

01 | Patience Is A Long Time

Kelsey Bohl:

Hey, y'all. Welcome to the Ace on Air podcast. I'm Kelsey Bohl.

Ahmaad Solmone:

I'm Ahmaad Solmone.

Kelsey Bohl:

And today is a very exciting day because we are interviewing our ninth president and first lady. Though, could you all introduce yourself.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Hi Kelsey and Ahmaad. I'm Ron Berry.

Dr. Christine Berry:

And I'm Christine Berry.

Kelsey Bohl:

We're so excited to have y'all. So we're just going to jump right in.

Ahmaad Solmone:

This is going to be real fun. So I'm excited.

Kelsey Bohl:

Just for listeners that may not know y'all, could you just tell us a little bit about yourselves.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Well, I'm originally from Northeast Louisiana. I grew up in a small town, Winnsboro, which has a population of about 5,000 people. Two degrees from ULM, accounting degree, MBA degree. Went to Mississippi State for grad school in North Carolina for a year and back here to Monroe.

Dr. Christine Berry:

I'm a professor of risk management and insurance here on campus. My dad was a railroader and so we moved every few years. So I don't have a home that I claim except Louisiana. So this is home. Let's see, I got here in 2001 and I've been here... I went to West Virginia University and Florida State for my doctorate.

Ahmaad Solmone:

So I guess we can jump right into some questions. And so the first question is from a student and they would like to know how you guys met because you are so cute.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Well, we actually met here on ULM's campus. I was the department head of computer information systems at the time and Christine was interviewing for a job. And, so the department head at the time, Bob E. Asked me to be part of that search process. So we actually met during that process. And, fortunately she was hired and joined the ULM family. And I can remember like it was yesterday going into her office one day and she just looked at me and said, "So are you ever going to ask me out?" And-

Dr. Christine Berry:

I do not remember that.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

And I said, "Well, actually there's a list and I'm number seven on the list. So the first six get to go first and I'm number seven." So, she doesn't know-

Dr. Christine Berry:

You said you drew straws.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Well, okay. Well, we drew straws, but I didn't ask her out because she had told me this other story that she was moving into her office and her dad was helping her. It was one late evening and I was leaving. It was about six or seven o'clock at night. And they were carrying books up to her office. So I stopped and said, "Let me get you a cart." And so I got her a cart to make it easier. And then she later told me that her dad said, "Would he be someone you'd be interested in?" And what-

Dr. Christine Berry:

He was pushing for him right away.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

And what did you say? What did you say? Do you remember what you said?

Dr. Christine Berry:

Yeah. This part is true. I said, "I think he'd be a good babysitter, but not so much."

Dr. Ronald Berry:

And you can bet I am an awesome babysitter. There is no doubt about that.

Dr. Christine Berry:

He's a really good babysitter because I had a one year old when I first moved here. So from a previous marriage.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

But, the rest is history. We met on campus, fell in love, got married, not too long after that. And-

Dr. Christine Berry:

Two years.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Two years.

Dr. Christine Berry:

It wasn't right away.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

It wasn't right away, but-

Kelsey Bohl:

That's a really good story. So now y'all have a lot of pets, right? So you mentioned that in your video, during the search process. Are y'all dog or cat people?

Dr. Christine Berry:

I'm definitely a dog person, but I like cats. I don't know that he's either, and these are all... Though there are some funny stories about these dogs. He's probably the best to tell them. The oldest of our dogs was one of two that we got when Ron went to the Harvard leadership institute, which was two weeks in Boston. And that was how many years ago? About 13.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Yeah.

Dr. Christine Berry:

12 or 13 years ago. I went with his cousin, it's her fault, to this Yorkie farm somewhere near Winnsboro, I think actually. And I fell in love with these Yorkies. Me and the two kids brought the two Yorkies back. So when he came home from Boston, we had two more dogs. We already had one. And that didn't go over too well.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

You forgot the story. So my plane was delayed and I flew into Shreveport instead of Monroe.

Dr. Christine Berry:

That's true.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

And I get in the car and our daughter was probably three years old. And the first thing she said was, "Daddy, we got new puppies."

Dr. Christine Berry:

After I had-

Kelsey Bohl:

Surprise.

Dr. Christine Berry:

After I had made her swear not to tell him, both kids, and the first thing she said is we got new dogs. I was going to ease into it.

