first-year international students to St. Andrews for the fall term, so that they could have a residential experience on the ground together, even though they have to socially distance. The alternative would have been they would have had to defer a year or they would have been stuck behind a computer screen, taking asynchronous courses or taking synchronous courses at three o'clock in the morning by themselves.

So we... again, this is just another reward of developing good relationships with organizations and colleagues around the world. They were able to take care of us, we got in early, it was great. And so we look forward to bringing those students here for the Winter Term. So that's just a great success story with St. Andrew's.

**Ruth Candler** 21:18

Yeah, a true partnership.

**Mark Rush** 21:19

Yeah.

**Ruth Candler** 21:20

So other than St. Andrews in Scotland, how have the current COVID-19-related travel restrictions affected your programs?

**Mark Rush** 21:29

In broad strokes they've shut them down. I mean, Spring Term Abroad is essentially on hold. We will revisit that in December, January. I'm not optimistic. I'm not being a wet blanket, it's just that I don't see CDC or anybody lifting restrictions to make it possible, really, for us to lead groups of students abroad. We have a few going abroad under regular study abroad. In the fall, Oxford students will be there, we'll have a bunch at St. Andrews. And we have a couple of dozen students looking to try to go abroad in the Winter and Spring Terms. But they can go individually. It's very limited—mainly they're going to

universities, they aren't going to study abroad providers, because the universities have better infrastructure to handle quarantine and whatnot.

So it's limited. But what's nice is we're able to keep it open as an option. I mean, if you're gonna fly from Los Angeles to D.C. to come here, it's not a whole lot different than flying from Washington to London to go study there. It's six hours in a plane. So if in another place, they are prepared to deal with COVID, and the students realize and agree to deal with the complications, we'll make it... we'll get them there if we can make it possible for them to go. But again, we're really running a scaled-back program. We hope to be able to do some summer internships next year. Again, we don't know how much kids will be able to travel. But we'll support whatever we can within the context... within the constraints imposed by the State Department and COVID.

**Ruth Candler** 22:55

Be nice to have a crystal ball, wouldn't it?

**Mark Rush** 22:56

Oh, yeah. Real nice.

**Ruth Candler** 22:59

W&L's Honor System is an all-encompassing system of trust, and one of the university's most important traditions. You once traveled to Doha, in the United Arab Emirates, with W&L's student Executive Committee to make a presentation on our system. What was that like?

**Mark Rush** 23:15

It was pretty fascinating. Um, you know, it's... What I love about the Honor System is that it's... I suppose it really is the one thing that makes W&L unique. And also, it really is, I think, the core of what makes the university community tick. Alumni can fight over everything, like any good alumni, but it's been my experience in any alumni gathering of old and young, whatever, you start talking about the Honor System, they circle the wagons, they realize that's the core, I mean, it's just something you bring from here. You can be an A or B or C student, whatever. But the assumption of honor and trust that you carry with you as a graduate of this institution, I think, is crucial. Even people who don't go here respect it.

So we gave a talk over in Doha. There was a higher education conference. And so we connected with a couple of universities that were there. They were all American universities, but they have local student bodies. And Texas A&M was there and set up and they had the Aggie honor system there as well. And it was kind of peculiar, because you were bringing Western values to really a non-Western culture, non-Western tradition and just a studious... a student tradition of academic integrity that really is different. We get spoiled here at W&L. Cheating is not rampant here. It is in other countries and other cities and other universities around our country. And so to go there and explain... We had three members of the student Executive Committee come there and give presentations just talking about how the Honor System works. And they were astounded, first of all to know that it was student run—in virtually every other university on the planet academic integrity is operated at least partially by deans or administrators. And, you know, we would explain, "No, no, this is the students' Honor System. It opens,

'We the students of... we the students of Washington and Lee.' It's the students' Honor System. It's not the faculty's."

They were... Over there, frankly, they were astounded that, you know, junior students could throw out senior students, women could throw out men, it just, you know, breaks the sort of stereotypes, non-Western stereotypes that we're accustomed to. And even American students were astounded. There were... I still remember some faculty there from the University of Arkansas visiting in this conference, and they were absolutely flabbergasted when we told them, we showed them the data on the number of kids we throw out, and it's very small, except for this one spike several decades ago, and we said, "That's when we threw the football team out midseason." And of course, you know, good SEC people were just absolutely... you could see the synapse failure. They were mind-boggled that it was single sanction, student run, and yes, we threw out the football team.

