

English Transcript for *Rhodes College: Part 1: Getting to Know You*

[BLANK_AUDIO] We're here with Lauren Sefton, Associate Director of Admissions and Graduate of Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. Lauren, thank you for being with us today. >> Thank you, Eric. So, to start our conversation, let's get to know you a little bit. Can you tell us a little bit about your role as an admission officer? >> Sure. I actually prefer the term counselor, admission counselor, to admission officer. Because I think a lot of what we do, at least in our office, is counsel students. We listen to their interests and their needs, what they're looking to get out of college, and then I try to assimilate that with the institution that I work for and see if Rhodes is the right fit. I explain and educate them about opportunities at Rhodes, about experiences they might have on campus and off campus. And then I serve as their advocate throughout the admission process. So I'm there to answer any questions that they have when they're going through the application. I serve as their advocate to our committee in the admission decisions. And then I help them make more informed college choices once the decisions come out. Something that's unusual with Rhodes is that our admissions officers, our admission counselors, also serve as financial aid assistants for incoming and prospective students. So our financial aid office will work with all current students, and our admission office works with all incoming students. So I'm also able to help families and students learn and understand their, their financial aid packages. >> And just out of curiosity, do you have a, do you have a favorite part, is there a, a favorite aspect [CROSSTALK] of being an admission counselor. >> I love it all. I think I have the best job in the world. I get paid to travel and to talk to students and share my alma mater with them. I think my favorite part is traveling during the fall, most of the fall we travel around to high schools and around the country, around the world, and meet with students and their families. And I think getting, getting excited and having a face to match with the name later on throughout the admission process is really exciting. >> Now that we know a little bit about you, can you help us get to know Rhodes College better? >> Of course. Rhodes College is a national, liberal arts and sciences college. And we have just under 2,000 undergraduate students. Located right in the heart of Memphis, Tennessee. Memphis is the 20th largest city in the US. It's home to about 1.2 million people. So by U.S. standards, it's a pretty big city right in the Southern part, mid, mid Southern part of the country. The college itself again has just under 2,000 students, a beautiful campus with collegiate Gothic architecture. Most of our students describe it as looking like Hogwarts in the movies. And we have a wide variety of majors within the liberal arts and sciences, but our most popular majors are biology, and business, English, psychology, and international studies. We have a very strong honor code. We're one of only 18 schools in the U.S. to have a completely student run honor code process. So every single student pledges that they will not lie, cheat, or steal, or be a party of someone else doing so when they join the Rhodes community. And that's a big part of our foundation. We also have a very strong commitment to community service. In fact, Newsweek magazine has ranked Rhodes as the number one most community service minded school in the U.S. two years in a row. I'll the first to admit, I have no idea how Newsweek comes up with the ranking like that, but that is one that I will sing from the rooftop, because I really do think it speaks to the students' culture on campus. So that emphasis of community service, that living a life of honor and integrity and that unusual experience of being a liberal arts and sciences institution in a major city, makes Rhodes pretty special. >> That's fantastic information about Rhodes. One of the things that I'm always telling my students is that every college and university has their own personality. How would you

