# Health and Human Science Matters Season 4, Episode 1: Rick Miranda

Rick Miranda:

Because Colorado state's the land grant institution of the state. We sort of think that the state of Colorado is our campus. We have extension offices in every county in the state pretty much. We have Forest Service offices in selected areas of the state. We have agricultural experiment stations scattered all over the rural parts of the state. We have, as you say, we have our teaching experiences, whether that's our deck north of town or the Mountain campus, an hour away, the Foothills, the South campus and now Spur coming online. We really feel like the state of Colorado is our campus and we need to be out there and reach out as we can. I would also point to our involvement with the Semester at Sea. So the oceans are our campus too. Let's think big. Let's think big here. Mark.

Avery Martin:

Welcome to Health and Human Science Matters, a podcast by Colorado State University's College of Health and Human Sciences. I'm your co-host and digital media strategist, Avery Martin.

Matt Hickey:

And I'm Matt Hickey, associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies. In our college, we make it our mission to optimize human health and wellbeing through discovery and innovation. Don't just take our word for it. Each episode we sit down with people who fulfill that mission, our college faculty and staff.

Avery Martin:

And on some occasions we're joined by very special guests. Dr. Rick Miranda has had a 40-year career at Colorado State University. At the time of recording in early 2023, Dr. Miranda was serving as Interim President for the university. On February 1st, CSU welcomed at 16th President Amy Parsons, who appointed Dr. Miranda to be her Interim Executive Vice President. Stick around to hear from Dr. Miranda.

Matt Hickey:

Rick, welcome.

Avery Martin:

Yes, thank you.

Rick Miranda:

Oh, great to be here. Thanks for the invitation.

Matt Hickey:

We're looking forward to chatting a little bit, and as we were talking about before we came on air, a little bit of Rick, the person off campus and things that interest you. And of course we're interested in your experiences here at CSU and even the educational training pathway that led you here. But we want to start with kind of a big question. So when we think about research problems that CSU is well positioned to pursue, I'm interested in your insights on that rather large question.

Rick Miranda:

Yeah. Well there are quite a few actually. We are a pretty comprehensive university and we've got some great strengths across the board. I think there's no question though, that when you take a look at us from kind of 30,000 feet, you sort of see the pillars of the vet school and engineering, that's our traditional, and the agriculture space we started A&M. And that's still strengths of the university. So we're really well positioned in so many areas in veterinary medicine. We've got one of the top vet schools in the country and that means in the world. And our investments actually in infectious disease research and in animal health and in animal reproductive health is unparalleled across the globe. And so there's no question you put that whole sector on the list. And it was an incredible boon to both us and our students and our faculty and to the rest of the country that we had that capacity here during the pandemic.

Because that expertise in infectious diseases really was able to benefit our campus, the State of Colorado, we did a lot of stuff behind the scenes in assisting with testing and nursing home stuff and really great work. And so you really point to that as a pillar. In the engineering space, you think in terms of energy research here, we have the powerhouse facility north of campus on the north side of town. Unbelievable stuff going on there. Science fiction type stuff going on there. And a lot of other areas in engineering, too numerous dimension in hydrology and water research brings us that sort of tax over. When you think about water and hydrology, you start thinking about the impacts on agriculture in water research and how irrigation started here was the strength of the university for so many years, still is, and how that impacts agriculture and sort of bleeds into our other work in both crop science, animal science, soil science especially.

We're very strong in soil science here. That's probably one of the biggest strengths we have. Branching out from there, your own college in health and human sciences has got some fantastic programs, especially those that deal with the relationships of health with human behavior and other aspects of that. So whether that's human behavior and where we live in construction or human behavior and how we deal with our relationships in human development, family studies or human behavior in how we deal with our bodies in health and exercise arts, they're all interrelated. And this college kind of captures that, those interrelationships in a sort of very unique and interesting way. I'd be remiss if I didn't sort of tack over to the humanities in arts too. I think I mentioned some of our strengths in the sciences, and I don't mean to leave out my own home college in natural sciences either, but I don't want to leave out the humanities where we've got some extraordinary strengths in unexpected parts of the college.