Kelsey Bohl:

Not with a three year old now.

Dr. Christine Berry:

No.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

No. But that happened again.

Dr. Christine Berry:

That happened again at Christmas this year-

Dr. Ronald Berry:

With two more.

Dr. Christine Berry:

... right before Christmas.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Two more dogs.

Dr. Christine Berry:

He came home and we had two dogs. Michael was, our son was volunteering at the Monroe humane society, and he said, "There are these two adorable puppies." And we went out there and came home with two more dogs. So now we have five. No, four. I'm sorry.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Four. One of them really, I said yes to, but on the way to the shelter, I said, "Any dog, except a-

Dr. Christine Berry:

Pomeranian.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

And guess what we have?

Kelsey Bohl:

Pomeranian.

Dr. Christine Berry:

She's a mix.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

She's a mix.

Dr. Christine Berry:

She's mostly Pomeranian.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

So I don't want people to think that I'm a pushover or anything, but I had very little to do with those dogs whatsoever. But I do love them. They're cute. They're adorable. They're funny. They like to play. Each one has a unique personality, which adds to our family significantly.

Dr. Christine Berry:

True.

Kelsey Bohl:

So are we getting a presidential first dog on campus, or four first dogs?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

I think just two. Two will stay with our son.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Okay.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

So we have things to talk about.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Yeah. One is definitely going with our son because it was, one of the ones we adopted last fall, its his. But the three that I think are going to be moving with us to the house are, Hermes and he's the youngest, and Charlotte and Sadie.

Ahmaad Solmone:

So great transitioning back to the president's house. This is a burning question for me. Will you guys redecorate the president's house?

Dr. Christine Berry:

So the house is gorgeous. We'd been in it of course several times just with him being the dean, and being invited for dinners and things, but hadn't really seen all of it and you forget how beautiful it is. So when we went back there, shortly after I think, we got back from Baton Rouge maybe the next day and

took our daughter over there just to see. We couldn't even go inside, but she was like, "Oh yeah, I can do this. This is nice."

Dr. Christine Berry:

So we're really excited about it. There will be some redecorating. I'm excited about maybe trying to get some student art and faculty art in the house. I'm buying some of that and maybe some Bayou scenes. And our campus is just so beautiful and I'd like to get some of the photography that, our awesome photographers here have done and put that throughout the house. So as well as the student and faculty art.

Kelsey Bohl:

That would be beautiful.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Other than that, I mean, it doesn't need a whole lot of redecorating, I think.

Ahmaad Solmone:

I just love a good accent wall. So I was hoping you'd say, we gotta

Kelsey Bohl:

Completely painting it gold.

Ahmaad Solmone:

We gotta paint one more gold.

Dr. Christine Berry:

I don't know about gold, but, I would love you to come over and you're welcome to-

Ahmaad Solmone:

I got you. I'll come over.

Ahmaad Solmone:

I got you.

Dr. Christine Berry:

I mean-

Kelsey Bohl:

We can do-

Dr. Christine Berry:

... we need a little advice.

Kelsey Bohl:

... paint a wall like fully maroon or fully gold, and then a gallery wall of all faculty and student art, just all over the place.

Ahmaad Solmone:

See.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

That sounds cool.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Got your first idea here.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

That sounds cool.

Kelsey Bohl:

A really good question from the ULM office of student life and leadership, and this might be a little bit hard. What one word do you hope will define your presidency when everything is said and done?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Wow, that's a deep question. How about transformation. When we started this process, it was all about serving others and helping make a difference in our community. Having grown up in Winnsboro in a small town, I've seen firsthand the changes that need to be made, the transformation that needs to occur. So whenever that time is, I think looking back, it would be very meaningful, I think to both me and Christine, if we could say yes, we played a role in transforming this region for the better, that people have opportunity, or access to opportunities that they didn't have before. So I'd say transformation.

Dr. Christine Berry:

That's awesome.

Kelsey Bohl:

It's a good word.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Cool. So let's keep it-

Dr. Christine Berry:

That was going to be my word too for you.

Kelsey Bohl:

I mean, that's good. And I'm like, yes.