So I mean, it's really, it's a... it's a powerful, powerful part, I think, perhaps the core part, of this university's experience. You know, frankly, when I taught over in the Middle East, I used it. I walked out of the room and said, "Don't cheat." And the kids didn't. I mean, I think it would have been pretty easy to tell if they had in a sit-down exam. But basically, I walked out of the room, and they respected it. So, you know, what's interesting is, I think, an honor system can be cultivated, transplanted, but it's a lot of work. Especially when you're dealing with different sorts of cultural or generational or technological assumptions about sharing work, but it can be done. It mean, it needn't necessarily take the form of ours.

But the extent to which you have an honor system does generate then a sense of trust within and among the student body, and between the students and the faculty, which just makes for a better teaching experience. I don't walk into the classroom assuming the students are all trying to cheat. The students don't walk in assuming that I'm some sort of cop trying to throw them out of there. You clear all that out of the way, and you have a better classroom experience.

So I think, I mean, it's just great to be a part of the tradition, to have brought it with me abroad, to talk about it, to reflect upon it from abroad here. It's just, really, I think it's such an important part of our experience here.

**Ruth Candler** 27:17

Mark, you were also the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the American University in Sharjah, which you mentioned earlier. What did you find different about higher education in the Middle East?

**Mark Rush** 27:30

At that point, it was really fascinating. You know, the university there was only 14 years old at the time. Many universities there were new, and what you really saw was... the higher education, whatever you want to call it, sector, industry, profession there was whistling through the trajectory of development, or trying to, that American universities have taken 200 years to go through, European universities even longer. And so it was an impressive experience to be there watching this, partaking in it, as they try to put down roots, develop student loyalty to the brand, if you will, develop alumni loyalty in a culture... I

mean, American culture is really unique, with its eleemosynary base, I mean, people give money to their universities and other institutions. You don't have that there. And you come really to appreciate just how important it is, especially in a part of the world where in many cases, education is free, to try to develop a private model, which is significantly more expensive, and then establish brand-name loyalty and so forth, and understanding about trust, honor, integrity, and so forth... It was a remarkable challenge.

Along with that, you saw a lot of the similar sorts of challenges that we have here too. The arts and sciences are struggling just like they do in the United States. So many students want to go there and get their engineering or pre-med or business degree and move on, and they don't, you know, have a real appreciation for the importance of general education, and a good liberal arts foundation. So it was fascinating, really, to see how they're going through the same sorts of struggles over there in many different universities.

You know, it was really sort of an educational frontier. You had a lot of branch campuses opening and closing, even in the time that I was there. It's really sort of a Wild West as you see an influx of international, whatever you want to call it, foreign money trying to set up educational models, while the locals are trying to set up their own. And, you know, this just takes time. I think today it can happen more quickly because of the pace of finance, technology, communication and whatnot. But still, it's a struggle, and it's not a bad struggle, but it just... you come to appreciate just how much energy goes into establishing a solid institution that delivers a quality education for many years. So it was a great experience.

**Ruth Candler 29:53**

As dean at an American University there, did you try to duplicate certain distinctively Western approaches to learning?

**Mark Rush 30:01**

I mean, personally, I did. I mean, in my own classrooms. But you were dealing... Again, we had faculty from all over the world. When I hired... I mean, literally, I hired from all the continents except Antarctica. So there wasn't, you know, there was plenty of distinctively Western influence mixing with all sorts of other influences from around the world. So it was becoming its own thing. I mean, this university is an American University, it was modeled on the American system. But still, you could... It was supposed to be sort of a marriage of this American or Western university vision to Gulf culture, politics, whatever. And it wasn't a hand in glove fit. But it was developing its own, you know, modus operandi.

Things I tried to do, though, that I really enjoyed, though, I mean, I put a lot of my efforts into promoting the performing arts, which folks didn't understand. No one wanted to be a performing arts major. But it was astonishing to see how many students who were really being pressured by parents and families simply to be engineers, or simply to be business majors or whatnot, would come quietly and ask if they could be in a performance. And it was difficult because to be in a performance, you had to take it as a class, and they said, "Well, I don't want my parents seeing the theater course on my transcript," things like this. But then you would see, I mean, just tremendous, the talent of the kids and how much they really flourished in theater, in musical performances and dance. If... You know, one of my legacies

there is on my watch, we established the first accredited coed dance instruction course in the UAE, where, you know, men and women dancing together in the same room for credit, like, it was okay.