I mean, I don't know if you realize this, but we've got three to five of the most wonderful poets in the country on our faculty. Whether if you look at Dan Beachy-Quick or Camille Dungy or others, it's really incredible. So if you like poetry, which I do, this is a great place to hang out and just listen once in a while and many other parts of... That's probably one of the most humanistic sides of college of liberal arts. They're also intimately involved in many research projects that have to do with sociology and other areas that can contribute to the big grand challenges that we face. Whether that's climate issues, whether that's democracy issues, whether that's poverty, you name it. We have people thinking about that here at Colorado State. So those are just a few of... I mean, how long do you want me to talk? I got a couple hours of this. It's queued up if you need.

Matt Hickey:

Just made the answers so much fun, right?

Avery Martin:

Absolutely.

Matt Hickey:

Because they instantly bring people to mind and current projects. Michael Caroline came to mind when you were talking about [inaudible 00:06:25]...

Rick Miranda:

Yeah.

Matt Hickey:

Food system stuff.

Rick Miranda:

Food.

Matt Hickey:

The pandemic. We just had an opportunity to simultaneously interview Lisa with Nicole Earhart and of course Nicole and Ricky Boler were really at the forefront of that work with skilled nursing facilities. So it's fun to chat with her after the fact in some ways, to reflect on a very different time for all of us, wasn't it?

Rick Miranda:

Yeah.

Avery Martin:

Yes.

Matt Hickey:

It's what you've just shared is a microcosm too in the the three and a half seasons we've been doing this to hear the range of what's going on just within our own college continues to surprise and delight us. It's, I've spent my entire academic career. I'm in 26 years and I still go, "Wow, that's cool."

Rick Miranda:

Something new every day.

Matt Hickey:

Exactly. Yeah. So I want to move off campus and maybe wind the tape of your life back a few years or decades as you prefer and talk about, we are always interested, we ask everybody to share about their educational pathway. And that doesn't have to start with, "Here's when I got my PhD." We've had people sharing about second grade teachers that really had an influence on them. But talk to us a little bit about your pathway from Rick the young man, to Rick the math professor and dean and provost and President.

Rick Miranda:

Yeah. Well, I don't know. If I really go back to my childhood education and spent eight years with the nuns and then another eight years with the Jesuits.

And that's when I exited college and decided to go to graduate school and study mathematics. I've always been, I was a math major in college and I was sort of a math nerd my whole life and maybe I still am. So MIT's a wonderful place. It's an incredible, talk about science fiction stuff mean every person you meet there is kind of an incredible frontier like person who was really on the bleeding edge of things and discoveries, which is incredible. And Boston and Cambridge is a sort of extremely stimulating place. So that was a wonderful half decade of my life hanging out there.

Matt Hickey:

Now, Rick, I have to ask you again, forgive me for interrupting, but first of all, your undergrad was at Holy Cross, right?

Rick Miranda:

Yep.

Matt Hickey:

And did you have a moment or a person that opened your eyes to graduate school or was it kind of all part of the long range plan? I knew going into my freshman year I was going to...

Rick Miranda:

No, it wasn't quite, I knew going into my freshman year, but I was a math major from day one and I just kept going on and studying more and more. And the math faculty at Holy Cross was great to me. They just kept loading me up with things to think about and gave me a lot of freedom with independent study classes and projects to do and summer jobs in the computer science department, in the computer labs there. And they clearly invested in me, which I'm eternally grateful for and let me do the things that launched me towards the next step, which was great. So encouraged me a lot.

Matt Hickey:

Now a related question. Do you come from a family of mathematicians or engineers or where did that interest start?

Rick Miranda:

Well, my dad's a physicist and my mother was a medical records librarian before she had the kids and then she left that. So I wasn't a first gen student. I was maybe a second gen student. My father was the first person to get a degree in many generations I think, in the family.

Avery Martin:

That great.

Matt Hickey:

Now your dissertation work was on what set of problems?