Ahmaad Solmone:

It got synced up on the air. So let's take it back a little. So your first day as president was Monday, September the 14th. So talk to us a little bit about how this experience has been for the both of you and what are some of the things that you've learned so far?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

The first thing I learned personally was, I can't hide anymore, that I can't slip into a restaurant and get a takeout order. I can't stop and get gas, which is exciting. I mean, it really is, but that's something I guess I didn't fully realize that now we are really public figures and we're very happy that, that happened, but I wasn't ready for that yet, for people to come up. I try to eat lunch in the sub, well, I shouldn't admit this to Christine three or four times a week because I do eat Subway, which is healthy.

Dr. Christine Berry:

That's true.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

But students have been very welcoming. They come up to me, they introduce themselves, and then they tell me things like, "You need to fix the sprinklers and..."

Ahmaad Solmone:

The sprinklers.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

... please reduce tuition," which is great. I mean, I love that. So, I'd say that's been the one thing that, I knew it was going to happen, but I guess really in my mind, I hadn't realized to what level that was going to happen. And then of course, the first two weeks have been full of meetings. So I've been learning an awful lot, which is great because I need to learn a lot. I've been listening a lot, taking a lot of notes and meeting with some great people who love this university, who want to support this university. So it's been exciting and I look forward to continuing that and learning more.

Kelsey Bohl:

What has been the biggest surprise? Has anything really surprised you yet in the less than two weeks you've been president?

Dr. Christine Berry:

I think the whole thing has been a surprise in a way. I mean, it's just, we still have to pinch ourselves a little bit and just, wow.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Someone asked me the other day, "Had it sunk in yet?" And I think it is sinking in a little bit more each and every day. But the first realization, so the Saturday before that 14th, I guess that would have been the 12th, Christine and Michael and Aliyah helped me move some stuff into the president's office. And, once we got in to look at the glass there and see office of the president, and I just got goosebumps. So it

started to settle in a little bit more at that point, but it's still sinking in. So it is, I agree with Christine, it still is a little surprising, still emotional, but it's all been very good. Very good, indeed.

Dr. Christine Berry:

It was a weird process because, COVID and then Hurricane Laura, I mean, everything just kept getting pushed back. And so he's a lot more patient than I am. And he's taught me patience. And in fact on Tuesday, the 15th, I guess we went out to dinner, or had, I don't know. We went somewhere and we're sitting there and I was like, "So have you done this, this and this and this, and what are you going to do about this, this and this?" And he said, "Christine, it's my second day." I'm like, "Give me." Or he said that, "Give a minute."

Dr. Christine Berry:

But the fact that we were waiting and waiting and waiting and didn't really know which way the trajectory of our future would be, you almost don't think about it because you don't want to be too disappointed honestly. And we didn't have the summer to really prepare like I guess, normally you would, just kinda middle of the semester.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

There was a one week transition period about, that was it. But she mentioned the word patience and she knows the story I'm going to tell. But, one of my favorite sayings from our daughter, she was two or three when we would read at night to her and she would always ask, "What's next, what's next, what's coming next?" And, I said, "You have to be patient." And she said, "Daddy patience is a long time."

Dr. Ronald Berry:

And so, a lot of people have asked the same questions Christine has, and I've said, "Well, it's only my fourth day. It's only my fifth day. And, you have to be patient with us." But this process taught us both that patience is a long time. It really is. But it's worth being patient.

Dr. Christine Berry:

It's worth it. We both just love this university so much. And it is still emotional to talk about.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Warms my heart a little bit. So certain words trigger things for me. And so we'll rewind a little bit. And so Dr. Berry, you've told us about moving into the sixth floor office. So what is your one office must have? So mine is like a little coffee cup warmer, like a little Ember. And like, you sit your cup on there and it keeps your coffee warm throughout the day. So what's your one thing you must have in your house?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

This is going to be really weird. My must have is an open door. And unfortunately my door has been closed a lot and I don't like that. But in terms of things that sit on my desk or my computer or anything, I don't really have anything. I like people coming in and out of my office. I like the interaction, the discussions. And these first two weeks the meetings have been back to back to back to back. And so I, haven't had a lot of free time where people can just drop in and visit.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

I'm hoping that we get to that point. And, because that's where I think great ideas come from when you can have even just a 15 minute discussion with someone. And I'm waiting for you to drop by one day and say, hey, I've been thinking about this. Let's do this for the students. And we need an accent wall and, whatever. Whatever it is.