So yeah, I guess if that was an influx of Western influence, that's one, one surefire, that... another thing we try to do is just marry the sciences, marry it to the humanities. And so we would have astronomy nights with poetry, things like that, sort of marrying different parts of the Arab traditions, the great scientific traditions, and great poetic traditions of the Arabic language and Islam as well. And, you know, you mix that with everything else.

And you're not... Again, it's not a Western... It's not a Western climate, it's not a Western institution, it was truly an international one that was still trying... was still sorting itself out when I was there. It was still mixing. It's still mixing. We don't know what it's gonna look like in 10 or 20 years. But it was just fascinating to be able to come from a pretty established American way of operating within a pretty established Western vision of education and go over there and operate in a different one, and then look back through a different lens at the Western system, to look at the United States as a source of study abroad students, you know, coming to you. They were your international students, all of a sudden. It just puts a different spin on things. And it was fascinating.

**Ruth Candler 33:06**

So from a cultural perspective, I'm thinking back to the class where you had men and women dancing together. And I'm thinking this may have been the first time that that's happened for many of those that attended the class. What was it like to be in the room, when...

**Mark Rush 33:26**

Well, I wasn't in the class, I would see the theater productions that came with it. And it was fascinating just to see, you know, I mean, things you're just not supposed to do. But "Romeo and Juliet," you got to kiss her hand. They did, you know, and this was just new. But they kind of moved forward, they, you know, it took careful steps. You didn't do it the first time.

But, you know, it was a bumpy road too. They also had a course they taught... the theater guys were great. I loved working with them. They'd come in with brilliant ideas, and I'd say okay, and they said, "We're gonna have a full-blown How to Do a Performance course. I said fine. Everything. Theater, you know, the whole production itself, but also the building, the stage, the lighting, the sound, you know, everything. Food and beverage, the whole nine yards. I said fine, whatever. Little did I know that this would also include, like, at the end of the term, a celebration with food and bev and dark lights and dancing and you know, somebody actually went in there and had... they filmed it, put it up on Facebook or something saying "Look!" you know, "American University of Sharjah is giving credit for kids to dance in the dark."

And you know, we didn't get fired. But I still remember the chancellor calling me and saying, "People have been thrown out of the country for less than this." Seriously. But you know, it was great. You just sort of... The ruler of Sharjah was a supporter of the arts, supported... He built the university. He had family members at the university, and they enjoyed this. So it was a great experience. But again, it was one of those things you just had to move forward slowly and we did. And it is a success story, I think...

It's struggling now just like every other university on the planet because of COVID and whatnot. But it was really a fascinating place to be with really a fascinating group of people—faculty, administrators—who were just trying to move this endeavor forward. It was fantastic.

**Ruth Candler** 35:18

Were your students mainly Emirati? Or did they come from several different countries in the region?

**Mark Rush** 35:24

Oh, there were only... I think it was maybe 10 or 20% Emirati? But also the Emirates are only 10 to 20% Emirati. The rest of the population is expats. And so we drew, essentially, I mean, from that population of expats, as well as just people in the region who wanted to go to an American University and maybe didn't want to go as far away as American University in Beirut or Cairo. There was American University in Dubai, slightly different structure, quality place. But no, we had students from everywhere. Every country that touched the Gulf, and, say, every country that touched a country that touched the Gulf was there. Along with just different students from Europe, we had a nontrivial number of students come from China, just a cohort coming and whatnot.

So it really was a pretty remarkably international student body. It was a strong presence of Emirati. We knew them. But still, across the board it was pretty international.

**Ruth Candler** 36:25

So you had also said that about the faculty. What was it like to be a dean of faculty from all over the world?

**Mark Rush** 36:34

It was a wonderful challenge. The best reflection on it was when the chancellor made a joke one day, but it was only tongue-in-cheek. We had all of the deans and all the department heads together, and I forget who he was speaking to, but they said... He, the chancellor just turned to this other dean and just said, "You know, you have the second hardest job after being dean of arts and sciences. Because the faculty, it's such a diverse... It's not even a melting pot. It's just a mixture of different cultures, different educational backgrounds: liberal arts, not liberal arts, different countries, different gender roles, different ways to relate to people and, you know, different expectations of how to relate to the students. It was a fascinating study of diplomacy.