Rick Miranda:

Well, I'm a pretty pure mathematician and study geometry, and it's called algebraic geometry because I study geometric objects that are defined by polynomial equations only. So I don't do wild things, it's just, it's got to be defined by a polynomial. And the fact that it's the geometric objects are defined by polynomials really restricts what they can be. So for instance, if you just have, look in the plane, you have two variables, X and Y. And if you use a polynomial, like a linear polynomial, like three X plus five Y equal seven, well that defines a line. And then you go to quadratic polynomials, you get circles and ellipses and things and you go to cubic polynomials and all of a sudden all the lines and conics, quadratic equations were studied by the Greeks. Cubic were a mystery until the Renaissance. And then they started getting to understand how cubic curves in the plane work. And I wrote my thesis on families of cubic curves, actually. Still things we don't know about them. And I wrote another paper last year about cubic [inaudible 00:11:11]...

Matt Hickey:

I was about to ask that. That's true.

Rick Miranda:

About them. But I spent my whole career sort of thinking about these kinds of geometric objects, not only in the plane but in higher dimensions as well, curves, surfaces.

Matt Hickey:

So you finish a PhD in mathematics from MIT. What came next?

Rick Miranda:

Well, I had a sort of an instructorship at the University of Chicago for a couple of years. Then I went to Princeton, the Institute for Advance study for a year, which was a wonderful experience. Both of those experiences were great. And then I came here in 1982 and took up a position as an assistant professor in the mathematics department.

Matt Hickey:

And who was the department head back then?

Rick Miranda:

His name was Bob Gaines. And he was a wonderful man and...

Matt Hickey:

He rings a bell.

Rick Miranda:

So Bob was the department chair for about five years at the time. He was sort of fit maybe heading into his second term as chair when he hired me and he was a man of good humor, a good sense. He was dedicated to building the department up and investing in a little bit more research than had been the case in the previous generation in the math department. And he was chair for 20 years. When he stepped down 15 years later and then I became the chair in '97 and he became the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs. Loren Crabtree became the provost. He asked Bob Gaines to, they knew each other well, they played basketball together all those years. And so Loren asked Bob would he step in as the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs. And so he did that for a couple of years before he passed away. But he was a great mentor and a great example for university leadership.

Matt Hickey:

Now again, presumably you weren't hired as an assistant professor with a long-term vision of being department head. How did that evolve? I'm always interested in how one finds himself in leadership?

Rick Miranda:

Yeah, it was a little bit partly luck and partly the demographics of the department to be honest. So the department and the whole university really grew a lot in the '60s, as we all know. And we were coming out of the period in the '50s where we transitioned from being Colorado A&M to Colorado State University. And enrollments were increasing. We did a lot of hiring all across the university and in the math department. So we had staffed up in the '60s and we had a lot of faculty. So when I got here in the early '80s, there were quite a lot of faculty members who were just coming into their kind of full professor prime and there were in their 40s. And that was a whole cadre of faculty who made up the department. So then I was hired in '82. So they didn't do a lot of hiring in the '80s because we had staffed up so much in the prior period.

And so when they hired me, they hired a couple other people, but I was kind of a demographic that was sort of alone for a while. And there was a lot of people who were 15, 20 years older than me. And then there was me and a couple other people. And then by the time Bob stepped down as chair, we had started to hire some assistant professors. But it was this gap. And so when Bob stepped down, people started looking around, it's like, who's going to be the chair? We had all these people who were now not in their 40s but in their 60s and were looking maybe that they were looking to not commit themselves to another five or 10 years of activities. So everybody started looking at me, said, "Rick, are you going to be the chair? You're the person now in the 40s who could do this."

And so I said, well, I'd only been elected to the executive committee once I kept my head down, I was doing a lot of research and mentoring graduate students, teaching undergraduate classes. I never thought about going into administration. But that moment in history came and they started asking me to be the chair. So I said, "Okay, I'll be the interim chair. We'll see what happens." And it wasn't so bad. So then the dean at the time, John Raich, we did a little search and it was a national search and they chose me to be the chair. So I was chair for five years. And then the same thing happened when the dean, the dean's job came open there was, John Write, was the dean of Natural sciences and he was the second dean of the college. The first dean was Bill Cook, he was dean for 17 years Bill.