Kelsey Bohl:

We need mural painted on the side of the Sub.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

There you go. See. We need those kinds of opportunities just to have, it's almost like we get in a rut sometimes and we're constantly doing the job. We don't get to think about the job and we don't get to talk about the job and the opportunities. So I know that's probably not the answer you were looking for, but it's-

Kelsey Bohl:

Mine's trying to keep it light and where, we keep going deep.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

So I have to have pictures of my family right across from me on the bookcase so I can see their smiling faces. How about.

Ahmaad Solmone:

There you go.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Is that a better answer. A little lighter.

Kelsey Bohl:

Both answers-

Ahmaad Solmone:

Both answers are very good.

Kelsey Bohl:

... are very good.

Ahmaad Solmone:

It's funny you mentioned popping in your office with some ideas. You'll hear some from me soon. I have some little ideas popping in my head.

Kelsey Bohl:

And things cooking.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Yeah.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Great.

Ahmaad Solmone:

And so I think it'd be fun.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Awesome.

Ahmaad Solmone:

I think the two of you will like one of them. I'll tease it a little. So it's called brunch on the Bayou.

Kelsey Bohl:

Oh my gosh.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Love it.

Ahmaad Solmone:

And it's just like our office inviting some other students from the local area and their parents on campus. And we just branch and hang out like a casual setting. So we'd like to keep it a little fun in the office of recruitment.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Absolutely.

Dr. Christine Berry:

I want to say, I mean, to me that house, it's such an awesome entertaining house and we can't wait to get in there and entertain, and just have people there and just experience the beauty of the Bayou and the gardens. And they've just done such a phenomenal job with it. And it's our house, but it's everyone's house. So we want to share it with everybody. We're excited.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

I think we both look at, one of our main responsibilities is to be the host and hostess of the university, and we look forward to that. But Ahmaad you said cool idea. I have a cool idea for you. Okay?

Ahmaad Solmone:

Okay.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

So I think that we as employees, I haven't told you this yet. I don't think.

Dr. Christine Berry:

I've no idea what you're about to say.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

She's looking at me like I'm crazy.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Breaking news.

Kelsey Bohl:

Exclusive.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

So next week we're doing, it's employee recognition week. So we're going to have lunch for people, pick up boxes. So we're going to stay within the COVID guidelines, but I think next year, and I think Ahmaad, you would be the perfect person to lead this for us. All right. So I think we need to do an employee skit. So it should include all-

Dr. Christine Berry:

I can't believe you're saying this.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

... of the executives, all of the leaders on campus. And we should do like a talent show-

Dr. Christine Berry:

Oh my goodness.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

... for all the employees on campus and maybe even invite the students. So I could see Christine doing the hula hoop-

Dr. Christine Berry:

Oh no.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

... on stage-

Dr. Christine Berry:

You're mean.

Dr. Christine Berry:

You're just mean.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Or you know, singing. She's actually a talented, what do you play, clarinet?

Dr. Christine Berry:

Are you serious.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

The flute? No I was joking.

Dr. Christine Berry:

I thought about it a lot.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Yes. So she could play her-

Dr. Christine Berry:

I don't do it.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

... musical instrument. But I think that'd be fun.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Hey, we can make that happen. [crosstalk 00:20:38].

Kelsey Bohl:

That'd be a good way to-

Ahmaad Solmone:

I got a little bit of experience.

Kelsey Bohl:

... get to know people that talents that they may have that they haven't talked about yet. Just a good way to get to know your colleagues on a more personal level.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Absolutely.

Dr. Christine Berry:

I'm not just that make me try to do the hula hoop because it can't. I won't.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

And I would be lip syncing anything I do.

Ahmaad Solmone:

And maybe we can give you on one of our skits-

Kelsey Bohl:

Choreograph a dance.

Ahmaad Solmone:

... from PREP.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

There you go. Maybe the prep students could be our choreographer help us with that.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Got it.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

So what made me think of this is when I was department head, oh gosh, that was 20 years ago. We did a board of our students and it said, "How well do you know your faculty?" So we had these hidden talents of our faculty on this board and the students had to guess which faculty went with-

Dr. Christine Berry:

Each talent.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

... each talent. And, one of them was, I went to college on a ballet scholarship.