describe the personality of Rhodes? >> That's a great question, Eric, and one that I've put a lot of thought into. I really think Rhodes is the best of both worlds, and in many different ways. We are a school that provides the research opportunities similar to those of a large university or a research university, yet we provide the intimate learning experience of a small residential learning community. We provide that small liberal arts college experience but yet in a major city, a major metropolitan area. We provide a rigorous academic setting, and yet our students have a lot of fun on campus. And so there's a great sense of balance, so I think the personality, I don't know that makes Rhodes' personality that of a, of a balancing act or acrobat, but I think our, our campus provides one of, of great balance in the best of both worlds. And I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that our community really revolves around that honor code experience. And so that personality of the campus infuses everything that we do from academics to student life. Students can leave their backpacks and purses by the cafeteria door while they grab a bite to eat. They can leave their laptop in the library while they take a study break or go grab a cup of coffee with friends, and three hours later it's still there in the library. And so they know that they can have that sense of trust and responsibility. And that changes the type of personality of a college campus feel, I think, in a very important way. >> So, now that we understand kind of who Rhodes is, or what Rhodes is, what kind of student thrives at Rhodes, and who might struggle? >> Mm-hm. The type of student who thrives at Rhodes is one who is intellectually curious. You have to love to learn, or else you will be miserable for four years. And so, the student that thrives is going to be the one that comes in and is excited to discuss new and different ideas with classmates and with faculty members. Not just in the classroom, but in the cafeteria, or over a sporting event, or hanging out in the quad area. And so a student that thrives is certainly one who is intellectually curious and engaged. Our faculty will tell you a student who thrives is one who has strong writing and reading abilities, and capabilities, I think that's so important. You're going to do a lot of writing and a lot of reading in all of your classes. Even our math students are writing long research papers and having to effectively communicate ideas in words. And so, English competency is really important for all of our students, whether English is their primary language or not. We like to make sure they have that strong foundation in reading and writing, and that strong level of discussion and engagement in the classroom. I think students at Rhodes who thrive also have to be interested in having a passion for growth. Growth of self, growth of community. Because you're experiencing the Rhodes exp-, you're experiencing the Rhodes education for four years. And so, you want to be able to explore all of those opportunities and seek out opportunities. On the flip side, the opposite is true for students who are struggling at Rhodes. A student that doesn't have a solid reading and writing foundation is going to have a difficult time academically. A passive student is going to have a difficult time academically and socially at Rhodes. So we really, we're looking for students who are going to make the most and seek out those opportunities. >> You mentioned the size of Rhodes, that you're right around 2,000 undergraduate students. So Rhodes is of course classified as a smaller school. Can you tell us a little bit about what it's like to be a part of a smaller school, and what students can expect in the day to day life at a smaller school? >> Sure. I think students will notice the difference academically first and foremost in a small school. Our average class size is only 14. When I went to Rhodes, our biggest class was 33. And my smallest class was 3, so 14 is a pretty accurate statistic. You cannot hide in the back of a lecture hall at Rhodes because we don't have them. There's no way to hide in a class of 100 or 500 or 1,000 students. So every professor is going to know your name and where you're from, and what you're excited about, and when your eyes light up in

the classroom setting. They're also going to know when you're not excited about something they're talking about in class. And so academically, you're going to have that kind of level of relationship and engagement with the professor, with every professor. And every professor will have that same experience with every single student, because it's a small, small close knit community. Socially, I think students at a smaller school like Rhodes will notice that it's actually easier to get involved in clubs and organizations. And that sounds a little bit contrary, I think. at, at Rhodes, there's still over a hundred clubs and organizations. So almost anything a student can imagine getting involved in, is available. But there's less competition to get involved in those clubs and activities. If you think about a student who's excited about writing an article for a newspaper or putting together a proposal to host their own radio show on our campus radio station. You're not competing with 25 or 30 or 100 students for that same radio slot. You've got maybe a competition of five. And so, it's much easier to actually get involved and take on leadership positions in activities that you're interested in. Socially, we're a family, with just over, just under 2,000 students. You recognize most faces on campus. You're not going to know everybody, but you tend to recognize most faces, and so it feels like a family. The honor code, again, brings those family commitments and family ties a little bit closer, because you can trust everybody as well. But you're going to smile at people as you walk into the cafeteria. You're going to wave at people as you're crossing across campus to get to class. You know, you know people. >> Rhodes College is clearly a college [LAUGH] and that is something that often confuses international students. The terms college versus university. Can you tell us what it means to be a college, and how a college and a university actually differ? >> Uh-huh. That actually confuses a lot of U.S. students as well. that, simply, a college typically is focused on a smaller size, and as focused on the undergraduate college experience. A university is oftentimes quite larger, and it has graduate school programs within it. Being at Rhodes College, being a, a college environment, we're focused on the undergraduate experience from beginning to end. Our resources, our professors, the facilities are all focused on the undergraduate experience. Another difference between a college and a university is you apply to the entire college when you apply in the admissions process. Whereas at a university, oftentimes you apply to a specific academic college within that university. And so there's a little bit of a difference there as we're looking to shape a class and looking at the class for the entire campus experience. I also think with a college, personal attention is awarded to every single student. Whereas oftentimes at a university, personal attention is awarded to the student who seeks it out. And the opportunities are there at both colleges and universities. They're just a little bit more easy to find, or simply, they fall in your lap at a college experience, because you've got that personal attention throughout. >> Rhodes College was featured in a very famous book titled Colleges That Change Lives. The idea that a college could change someone's life is a pretty powerful idea. How can a college have that sort of impact on a student and, and what does it mean to be a college that change lives? >> First of all, Rhodes was very fortunate to be included in the book of Colleges That Change Lives. We were very pleased that Loren Pope chose to include us. There are certainly more than 40 schools in the United States that change students' lives. The main difference in being a member of the colleges that change lives consortium is, again, that focus on the undergraduate college experience that a student will be different from the time they enter college through the time that they exit college. And that they'll have a chance to grow and explore themselves, the world around them, and their role within that world. And that makes a big difference when the entire institution's focus is on your experience as a student. And so all of the, the schools are included in the Colleges That Change Lives