And he had been asked by the president at the time, I think it was Ray Chamberlain, to take the former College of Science and Arts. We had a big arts and sciences college and to split it into two, the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Natural Sciences. So he spent his first year as the sort of dean of the big college, splitting it. And then he became the Dean of the Natural Sciences and he was dean for 17 years and then he retired. And John Raich, a physicist, he was a chemist. Bill Cook, John Reich physicist came in and he was dean for 17 years. And so then I became the dean and I was thinking, well, I'm going to be 18 years in this job.

Avery Martin:

I had the one up.

Rick Miranda:

I only made it about seven because in 2009, Tony Frank sort of suddenly became the president and he needed a provost and looked around and found me to be the provost. And so I served as provost for about 12 years.

Matt Hickey:

When you think about your opportunities for administrative leadership from department head up to your current position, I'm interested in things you like best. I'm going to ask the inverse in just a few minute, the challenges that attend leadership, but we'll start with the good stuff first.

Rick Miranda:

Well, the things you like best are to be able to say yes to great ideas. I mean there's no shortage of great ideas at a place like this. I mean, y'all are examples of folks with great ideas and if you just talk to people you realize there's so much opportunity here. And so one of the hard parts of the job is just to give those great ideas a platform and a voice to reach the president and the provost desk so you get a chance to evaluate. Then it's sometimes a little Sophie's choice to select those few things. But to be able to say yes to great ideas is one of the great pleasures of the leadership positions. And I think that's one of the things I enjoy the most. To see things that you've invested in blossom. I always used to say to people, "Look, I mean, what's the provost do well?"

Well, I'm not up there in the admin building making all these sort of Wizard of Oz decisions, right? The two big roles are to be a cheerleader and to be a checkbook. I mean, I had access to the finances, I knew where some of the opportunities for resources were and I could be a champion for those great ideas. And so I always viewed the role as those two aspects more than that I was really driving the university in a particular direction.

Matt Hickey:

So the challenges are probably related to what you've just articulated in terms of this.

Rick Miranda:

The areas a flip side, there's a heads and a tails to these coins. So one of the hardest things is to be able to say to somebody who brought you a great idea says, "I'm sorry we just ran out of resources. I can't fund you this year. We better not start that program."

That's always a hard conversation because both of us want to do it. And I feel like those are the hard... It was hard because I feel like I couldn't somehow find the resources to make that happen. And I always felt that was part of my inadequacy of the job. Okay, we all know that resources are finite, so it's not all my fault. But not being able to make those investments. Some other hard parts of the job, seeing good people lead the university. I mean, faculty and staff at universities are pretty mobile workforce, if I can use HR terminology. And we hire people all the time, great people. But we also see people sort of leave the university for usually great reasons. They have great opportunities. And it was always hard to watch someone great think that they have to leave because the opportunities somewhere else were better than here in their minds.

And sometimes they were, sometimes they weren't. And they want to come back. That happened too. But that was also a sort of difficult part of the job to understand, okay, how do we try to retain somebody or how do we try to replace somebody? Of course, budget issues are going to paramount when you live in the admin buildings, but those are kind of... I always viewed those as secondary. Annoyances more than real problems. That of course when the recession hit in '09 and you lost $50 million, it was more than an annoyance. And we had to scramble and sort of figure out, "Okay, where's our money coming from? How are we going to do some sensible trimming and stay within our budget?" This was serious business. But most of the time I viewed the budgets as more of an opportunity than a problem. "Okay. Let's try to find some resources in order to do the things we need to do."

Avery Martin:

Yeah, that's great. So I have a twofold question, and it's in the 40 years now that you've been here, I wonder if you might share the sort of biggest changes, institution-wide, things that really sort of stand out for you. The second order question is the same thing related to the research enterprise.

Rick Miranda:

Well, I think one of the... Well I was going to talk about the research. When I first came here, although we had sort of strengths in engineering and vet med, I think the rest of the university was a little behind those two. And now what I've seen over the decades is that those areas of stayed strong and the rest of the sort of university has met their challenge and also gotten strong. And so we've got incredible strengths almost everywhere you look. So I really feel great about the trajectory of Colorado State coming from not quite a one trick pony, but a more focused and a less broad university to what we are now is really a comprehensive R1 university where we've got strengths in almost every aspect of human endeavors that you could think of. Unbelievable opportunities for students to come here and study almost anything their heart desires and to get a great degree to go do whatever they want to do.