**Ruth Candler** 37:17

Did you expect that going in?

**Mark Rush** 37:19

Oh, yeah. I figured, you know, faculty meetings here can be pretty testy. And I figured it would only be worse under these situations, because you would just multiply the number of reasons or points where you could have contention.

But we managed. We managed well. We got a lot done. And, you know, it... If you're transparent, open and approachable, it's not too hard to get things moving. And we did. We were very successful. A good

team, you know, my administrative team was great. The department heads were solid. It was a good bunch of folks.

**Ruth Candler 37:48**

Before we end the podcast, I have to mention your inspired service to the W&L Alumni College and Traveller programs. Like many alumni who have been privileged to hear your talks on campus or travel with you abroad, we're grateful for your many contributions to W&L's lifelong learning mission. And I should also add that your wife, Florinda Ruiz, who is also a W&L professor, has also been a popular and informative lecturer and host on many of our trips, several of them with you. Of the many Alumni College courses that you've taught in over the years, do you have one that sticks out in your mind as a favorite?

**Mark Rush 38:23**

You know, they've all been wonderful. I don't think any one in particular I'd say would be a favorite. Because, again, each of them I've had different emphases. I... My work with this started in the old Elderhostel, which we don't do anymore. Teaching civil liberties, which always was fun with free speech and people the age of my grandparents at the time, and then just dealing with global affairs and whatnot, working with Rob and the staff. You know, no one of them, I would say, has been my favorite. They're all wonderful. And that includes not simply, you know, summer Alumni College, but the Law and Literature program, the other programs we have during the year. Each one brings a different sort of emphasis.

I really love the Law and Literature programs because they're quick, short, everybody is fun, fantastic. Everybody's already done the homework. They're very intense and very wonderful. But then spending, you know, a beautiful week in the middle of the summer with a group of folks who simply wanted to come back to campus to share the study of some particular topic—with me it was usually global affairs—and it was just wonderful to be able to sit around, trade notes with these folks about what it is we're studying and talking about together or just simply life in Lexington. Really, it's hard really to pick out just any one particular campus program because they've all been wonderful.

**Ruth Candler 39:38**

You've also served as faculty host on several Traveller programs as well, and I'm sure you've enjoyed them all. But I'm curious to know if there is one that you found most enjoyable, or if there was a place that you had always wanted to see and this enabled you to see it.

**Mark Rush 39:56**

Well, you know, one of the great opportunities and one of the things I'm thankful for about having been able to work at the university and work in the Traveller programs is that it made it possible for me... I probably would not have seen the Great Wall, or the Taj Mahal, if it weren't for the opportunities that the Traveller programs gave me to lead, you know, lead these tours.

My wife and I led the tour to India, that was our first one together. She led one, Flor led one to Istanbul on her own, I led one to China on my own, and then we did others together. We've done several to Cuba, a couple of Spain, it's really been wonderful. And every single one, I think there is some aspect

of it—again, seeing something you thought you'd never see. I remember just talking with a couple of alumni as we're looking at the Taj Mahal, and we're just sort of laughing, saying, "We thought this was only something we'd get to see on a postcard, you know, or National Geographic, and here we are."

So it's that. It's not only the opportunity to learn about a place, incorporating it into your teaching, but also to learn and experience a place with a bunch of alumni who really, you know, appreciate how much they love the college, the university. And again, getting back to my point about the Honor System, they'll ask, just like any good alumni, what's wrong with the place now since they've left, "It's gone downhill." We all know that. Everyone says that sort of thing about their university, but then, you know, the Honor System, how are the students doing, it's just... It's wonderful how that will just unify folks and...

Every tour begins a little rough, because everybody's a little tired. But by the end of it, we're a group, we've been running around together, dining together, experiencing things together, it's wonderful. And we'd always have a pretty good routine. Flor really is the better person to lead one of these. I mean, I'm good for logistics and stuff. If you want to go to war, I'll be helpful. If you want the really tremendously in-depth tour of things, Flor has such a wonderful eye for art, for detail, that sort of thing that, you know, when she leads a walking tour through a town, whether it's in Cuba, or Spain, or Istanbul, the stuff she's able to point out which even surprises the local guides' eyes are really fantastic. Me, I'm sort of the sheepdog, the St. Bernard. I'm bringing up the rear, making sure no one gets lost. And they...