have that focus on undergraduate experiences. Very student-centric. Something else that I love about the author Loren Pope's philosophy in the college search process is that it is also student-centric. So he wrote about these schools that highlighted the college student experience. But he also wrote about the students' own college search, and how to go about finding the right fit. And schools that are part of this consortium, or follow the same beliefs of the colleges that change lives really focus on the student in the college search process. >> So, Rhodes College is a nationally ranked liberal arts college. What does it mean to be a liberal arts college? >> Well, first of all Eric, the full term is liberal arts and sciences college. We call it liberal arts for shorthand. But I don't want to give the impression that you don't study the sciences in a liberal arts and sciences education. So the full term is liberal arts and sciences. But you'll also hear, oftentimes hear it referred to as just the Liberal Arts. The simplest definition of a liberal arts education is that no matter what a student's major is, they will explore classes in the natural sciences, the social sciences, the fine arts, and the humanities. And I think one area that is oftentimes confusing in the term liberal arts sciences is the term liberal. Some students or some families may think that liberal refers to a political leaning. And it doesn't. It goes back to its purest definition of meaning liberal as a broad sense, a broad term. So you are covering a wide variety of subjects in a liberal arts and sciences education, regardless of what you ultimately choose to major in. Rhodes does this in a really unique way. We have what we call a Foundations Curriculum. And traditionally, liberal arts and sciences colleges will oftentimes give students a checklist of classes that they must take in order to graduate in four years. And those classes are designed to ensure that they are well-rounded human being by the time they graduate. You must take two natural sciences and three social sciences and four humanities, and it's a checklist. And that's all well and good. You get a very well rounded liberal arts education. Rhodes took it a step further a couple of years ago when we created a Foundations Curriculum, which includes 12 big picture concepts. Really big ideas that we think students should have a thorough understanding of by the time they graduate. Things like you should be able to write well. You should have an understanding of a culture other than your own. You should examine questions of ethics and morality. You should have an understanding of historical analysis and perspective in the way that it shapes the present day and future. So big picture ideas. And students actually get to choose the classes that they want to take in order to satisfy those 12 foundations. So there's a lot more ownership of their education over the course of four years and certainly a lot more flexibility. My favorite example is in mathematics. I don't know how many of our student participants are in love with calculus, but I was not a great math student when I was applying to Rhodes. It was not my favorite subject, and the idea of taking calculus was a little bit hard to swallow for me. But we all need and should learn math in order to be a well rounded human being. And so with our mathematical foundation, every student should have a thorough understanding of mathematical analysis and expression. And for those students who do love calculus or higher level math, they can choose any one of our math courses to satisfy that foundation. But they can also choose a computer science class, or a logics course in our philosophy department, or an accounting class or statistics course in our business department to satisfy that foundation. So, everybody learns math, but hopefully in a way that is interesting and applicable to them. So again, it gives students a lot more flexibility and a lot more ownership of, of their education. I think for high school students to understand a liberal arts experience, one of the easiest ways is to think about what they're experiencing in their own high school right now. Because a lot of high schools operate under a liberal arts and sciences model. Particularly if anybody is participating in an international baccalaureate