That just wasn't the case sort of 40 years ago. It was a little bit more restricted I think. So on the research side, I would, when you really stand and look at the university from 30,000 feet, you see an incredible institution that has matured. And to become in that sort of top rank of universities in the country and across the world. I would tack over the student side too. And we see our student body more and more diverse every year reaching deeper into the population of the State of Colorado and encouraging students to come here, providing experiences in ways that we didn't really understand how to do well before.

We've gotten a lot better at providing experiential learning opportunities for students with internships, with high impact practices. Undergraduate research here has just exploded. It's a much better place pedagogically than it was also. So I think those two things are not unrelated by the way. So our teaching mission and our research mission should be, and I think in many dimensions are here at Colorado State sort of intimately intertwined. And it's really, for a place like us, it's impossible to make great progress in one and leave the other behind. They go hand in hand.

Matt Hickey:

The physical space has changed considerably as well when one looks out their window in 1982 versus now the landscape's considerably different.

Rick Miranda:

Yeah, the math department used to be in the E wing of engineering and while I was department chair, actually, I supervised the move from the E wing of engineering to the Weber building next door. And they had completely renovated the interior of the Weber building, which was really old chemistry and labs, which were awful. I mean it was a terrible. Now, it's a pretty nice place to hang out. And you see that kind of thing everywhere. When I think back in my first 15 years here in the E wing of engineering, we used to call it cell block E. My office was pretty tiny. There were identical little cubicle type offices across the hallway from the classrooms there. And it was difficult for me to talk to three of my PhD students in my office. It was so small. So now the facilities here are really, the things we've built over the last 15 years or so have been, are spectacular.

Whether you go to the behavioral sciences building or the Scott building in engineering, the renovation of the students center, the renovation of the Morgan Library, looking forward to the upcoming renovation of Clark, Animal Sciences, and Shephardson renamed nutrient is fantastic. This building, that we're sitting in, Spruce Hall, was upgraded quite a bit to 10 years ago. We really went on a concerted and deliberate building and renovation effort since about '05, I would say that era. And the campus has been transformed.

Matt Hickey:

Sure has.

Rick Miranda:

It's incredible. When you see the alums come back on homecoming who haven't been here in a while, I mean, they're walking around with their mouth open. "Really?" Luckily the oval kind of looks the same. Behind the walls, the buildings are different. And you know, go into the TILT building, it's beautiful. We've restored the Great Hall of the old library and the musicians have moved over across the street to the old high school, which has been turned into the University Center of the Arts.

That's an incredible facility. We hosted the National Association of Music Educators a few years ago when UCA was just, the renovation was just a few years old and we held most of the meetings over. There was a summer conference and these music educators were just wowed by what was going on, what we had built there. Not only renovating the old high school, but adding Griffin Hall on the north wing there. And they were coming up to me, I was sort of a new provost at the time. They were coming up to me saying, "How did you do this? Where'd you get, how did you talk to your president to investing in this?" Because all those musicians really wanted that kind of facility for them. And you just see that everywhere on campus. And when you look over the 15 years plus that we've really done this, you see almost every college, every department even, has gotten some attention in their facilities.

So I think we've, we've done a good job of trying to lift all the boats from this effort. It was a struggle, I think, when you look at the big building booms of the post-war era in the '50s and '60s when the engineering building was built and the student center was built and Morgan Library, the old Morgan Library is built and many of the old buildings were built. And we sort of stopped building for a while. And maybe in that pause in building after that big effort we made in the '50s and '60s, then we didn't build much in the '70s and '80s and '90s and a [inaudible 00:27:33] show. And the attractiveness of the campus and the utility of the facilities and the classrooms and the offices were really starting to hurt us in recruiting, not only recruiting students, but recruiting faculty and staff too.