**Ruth Candler** 42:11

It sounds like you make a great couple, and a great couple to host a trip.

**Mark Rush** 42:15

And folks appreciate it too. They know no matter how far off they go, I'm probably around to get them and make them catch up.

So it works out, you know, and then, you know, occasionally we surprise them when I'm leading the tour and wondering what I'm doing up there. But it's really great. And it's just a wonderful opportunity to keep connected with, you know, former students. I mean, all of our students are future alumni, all the alumni are former students. And we're still faculty. And it's wonderful to be able to just work with them, you know, in what's both an educational experience, but really just an extension of the university community. So it's been a really great part of my experience at Washington and Lee.

**Ruth Candler** 42:50

So I'm curious, given your interest in lifelong learning and your special affection for adult learners, is there a program that you would like to see us develop?

**Mark Rush** 42:59

You know, it's hard to say because I think the university has done a tremendous—the office has done a tremendous job, lifelong learning, of identifying new places to go or places to return to. You know, I can't think of anything in particular that they haven't done. I think it's been really great as they sort of

pivoted a little bit and developed the shorter trips to cities and whatnot, just to accommodate the schedules and pressures and constraints on younger alumni's lives and so forth.

But in terms of a particular place, well, personally, if, you know, they'd hire a boat, to go down to the Caribbean, middle of winter, and pull into each port city, and we all get to go to a Winter League baseball game? I'd love it. I don't know about the rest of the boat, but I would be happy to lead that tour and just see baseball all winter in the Caribbean. I've tried selling that to Rob a few times. He hasn't... It hasn't really been solicited, but several of the alumni guys thought it'd be a great idea. So I mean, it'd be cheap, hot dogs and beer, it'd be the cheapest. It'd be great. No, we don't have to worry about gourmet food, just send us off to the ballpark. It'd be great. You heard it here first.

**Ruth Candler** 44:16

So we've talked about your scholarship and academic experience, and I'd like to talk a little bit about your interests when you're not on campus. So as a fellow New Englander, I know that you're a lover of all things Boston as well as all things baseball. Do you have a favorite spot in Boston?

**Mark Rush** 44:33

Oh, there's many. Just downtown, kind of depends, walking on the corner on the Boston Common at dusk when it's starting to snow in the winter is beautiful. The lights coming on. You know the North End you still can't beat. It literally is a city of neighborhoods and every single one of them has their own sort of neighborhood Irish pub where everybody is... you go there for dinner. It's just a great walking city. It's really, the whole city's fantastic. I miss it. I don't miss winter, shoveling my car out six times a, you know, a month. That used to seem like a good way to make money, now it just makes my back hurt.

But no, it's... There are so many beautiful spots. The city is doing so well. When I grew up it was rougher. It was the '70s there. The oil crisis had hit, busing was tearing the town to shreds. It was a tough time to be there. And, you know, to go back and see neighborhoods where your friends lived that were kind of rough that you go visit, whatever, and now like none of us could afford to live there anymore. The city has really turned around. It's a fantastic place to live. So it's just... It's wonderful to be able to go back and see how well it's doing, how much it's changed. And then that you still... Taking a walk, you find an old corner that still looks exactly the same. The signs from restaurants in the North End that don't exist anymore, but they left the signs up as markers are kind of cool. I mean, that's the sort of city it is. It's wonderful. And it's just beautiful downtown. They ripped out, with the Big Dig, which was way too expensive, but it saved the downtown and it's just wonderful to be able to walk through the town. It's fantastic.

So the whole city is my favorite spot. Well, I suppose Fenway Park is my favorite spot.

**Ruth Candler** 45:11

Oh, yep. I... So I grew up listening and watching Red Sox games, because I was the only girl and that was the thing to do in our house. Do you have a favorite moment in Red Sox history?

**Mark Rush** 45:23

Oh, sure, October 27, 2004. That's when they finally won. And there was a dozen of us in the Southern Inn being recorded by NPR as they won. And so NPR picked this up for posterity. So that's good. That's the best moment in any Red Sox fan's mind, when they finally won in 2004.

**Ruth Candler** 46:47

As we discussed earlier, your wife Flor is also a W&L faculty member. And you and Flor have two sons who grew up on college campuses. How do you feel that growing up in academia has shaped the young men that they are today?