Kelsey Bohl:

Who was it?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Dr. Jim Wood, who was a COBOL programmer, who taught programming. And-

Dr. Christine Berry:

I forgot about that.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

... that was cool. One of them was, I went up in an airplane, I don't know, 5,000 times and never landed. It was a paratrooper.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Never landed in the airplane.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

And the one that got me was, this sweet lady, very sweet lady, the activity was, she was on the L rollers bowling team.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Was that miss Ruth?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

No.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Dr. Smith?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

No. It was Ms. Betty Cooper. And so here's this sweet, sweet lady that loves students. And I had no idea she was on a bowling team, but in the name of it was, what is that? But it's a lot of fun. You do get to learn something about people that you wouldn't know. So I think it'd be cool. It'd be fun and exciting. And I'll be glad to be the MC.

Dr. Christine Berry:

I think Ahmaad is going to be the MC.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Yeah we have to get you in one of the skits.

Dr. Christine Berry:

You have to participate.

Kelsey Bohl:

A student wanted to know what is your favorite thing about ULM?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

For me, it has to be the people. It's a beautiful campus. The Bayou add so much to it, but the people here are truly remarkable. I mean, to me, we've got a family here that cares about each other. We've been through a lot together, but we stayed together. We've built things together. We support each other. And so it has to be the people. And I've visited as a dean, probably 20 other campuses around the country for accreditation visits, and no one has what we have. It's really special here. And so for me, it's the people. I don't know about you.

Dr. Christine Berry:

No, I agree. It's true. Every time he goes on these visits and he goes for two days and they're very intense, he really gets to know those campuses and he always comes back and brings a few ideas, but he always gets reinvigorated about how fortunate we are to have the faculty and staff and the students and just the whole communities is awesome. Just a lot of heart here. A lot.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Awesome. So we have another question from the Student life and leadership office. And so their question is what can we look forward to in your first 90 days in office?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

So we're going to fix the sprinklers, whatever that means. Student life and leadership sent a list of things that they would like to see. And one of those was the sprinklers.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Electricity over in Bayou Park.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Electricity in Bayou Park.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Let's throw some ginger ale on campus in there as well too.

Kelsey Bohl:

Ginger ale.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

I'm a ginger ale drinker.

Ahmaad Solmone:

I love ginger ale [crosstalk 00:25:00].

Dr. Christine Berry:

That's his drink. That is his drink.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

We'll work on ginger ale.

Kelsey Bohl:

I think you got to get shot at that.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

I was told that that's not a product of the vendor we use, but I can stop at Sam's or something and get some ginger ale if that works Ahmaad.

Ahmaad Solmone:

That works.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

We'll get ginger ale. But the first 90 days will be a lot about listening, a lot about learning, but, Kelsey has actually started one of our big projects for us, and that is a series of focus groups. And so we'll have faculty, staff, students who will be going out into the community and we'll be listening, hearing those great ideas, hearing concerns, hearing challenges, hearing opportunities. So we're going to do a lot of listening and learning. But there are some things that we're working on, already, including budget things, looking at the budget closely to see if we can free up dollars to put back into the university.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

We're looking at some athletic issues. So lots of things are going on. They just may not be visible to everyone, but we are going to fix those sprinklers. We're going to make sure students and faculty and staff don't get wet when they walk around campus from sprinklers. And we look forward to being visible around campus, meeting people and listening to their concerns and excitement. There are a lot of excited people around campus and that invigorates us, that makes us want to do more. And, hopefully we will.

Dr. Christine Berry:

I'm also excited about just all the athletic events, attending more. And when I'm not teaching so many classes, we'll have more time to attend everything in the spring. And I'm excited about being able to watch the ski team practice from my back window-

Kelsey Bohl:

Yes. Monday.

Dr. Christine Berry:

... in the tournament. Monday.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

And of course, we're looking forward to homecoming and all the activities with that. That will be very excited.

Ahmaad Solmone:

They really need it.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Next week.

Kelsey Bohl:

So I heard a little rumor. You guys are the featured guests, the grand Marshall of the ULM homecoming parade.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

She may not know that yet.

Dr. Christine Berry:

I don't know that.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

You just learned that.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

One of the things that we've learned is, we used to talk quite often and because of the schedules, now we have to schedule time to visit. And I haven't brought her up to speed yet on all the things we're doing for homecoming, but yes, we're going to be in the parade.