program. If you love theory of knowledge, you're going to love a liberal arts curriculum. But if you think about a time, students, when you have gone to your history class. And you've learned about a period in, in history, a time period. And you're understanding the political and economic forces at work that are shaping that history. And then you participate in a literature class. And you read a piece of poetry that was written in that same time period that you just learned about in your history class. And your understanding of that poem or that piece of literature is greater because you now have the historical context to put it into. And then you move to your science class, and you learn about an experiment that takes place in that same time period. And that science experiment could only have taken place in that historical time period, and you should know that, because you learned about the historical influence in your history class. And the lightbulb goes off, because the dots are suddenly able to be connected, and everything makes more sense. You're able to delve more deeply into subject matter because you can make those connections across disciplines. If you love that kind of moment as a student in high school, you're going to love a liberal arts and sciences curriculum in college. If you are shaking your head listening to this and thinking, wow, that woman's a little crazy, then liberal arts is probably not the way to go. >> Thank you for that great explanation of the liberal arts. now, to, to take it to the next step using Rhodes as the example, what can a student expect from the day to day of a liberal arts education? And how might that differ from a non-liberal arts school? >> Mm-hm. Students can expect a lot of that same interconnectivity across thinking, across disciplines when they're attending a liberal arts and sciences school. So, for example, a student may start off with breakfast in the cafeteria with some of their foreign language professors discussing French or Russian cinema. And then they're going to go to their first class of the day, and that's a chemistry class. And so, they're switching from foreign language to natural sciences. And then they might go to their second class of the day, which would be an art history class. And so, they're moving from a natural science course into an art course, or a social science course perhaps. And then they might pursue a business-related internship that afternoon at FedEx, whose international headquarters are in Memphis. And then they'll come back for a meeting with fellow students about student government. And so, it's a mix of using all sorts of different parts of your brain and all sorts of your creative thinking. Your critical, your critical problem solving and effective communication skills that are emphasized in a liberal arts curriculum. >> In describing a liberal arts education, you've highlighted a lot of the intellectual pursuits in the, the intellectual nature of the the education. And a question that I get from a lot of the international students that I work with is, what can I do with it? So, how would you answer that question? What is it that you can do, that a student can do with a liberal arts education? >> What can you do with a liberal arts education? Anything you want. And that's the best possible answer because it's absolutely true. A liberal arts and sciences education emphasizes critical thinking skills, creative problem solving skills, teamwork, effective communication skills. And these are all skills that employers time after time after time say that they want in future employees. And so you truly can do anything. We have a lot of students who are interested in health professions. We have had students from every single academic department go into medical school. So you don't just have to be a biology or biochemistry major to pursue med school. In fact, in last year's graduating class, we had a Greek and Roman studies student. Think about that, Greek and Roman studies. Who's now enrolled at Harvard Medical School. So you can truly do whatever it is that you want to do as the next step. And I think in so many ways, you are learning for a lifetime. You are not learning for a vocation or for a career path, when you study the liberal arts and sciences. And a lot of employers

will say, we can teach you how to use this computer program. We can teach you how to use the spreadsheets and how to set up meetings. So what we don't have time to teach you is how to be a team player, how to present an effective presentation or sales pitch to a group of people, how to write and condense a 200-page report into a one paragraph summary to present to your supervisor. They don't have time to teach you those skills, but those are skills that you're going to learn every single day in a liberal arts and sciences education. So what can you do? Anything you want. [LAUGH] >> So moving away from the liberal arts a little bit, you already mentioned Rhodes College's located in the city of Memphis, Tennessee which, as you mentioned, is a pretty major U.S. city. Being in Memphis, that of course gives Rhodes what's referred to as an urban location. What is life like in an urban location? >> It's a lot of fun. And I'll be honest with you, Eric, one of the things that drew me to Rhodes when I was a prospective student many years ago, was the fact that Rhodes is a small liberal arts college in a major city. I grew up in the suburbs of a city, so I knew I enjoyed the advantages of a city, the culture, the arts, the fast-paced life of a city. But I wanted to actually be in a city, not 45 minutes away or a train ride away out in the suburbs. And Rhodes is really unusual to be a small liberal arts college in a major metropolitan area. And it's exciting to see how our students take advantage of that city on a daily basis. First of all, I got to tell you, Memphis is a lot of fun. It is the home of the Blues and home of Rock and Roll. So there's a great vibe, a great energy in Memphis. And in general, anytime you'll find a college or university settled into a city, into an urban area, you can find ways to connect what you're learning in a classroom on a daily basis to practical life, by being in that city. One of the easiest ways to do that is through internships, certainly. Rhodes is fortunate enough to have FedEx in Memphis with their international headquarters. The national headquarters of Autozone and International Paper are also in Memphis. St. Jude Children's Research Hospital is right down the street from our campus. And so, for our students to be able to connect through internships is a really great way for them to explore the practicality of a liberal arts degree. And take that learning from the classroom and apply it directly to the outside workforce. And about three quarters of our students will do at least one internship. I actually did three while I was a student at Rhodes. So, you can have that work experience, the opportunities for networking and professional development, and building that resume. But also trying on some of those jobs for size before you're committing to something upon graduation. You'll also see professors take advantage of the urban environment in their classrooms. It might be something as simple as a Spanish professor taking their classes to a local hospital to provide Spanish language translation services. Or it could be a history class going to the National Civil Rights Museum and doing a field trip, if you will. And exploring some of the things they're learning about and reading in their texts. It could be one of our urban studies classes reaching out to urban planners, and talking about city growth and city planning and public services that need to happen in a city to make it work well. We have a relatively new environmental studies program that's focused on environmental policy, as opposed to environmental science. And they do a lot of work with the city planners to discuss recycling and environmental initiatives within the city to reduce the carbon footprint. Or recently Memphis has installed bike lanes throughout the city. And our students got to be involved in some of the research related to where those bike lanes should be. How effective they'd be able to, to reduce public transportation or reduce the use of cars within the city. So it's really interesting to see how professors are able to academically tie into the city. Another way to get involved in an urban environment is through service. I mentioned that Rhodes has a very high commitment to community service. We don't require it of our students, but