**Mark Rush** 47:03

Well, for one thing, they were absolutely certain they didn't want to go to school in a small town at the university where their parents worked. And so one went to Boston College, I guess the Boston blood flowed right into him, and the other one went to UVA. And it's funny, the younger one, I mean, became much... was much more into the outdoors of Virginia and whatnot. And that's about as far as he really wanted to go. He's happy to go to UVA.

I think being the child of academics and living, you know, close to a college campus like you would here, both of them made the transition to college more easily. I mean, it wasn't this crazy foreign place. They had been listening to their parents talk about university life all their lives, and so it was just a thing. I mean, their friends' parents were academics, professors were accessible. And it's just, they... So I think it just made their life, their transition to college, much simpler. They've been confident in both the universities that they attended.

They're doing well. My older boy, our older boy, works at Vassar now, so he's never really left university life. He likes it. The younger one's a senior at UVA. We'll see where he wants to go. But he's... He's having a great experience out there.

**Ruth Candler** 48:12

When you're not on campus, what do you enjoy doing?

**Mark Rush** 48:16

Really hang with the family. I hold the stakes in several fantasy sports leagues all year. I inherited that job from Lew John, God bless him, who passed away a couple years ago. You know, I do bicycling, I swim a lot. Really visit with the family when they come home. It's not that complicated.

**Ruth Candler** 48:36

After living in the Middle East for three years, do you have a favorite Middle Eastern food?

**Mark Rush** 48:41

Oh, kunafa. It's this wonderful pastry made out of, like, I forget the name of the cheese. It's kind of like a ricotta. And then a sprinkle of other cheese. It's sweet. It's a pastry. I mean, you could have it for breakfast, but also it's a dessert.

And what's really great is when you would go to... When you would go to get kunafa, it's... The kunafa joints are just like every cheap neighborhood pizza joint that we all grew up with. And like the Northeast, no matter where you went, every single one of them, the owners were sui generis. They walked... People would walk in, they knew everybody in the neighborhood. There was all sorts of chatter, everything sort of shed, it was like family coming to one another, men and women talking to one another across the counter, the whole nine yards, moving stuff coming out of the... Same sort of complaints and attitudes about is it good today or whatnot, and, you know, again, Egyptian place made it different than the Lebanese place, the Lebanese place made it different than the Emirati place, you know, and so on.

And so it was really just sort of different things you sort of see in your different sorts of pizza joints, you know, Chicago pizza, Greek pizza, Italian pizza, white pizza, this, that, you know, northern Italy, southern Italy, it was that same sort of thing. And I don't have much of a sweet tooth, honestly. But the ambiance of the kunafa joint was just great. I mean, it was just... You come to see people aren't that different. I mean, if they were making pizza, you know, it would have been the same sort of feeling, okay, across other parts of the world. So that was really, that was one of the more... Perhaps the most outstanding thing I ate. I mean, there's all sorts of great food over there. But the life around the kunafa joint I found to be incredible.

There was a great place we saw when we went to Jordan, and we went winding through the alleys there. In the middle of the city, down in this old place where there's a line outside of it, and it was the kunafa joint. And this was, you know, this was spring. It wasn't too hot or too cold. But they said, "Yeah, on New Year's Eve, when it's cold there, there'd be a lineup as people would be there going to get their, you know, box of kunafa. And like, just like in the old school, you know, they'd wrap it with string and take it home, it was that sort of thing. So you really kind of saw how this was sort of the beating heart, it could be the beating heart of a culture and I just... The mystique around it was as much a part of it as the kunafa itself.

**Ruth Candler** 51:03

Alright, so a pizza joint, you'd have different varieties of pizza.

**Mark Rush** 51:07

Yeah.

**Ruth Candler** 51:07

In a kunafa joint, you would just have one kunafa? Or are there different varieties?

**Mark Rush** 51:12

Oh no, there's different ways to make it, different sort of... You might have some sort of, you know, there's more honey in one, more cheese in another sort of thing. Sure. Different sorts of kunafa in any joint, but then there was the style with which it made and everything. Again, great. It's just like when we have the latke, hamantash debate here. It's the same idea. I mean, you know, you could have arguments over the right way to make kunafa the same way, you know, with wonderful stuff.

**Ruth Candler 51:38**

So other than the kunafa joints, if someone was traveling to that region of the world and asked you where your favorite spot was, where would you tell them to go?