Kelsey Bohl:

Dr. Christine, I'll keep you in the loop.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Thank you, Kelsey. I appreciate that.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

If I can, I want to go back to the 90 day question, because I just thought of something that I think is important. Through the interview process, we heard a lot of ideas and opportunities that people weren't able to take advantage of yet. And so we created the opportunity fund and we've been very excited that other people have joined us and contributed to that fund, and people are starting to ask, what are you going to do with that?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

I want to get my doctorate. How can I participate in this opportunity funds? So, within the first 90 days, we're going to have all of that set up and hopefully we'll have people in place to take advantage of those dollars, because really what we viewed this as was an opportunity to remove barriers, financial barriers and others. And, Christine and I, we're not going to be directly involved.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

There will be a committee that creates the criteria and evaluates proposals, so that our community, our faculty, our staff, and our students have the opportunity to do these amazing things they want to do. We both believe strongly in investing in people and supporting people and serving people. So within those 90 days, we hope to have that up and running and we're going to, as soon as we can, begin visiting with a lot of alumni and supporters and telling that story. And we feel confident that they're going to be moved by the stories and want to join us and help fund those opportunities for everyone.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Awesome. Let's see. What else do we have for you guys? So we talked about events a little bit. So what event are you two most excited to attend as president and first lady?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

I'm pretty pumped about the homecoming parade.

Dr. Christine Berry:

I just learned about it 45 seconds ago. No, maybe a minute and a half. But that does sound fun.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

As dean, I can tell you one of the most meaningful-

Dr. Christine Berry:

Wait. Can I guess?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Sure.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Are you going to talk about Christmas?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

No.

Dr. Christine Berry:

We have different minds.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

No. One of my most meaningful-

Dr. Christine Berry:

Graduation.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

... responsibilities. Yes.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Graduation.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Yes.

Dr. Christine Berry:

All right. Yes.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

For those students who have heard me speak before, they know that, I think we're the best in the world at what we do. And that we're a place where opportunities are everywhere and that doors are going

that be open that people didn't know about. And, the world belongs to our students. All they've got to do is show up and be willing to do their part and we can get them anywhere they want to be.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

And so I think about talking to those 18, 19 year olds, and then you fast forward four years and you stand on the stage and you're looking at them standing there in line, and you can see they're still a little scared, they're still a little uncertain. But as soon as their name is called, all of that just disappears.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

And that smile comes on their face and you can feel that excitement and that pride. And then they walk across and I give them the diploma and I say, "Congratulations." And I always try to say their name. So I was always trying to listen so that I could say their first name and shake their hand. And it's just that moment is just magical. And, so I look forward to the first graduation exercise that we're able to have, safely have, to do that with all students, not just the ones from the college of business and social sciences. So to me that is so meaningful. And I wish that every faculty member had the opportunity to stand on that stage and shake their students' hands because it is so meaningful. So moving.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Commencement, it's just powerful anyway. Even in the audience, I get emotional. But I wasn't emotional at my own ceremony. I was just excited watching students that I knew. And, it was a little part of their academic journey. It's emotional for everybody.

Kelsey Bohl:

Faculty-

Ahmaad Solmone:

I was late for mine so....

Kelsey Bohl:

Faculty and staff. You were late.

Ahmaad Solmone:

And I lived across the street.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Oh my gosh.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Oh my gosh.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Typical me.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Typical Ahmaad.

Kelsey Bohl:

It's funny.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

But it was still exciting. Right?

Ahmaad Solmone:

It was. So it's funny you say that because I remember standing in line and being like, "This line is so long." But the moment my name is called, there's this picture that my mom has. And she's like, "I've seen you smile all the time, but that smile that you had that day, I've never seen it before." And so I get it.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

It's a special time for sure. Absolutely.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Well, we also love Christmas.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Yes we do. We do, we do.

Dr. Christine Berry:

We love Christmas. We love decorating in the house. And I said, I'm not a big decorator. He's a better decorator than I am. He's got a better neck, but, there's something about Christmas that I just, we cover the house. So I guess we'll be doing that in the new house. At first I was told that we couldn't, that we used their decorations, but Ms. Pam, the house manager told us that we could use our own decorations. So I'm excited about that.