It was recognized by the leadership there in those mid 2000s that, okay, we got to turn this around and we put in place funding plans and did some borrowing, students helped out with their facility fee efforts and their willingness to invest in the campus. And you fast-forward these 15 plus years and the place has transformed in really great ways. And so now you see students from all over the country wanting to come here. Why? Because it's a great place to be and it's a great place to work. And it's a great place to learn.

Matt Hickey:

Here. Here.

Avery Martin:

Yes. You have such an interesting vantage point of looking at leadership and the evolution of the many different leaders that you've seen, including yourself. So I'm interested in knowing how you've seen the leaders transform and contribute to the university in their own ways.

Rick Miranda:

Well, I mean, we have been blessed with some great leadership here who really had both the foresight to say yes to those great ideas when they came around. And not only do you have to say yes, but you also have to say yes in a timely way because sometimes those brass rings, they don't come around twice. I had to grab things. I'm the President of the university for another week here and I report to report to Tony Frank, he's the Chancellor. And the last couple of years, I was the System Chief Academic Officer, reported to Tony Frank as the Chancellor. Before that I was the provost and reported to Tony Frank for 10 or 12 years. And then before that I was the dean that I reported to Tony Frank when he was the provost. So, Tony I think has been my direct supervisor for almost 20 years.

And I would point to his leadership as really being a key linchpin of the progress that Colorado State's made over the last 20 years. I've watched him lead the university, lead, not only lead the university with his speeches and rhetoric and neat long emails and stuff, but also watched him in small meetings with three people, five people, 12 people, and seeing exactly how organized he is and how committed he is to doing things right and doing the right thing, which are different. And he kind of gets both ends of that. And so he was a great model and a mentor over these years. Certainly the best person that I've seen in leadership roles at the university since I've been at the campus. I've been very fortunate to, I think we've been fortunate to have him and he's a big part of the progress of the university.

Avery Martin:

Here. Here. One of the fun things to contemplate is this notion that the campus is sort of plural. We think about the south campus where that teaching hospital is. And of course they've got huge plans coming up in the next five or six years for continuing to growth. We've got the Foothills campus, we have the beautiful little Mountain campus, and we have a new jewel in Denver as well on the Spur campus.

Rick Miranda:

Yeah.

Matt Hickey:

So, I'm just interested in reflections on the borders being of somewhat porous in some ways, right?

Rick Miranda:

Well, yes, but it's not some new idea. So because Colorado State's the land grant institution of the state, we sort of think that the State of Colorado is our campus. We have extension offices in every county in the state pretty much. We have Forest Service offices in selected areas of the state. We have agricultural experiment stations scattered all over the rural parts of the state. We have, as you say, we have our teaching experiences, whether that's our deck north of town or the Mountain campus and hour away, the Foothills, the South campus and now Spur coming online.

We really feel like the state of Colorado is our campus and we need to be out there and reach out as we can. I would also point to our involvement with the Semester at Sea. So the oceans are our campus too. Let's think big. Let's think big here, Martin. So really the opportunities for experiential learning here at Colorado State are unmatched anywhere. We've got the Todos Santos campus in the Baja also, you didn't mention. So when you start listing all of these assets that we have, many of them are here in the state of Colorado. Some of them are outside the state. The opportunities for students are incredible.

Avery Martin:

We live in such a beautiful state too. And Chris Melby and I have had a 25-year running joke that if we ever plant a Mountain campus in Ouray, that we'd be happy to serve in any capacity necessarily. 'Cause it's so beautiful down there. A couple more things about your leadership. I want you to, if you were to talk to somebody who's thinking, I have been in my position for a while, leadership opportunity, opportunity to serve appeals to me, what kind of counsel would you give to somebody that's in that position?

Rick Miranda:

Well, I think one of the things you want to do when you approach a leadership position is approach it with humility and with a mindset that you're really there to listen first and then to act second. And to treat leadership positions as a partnership with the folks you're working with rather than a hierarchical relationship. And I think that's so important to engender the kind of culture that we like to have here at Colorado State. And I think the kind of culture that's healthy for any organization. And I think you get a lot better decisions made when you have that attitude as well. So that's one thing I'd say. Another thing I'd point out is that to someone who's taking up administrative roles is to do the job that you have rather than the think about the next job you're going to have. Because, I think a lot of people, and I don't think this happens as much at CSU actually, I think we're got a pretty healthy attitude for me.