almost everybody participates in some form of community service by the time they graduate. And I think that's indicative of being in a big city. You're taking advantage of Memphis for these internships, for these research projects, fun things to do on a Friday or Saturday night. So you naturally just want to give back to the city. And we'll see that with our Habitat for Humanity Chapter was the first collegiate Habitat for Humanity Chapter to complete a house. Our soup kitchen is a completely student run soup kitchen. And it's the longest continually running student led soup kitchen in the United States. So there's a long standing tradition of community service. But again, that's just easy to do because you are in a, a city environment. And finally, being in an urban environment just allows for a lot of fun. It means that your, your college experience is not just on the campus, it's in the city as well. I always say you're not making Rhodes your home for four years, you're also making Memphis your home for four years. And Memphis is a fun place to be on the weekends. But it means students aren't solely reliant on the campus for outside activities whether it's going to enjoy a Broadway level play at the Orpheum Theater that's passing through. In fact, our students have tickets to Wicked for \$5.00 coming up in just a few weeks. Yes, \$5.00. Rhodes will subsidise blocks of tickets to NBA basketball games or Minor League baseball games, or the Broadway shows or the concerts and symphony orchestras that are performing in Memphis, and then sell those ticket for \$5. So it's a really affordable way for students to take advantage of the city. And I think you'll find that at most colleges and universities in the U.S., if they're in an urban environment, there are usually student level discounts, and so it becomes affordable to explore your city and have fun. And I always say Memphis is one of the biggest small towns, but it has your big city amenities, an NBA pro basketball team, Minor League baseball team, a very Minor League ice hockey team, great restaurants, fantastic restaurants, great concerts, great music scene. And you're able to take advantage of those on a Friday or Saturday night. And I mentioned earlier that I think Rhodes' personality is the best of both worlds. And in some cases, that's for social life as well because you're able to take advantage of a student committee improv show, or a student basketball game, or a movie night, or a lecture on campus. Or you could take advantage of an NBA team, or a concert, or a movie off campus as well. It's kind of like a choose your own adventure novel. You can choose different options throughout your four years. And nobody's Friday night is going to look the same at Rhodes. >> And finally, just to ask about geography. geographically, Rhodes College is located in Memphis, Tennessee which is in the Southern part of the US. What is life in the South all about? >> Uh-huh. So I moved from the Northern part of the U.S. to Rhodes to be in the Southern part of the US. And so I have a good sense of the, the differences, the cultural differences between those two parts of our country. And in the South, I think students will expect certainly the warmer weather than what the rest of the country may be experiencing. And so for Memphis, our average temperature in January is only about 5.5 degrees Celsius. So you still have four distinct seasons, but they're a lot milder than in some other places. You still experience the four seasons. But we only get an average of about seven centimeters of snow, about three inches of snow a year. And so it's enough to be pretty at falls. You look at it, you enjoy it, you build snow people that are about that tall. [LAUGH] And then it melts and disappears. And so certainly I think a lot of our international students appreciate the warmer weather of being in the South. The South is also known for a more relaxed pace of life, and that's true. People walk more slowly. They talk more slowly. They kind of stop and smell the roses. It's a phrase that you'll hear a lot. And and the South is definitely a little bit more relaxed than some other places in the Northern part of the U.S., as well as just big cities in general. Having been to Tokyo and Mumbai, it's just a, it's a more relaxed environment than

those major cities. The South is known for something that we call Southern hospitality. And essentially, that's a, kind of an extra level of friendliness or an extra level of kindness. That's true, people smile at you as you're passing them down the street corner, even if you have no idea who they are. They will ask, how are you doing. They stop to talk to you at the cash register when you're checking out at the grocery store. It's just a more polite, friendlier way of life. And then finally, there's some great food in the South. The South will fry anything. In fact, one of my favorite traditions on the Rhodes campus is Fried Chicken Friday, which means every Friday, you are guaranteed to have fried chicken as one of the lunch options in our cafeteria. But there's some fantastic, what we call home cooking food in the South. >> We'll be right back to hear more from Lauren Sefton in just a second. [BLANK_AUDIO]