Dr. Christine Berry:

But the one thing that I'm a little sad about is we, every year for the last 16 years, we've had a party. I think almost every year, maybe all but one year we had it at our house, a Christmas party for our faculty and retired faculty. And we won't do that, but I think, there is a Christmas party, the university Christmas party, and I think we should start some new traditions around all that. And we'll still do the tree lighting, I'm sure. And some of the things, all the things that we've always done, but it's just a special time, just where everybody is happy and loving. And hopefully we can do a lot of those things and safely this year.

Ahmaad Solmone:

I've already started listening to Christmas music.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Have you really?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Have you really?

Ahmaad Solmone:

Yeah. So Carrie Underwood came out with the Christmas album today and so-

Dr. Christine Berry:

Oh well okay then.

Ahmaad Solmone:

... I'm going to listen to it all day.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Oh gosh.

Ahmaad Solmone:

I'm already in the spirit.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Good.

Kelsey Bohl:

Halloween is my favorite.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Spooky season.

Dr. Christine Berry:

I do love Halloween too. I love some Halloween.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

That's our son's birthday on Halloween. So we usually go a little bit above and beyond with decorations and it's a lot of fun.

Dr. Christine Berry:

We do love them. Spooky.

Ahmaad Solmone:

So let's keep it moving a little. So this is a fun one. So in your intro video, you mentioned many different types of leadership styles. If you could describe your leadership style in one word, what would it be?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

I think servant. I've been studying leadership for a long time and, to me I used to have a poster that was in my office that said, there's no better exercise for the heart than lifting others up. And, my role model in life was my mom. And so she was always helping other people, even though we may not have had what other people had. She was always looking out for other people, taking care of them.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

And, so that's just kinda how I grew up and I like helping people. I like serving others. And so I try to do that to the best of my ability. And I think if you have that approach, if you help other people, then they're going to be happier. They're going to be able to do their job, and they don't view me as someone trying to do their job. I'm just helping them.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

And I think we get more done together. And so I would say servant leadership is my primary focus on working with people. And along with that, I try to be someone who does things instead of just telling other people to do. So when we created our MBA program for online delivery, I developed and taught the first online class. Actually Dr. Luce and I, who was the associate dean at the time developed the first two classes and taught them, so that we would know what people were going to go through, so that we could help them when they started developing their courses.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

So, that would be it, trying to help others, serve others. There's lots of different philosophies on leadership, lots of different theories. But there's levels of leadership, and the goal is to become a level five leader, which is someone who just fits in and everybody's doing their job and everybody's supporting each other and everybody knows what they're doing. And that's what I aspire to be to get to that point where, if you're taken out of the equation, everything just keeps going, because everybody is they're doing what they need to do. So that's the goal, servant leader until I get to the level five leadership position.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Awesome.

Kelsey Bohl:

A question for you, Dr. Christine, along the lines of online learning and digital transformation of the university as a faculty member, what challenges have you gone through with COVID-19 and transitioning to online learning and how to better serve your students during this time?

Dr. Christine Berry:

So our risk management program is already online. So I had a little bit of an advantage over some people in having a lot of my lectures already on video and things. And I knew how to do that. But it's definitely been a challenge teaching online to face to face students is not the same as teaching online to online students, because they have different expectations and it's more challenging for them.

Dr. Christine Berry:

So the biggest thing I've tried to do is create a lot of practice tests, and that's probably something I'll carry into when we go back into face to face a lot more because, you recognize, I thought they were

getting it, but they weren't really getting it the way I thought they were. So you give them the practice test and then you go over the concepts and make sure. But, it's pretty time consuming because making a good practice test is a... and then you get.

Dr. Christine Berry:

And I prefer to do test banks that I create rather than video them while they're taking their tests, and proctor them. I just, to me, and that's just me, I would be very nervous if I was like being watched on a camera while I was taking a test. So, I make the test open book, open notes. But I worry about our students a lot because, colleges is about a lot more than just the classroom.

Dr. Christine Berry:

It's about just engaging and finding yourself as a person. And, it's a lot. I mean, my experiences college is a lot about your social life. And we're not really able to offer that to our students right now. And that's nothing unique to ULM, but I hope we can get back to that sooner rather than later. But I know you all, are all in student life and leadership and across campus are doing different things to try to keep students engaged. I've heard some really cool things that are going on during homecoming weeks on Zoom, but just some really neat ideas that, so I hope our students can engage in that and throughout the year.