But when I go around the country, I see a lot of people who are doing a job but looking for the next job. And I always feel sorry for those people. And I was lucky enough to have a whole series of jobs. I can't stay in a job more than five years. I keep getting kicked out. But I was never really looking for the next job. I had a job, I liked it, I was doing it. And if the next opportunity came along I'd look at it, but I wasn't looking for it. And it's a different thing. And I think that's important. Think about the job you have and try to find a way to make yourself happy doing it well.

Avery Martin:

Well said. That's great. I've had the good fortune of working closely with you for a number of years on a variety of things from institutional learning objectives to the provost ethics colloquium. And I can tell you that, you know, you model really nicely what you just articulated. I've always enjoyed the opportunity to hang out with you and think together and...

Rick Miranda:

Oh, thanks.

Avery Martin:

And tackle problems. I really do appreciate that. I've said many times that I admire leaders who take their role and responsibility seriously, but don't take themselves too seriously because that can get a little hard to handle after a while. I'm interested in whether you have particular characters from over the course of your 40 years here that are memorable to you.

Rick Miranda:

My very first year here, I was a brand new assistant professor. And like I said, they hired two or three of us that one year, those years. And it was one guy who came by Richard Games, who had come the year before. And we became friends, about the same age. And he came to me that first month or two that I was on campus and he said, "Rick, the retired professors in the math department have a bowling team in the bowling league. And they asked me to join their bowling team. And I thought it would be fun if you came along too, as sort of the sub, the sixth man on the team so we could go together." 'Cause everyone else was in their 80s.

Matt Hickey:

Oh my God.

Avery Martin:

He needed somebody close.

Rick Miranda:

So I said, "Okay." And so I would go bowling once a week with the retired math professors.

And this was a cast of characters, which from a bygone era. They came in the '40s to Colorado A&M. And the stories they would tell while we tried to hit a few pins was really something. Les Madison was the sort of ringleader, and he was a former department chair of the math department. And if you go over by the greenhouses there, you'll see the Madison Observatory. There's a little telescope down there that is named after Les Madison. Because back in the day, back in the '40s, astronomy was part of the math department for some reason. Anyway, Les was sort of teaching the astronomy classes in addition to, 'cause there's a lot of mathematics in astronomy. And so they named the little telescope after him in the Madison Observatory.

Avery Martin:

That's cool.

Matt Hickey:

Oh my God.

Rick Miranda:

But there's so many people that you encounter over the years that are sort of great characters, great people to talk to, and wonderful colleagues.

Avery Martin:

Part of the fun that keeps us here for decades. Right? Yeah. Yes. So I want to pull us off campus again for a little while. We started with your educational [inaudible 00:37:30], but talk to us about family and kids and, of course grandkids.

Rick Miranda:

Yeah. Well, my wife Jean is also a math professor. She just retired in May. Last May.

Avery Martin:

Good for her. Congratulations to her.

Rick Miranda:

So she wanted to spend more time with our grandkids. And so I'm a bachelor. This spring she went to, so my oldest son, Danny lives in New Jersey, has two kids, six and four. And my middle child, Maria, lives Minneapolis and also has two kids. And my youngest, Joey lives here in Fort Collins. He's a ceramics artist here in town.

Matt Hickey:

Oh, great.

Rick Miranda:

Yeah. So it's been doing great. Danny's a biomedical engineer and Maria's a chemist works for 3M. And like I said, Joey's a potter, so. He just got his master's degree, finished his master's in the leadership and entrepreneurship in the arts program here, the Leap...

Avery Martin:

Oh, good for him.

Matt Hickey:

Oh, that's awesome.

Rick Miranda:

So been, I'm real proud of them. Two PhDs and a master's student in the family. So we're overeducated.

Avery Martin:

And then personal interests. And those of us that have known you for a while now that you have a gift of singing so that the Rockies have even been blessed with you.

Rick Miranda:

Yeah. Sang The National Anthem. Well, yeah. I've been in choirs my whole life. I have a tenor voice and that's always rare. So I get recruited. It's easy for me to join a choir because they always need tenors.