**Mark Rush 51:48**

Back to Jordan, honestly. The family still agrees that was probably the best trip we took. There is so much history there. I mean, we saw ancient Roman ruins that were predated by Nabataean, you know, inscriptions inside caves or on the walls of, you know, mountains and whatnot. The Roman ruins were everywhere. You forget just how much of the Roman Empire was there, and how well-kept it is, and you can actually get into it, as opposed to in Europe now it's much harder to get into these things and touch things. The impact of the... The German railroad that developed in World War I is still operating there, runs up and down the country. The Dead Sea is there, you go up the King's Highway and down the Dead Sea Highway.

You see so much, I mean, because when you think about it, it's really the intersection of three continents, that part of the world. You can go down to Aqaba, which... Lawrence of Arabia operated there, they took the town. And from there, he went back to Egypt. You see, really, the intersection of so many cultures there—I mean, three continents of history—that it was just fascinating. And then you get downtown to the big cities, you could be anywhere.

So that was a fascinating trip. We really liked it. I guess the other one, if we had to pick, we went up the Nile, instead of... At the time, Tahrir Square had just lit up in Cairo. So we decided to go to the other part of the Nile. And just, again, it's fascinating to see, you know, ancient Greek graffiti, written on even more ancient Egyptian buildings, which is still preserved because of the climate. And just, you realize, you know, people aren't all that different, you know. Graffiti. But it was really a sort of fascinating, just... At certain points on the boat where, you know, we went up the river on a boat, were the boat not a modern boat, you could have been any time in history. I mean, there was nothing there. Just the river, the edge of the river and the desert. So it was really fascinating. But we had tremendous opportunity to go everywhere. And we did. It was one of the best parts about being in that part of the world. So we had trips to India, trips to Kenya. It was fantastic. Thailand, it was fantastic. You could go anywhere.

**Ruth Candler 54:05**

You've been working at W&L for a long time. What is your favorite thing about the university and our students?

**Mark Rush 54:10**

Well, I... Yeah, I've been here for a while. You know, it's hard to, I think, point out any, like, one thing. What I like about it is just, it's the sort of place I wanted to come to work. You know the names of your students, they know your names, when you pass them. You know who they are. That's a nice relationship to have with the people, you know, that you're spending six, nine, 12 hours a week with.

You know, a bigger university is a different sort of thing, but if I'm speaking to a crowd of 100, I'm just not going to get to know the people I'm dealing with every day as much as I can here. So I think, you know, you come to work at a small university like this, you have certain expectations about your

interactions with your colleagues and students and so forth. And I think that's it. It's what a small college should be. It's what a small college is, and I really enjoy it.

**Ruth Candler** 55:01

As the election approaches and all the noise level increases, what message would you like to share with our listeners?

**Mark Rush** 55:07

Wow. Take a breath. Relax. It's still, you know, to sort of channel my muse, one of my muses, John Stewart: this is the same country that elected Barack Obama. It's the same country that elected Trump four years ago. We'll see who it elects this year. We're going through a rough time. But, you know, we've gone through worse.

I think the most important thing is just folks need to realize... We need to get past what's really a contentious moment in history, sooner or later. We've got to start pulling more or less in the same direction. Right now, it seems that the country's pulling in opposite directions, this isn't good. It doesn't take too too much energy to change. It just takes a decision to do it. So who knows, but I think after the election, the sun's still gonna rise in the east and set in the west, and the country will move forward regardless who wins, and regardless who wins, there's still a lot of work we need to do. And if both parties don't start cooperating to do that work, then I guess you got to blame them both.

And so the question is, how can we get both parties to kind of work together again, and that's up to the voters to elect folks who want to work together. So we'll see. Nothing particularly prophetic, but just, you know, everybody should chill. It'll be okay.

**Ruth Candler** 56:28

That is a great way to close our podcast. So thanks so much for joining us on After Class.

**Mark Rush** 56:33

Sure thing. Thank you.

**Ruth Candler** 56:35

And thanks as always to you for listening. We hope you've discovered something new. To read more about today's podcast and check out other ways to continue your lifelong learning with W&L, you can head to our website, [wlu.edu/lifelong](http://wlu.edu/lifelong). You'll also find information on W&L's series on prejudice, discrimination and antiracism; our faculty reading list, "Sheltering in Place with a Few Good Books;" and information on how to join our W&L book club. We hope you'll join us back here soon. Thanks again, and until then, let's remain together not unmindful of the future.