Ahmaad Solmone:

I got the chance to chat with a few freshmen this past Monday. And so one of the questions I asked all of them is like, how is your college experience so far? And no one had anything negative to say.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Well, that's good.

Ahmaad Solmone:

So they all were like, "We're doing a lot of things online, but I'm having so much fun. Like it sucks we're in this situation, but college is what I thought it would be."

Kelsey Bohl:

Awesome.

Dr. Christine Berry:

That is really good to hear.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

That is awesome.

Dr. Christine Berry:

I'm so happy to hear that.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

That is awesome.

Dr. Christine Berry:

That's awesome. Good. Well, good.

Ahmaad Solmone:

It looks like we're doing a good job, making sure everyone's having fun.

Dr. Christine Berry:

I think everyone on this campus is working hard to try to.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Absolutely.

Kelsey Bohl:

I think work has tripled for people that have student facing positions, trying to do, move everything to virtual while still serving students and giving them all the resources and services that they need to be successful. And then now with students back on campus, while still some of them are still virtual is, you're doing double duty and faculty are as well, pretty much planning two classes.

Dr. Christine Berry:

It's funny. I mean, I wish somebody could film us. I don't know about other faculty, but I know it's pretty funny watching me try to go back to the Zoom people. I call them the Zoom people. That may not be appropriate, but or zoomers. I'm like, "Hey, zoomers, do you have a question?" And then somebody in the classroom will ask the question and I'll repeat it. And then I go to a document and I forget to bring the Zoom people with me. And I'm like, "Sorry." So everything takes twice as long. But our students have been incredibly patient and I think faculty and staff have been too. So I think everybody's really working together and really coming together to meet the crisis, to meet the challenge.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Absolutely. It's amazing. The university started last week with mandatory reporting, and our numbers for our university are really low, which is a testament to everyone on campus for following the guidelines. So I would just ask people to continue to mask up, to continually maintain that social distance and to wash your hands regularly because that's what's allowing us to continue having people on campus and in class. So keep up the great work. I appreciate it.

Kelsey Bohl:

So just in closing, because now we're at the point to wrap up, is there anything you would like to share to our listeners?

Dr. Ronald Berry:

Wow, that's some pressure. Coach Rashard with a basketball team invited me last Sunday afternoon to come visit with the students and the student athletes. And, I asked them to always remember that what they do reflects on all of us. And I think that's important for the whole community to know all of us are representatives of ULM. All of us are part of the family, and we all have an impact on the Warhawks brand and ULMs brand.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

And, it's amazing what we can do together. So I would just say let's all be proud to be ULM Warhawks, let's all take that pride everywhere we go and show the world that we are the best on the Bayou. We can be the best in the world at whatever it is we want to do. And so I would say, be proud. Be proud to be a Warhawk, be proud to be at ULM.

Dr. Christine Berry:

As I said, we're so excited to open up the house and have people in, both on campus and off campus. And, we were incredibly, really blown away by all the support throughout the presidential search process. It was a tough process, especially because it was so long and we couldn't have got through it without all of that support. Not in been so happy at the end of it, I think. So we can't wait to celebrate with everyone and just continue that, not just again, not just on campus, but we have an incredible alumni base that we want to really reenergize and bring back and have them get reengaged on our campus.

Dr. Christine Berry:

And not just alumni. I mean, I think this whole Northeast Louisiana community, just really has held up ULM and supported us and really truly shown how much they care and what they're willing to do for ULM. And we need to just keep moving forward on that. So we are excited to be a part of that charge.

Dr. Ronald Berry:

But thank you for allowing us to be here. I appreciate that.

Dr. Christine Berry:

Thank you.

Kelsey Bohl:

Thank you.

Ahmaad Solmone:

This has been a lot of fun. I feel like I'm energized and excited to-

Kelsey Bohl:

I know. I'm ready to-

Ahmaad Solmone:

... do some fun things.

Kelsey Bohl:

... let's get to work. Thank you, Dr. Berry and Dr. Berry for being here and letting us interview you and get to know you a little bit better. And listeners, I hope you enjoy this episode and the best is always on the Bayou.

Ahmaad Solmone:

Thanks for listening to Ace on Air. Be sure to tune in next time.