Matt Hickey:

Hey buddy.

Avery Martin:

Yeah.

Rick Miranda:

So I've done that a lot over the years and I even conducted the church choir for about 15 years.

Avery Martin:

Oh, St. Joe's, right?

Rick Miranda:

St. Joe's, yeah. And my final year I sort of stepped down as the choir director when I became the provost. It was a little too much. But the last year I took the choir to Ireland. And we sang our way from Galway to Dublin. Every night at a different church or...

Avery Martin:

There's a fond memory.

Rick Miranda:

Yeah. Yeah. That was wonderful. Yeah.

Matt Hickey:

That's sweet.

Avery Martin:

Well, let me wrap us up with some reflections on what you like best about working at CSU, this really important and integrated land grant institution.

Rick Miranda:

What do I like best about it? Well, the people. Intersecting with the people and sort of making sure that the interactions I have are productive and fun for people. I like to have fun, by the way. I'm sort of famous for joking around enough to keep the meeting light. And I think that helps. And a lot of my colleagues are civilian oriented and they enjoy enjoying themselves, which not everybody does.

But that's been a great pleasure to experience that over the years. So you'd have to say just working with all the people has been a real pleasure. Whether I was in the math department, mostly interacting with the students and the faculty in the department, or whether I was in the dean's office, learning about all the other departments in the college through... When I first got there, I didn't hardly know what chemistry was. And now I have to, all of a sudden I'm in charge of the chemists. That was a great learning experience working with some great leaders in the other parts of the college. And then when I begin the provost, it opened up the whole university to me. And if you just realize sort of day after day after day, the great people that you're surrounded by here, and I always gravitated to the great ones. Yeah.

Avery Martin:

Well Rick, this has been so interesting and so much fun. I really appreciate it. It's conversation on a professional life that's characterized by a consistent willingness to serve. And I just want to say thanks.

Matt Hickey:

Yes. We appreciate it.

Rick Miranda:

Well, thank you.

Avery Martin:

Yeah. Yes. Appreciate the time.

Rick Miranda:

It's been an honor to be in the president's office this last few months and looking forward to working with Amy. She's going to be great to work with and we know her well. So...

Avery Martin:

Here. Here. That's good. And if you don't mind forecasting the future of CSU a little bit. You've given us some awesome history lessons on the campus and how it's grown, but where do you see the university moving forward?

Rick Miranda:

Well, I think there's going to be progress in student success, progress in providing the kind of curriculum and evolving our curriculum to the kinds of disciplines and interdisciplinary opportunities that students really are demanding now. I think we're going to find ways to de-emphasize the silos between the disciplines and find ways to open up students studies more oriented towards those great wicked problems that we're facing. Whether that's climate, whether that's poverty, whether that's democracy. I think there's, we're going to open up the curriculum in the next 10 years so students clearly see paths towards studying the kind of problems they're really interested in and not being sort of forced to only study one thing.

On the research side, it's hard to predict where research is going, but I think the university's is positioning itself, I think Alan Rudolph's done a great job the last 10 years. Bill Farland before him, Tony Frank before Bill in investing sensibly in our research assets here and hiring great people to do interesting projects and interesting research themes. And I think that the kinds of research we will do and the kinds of contributions our faculty will make on those great, grand challenges will resonate well with the curricular side as well. So these will also go hand in hand. And I think looking forward to 10 years from now where those are even more closely bound together than they are now.

Avery Martin:

That's awesome. Looking forward to it.

Matt Hickey:

Here. Here. Rick, thanks a ton for giving us some of your time. We know you're busy and we really enjoyed the chapter.

Rick Miranda:

So did I. Thanks a lot, Matt. Thanks, Avery.

Avery Martin:

Great. My pleasure. Thank you.

Matt Hickey:

Another great interview is in the books. Thank you for listening to this episode of Health and Human Science Matters.

Avery Martin:

Stay tuned for the next episode. It's on the way. In the meantime, go listen to our episodes from Seasons one, two, and three. And if you want to learn more about our CSU College of Health and Human Sciences, go to www.chhs.coloosstate.edu.