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Alumni Engagement

5-2022

Redbird Buzz Episode 1: Terri Goss Kinzy, May 2022

Rachel Kobus Interviewer

Illinois State University, rkobus@IllinoisState.edu

Terri Goss Kinzy Interviewee

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Recommended Citation

Kobus, Rachel Interviewer and Kinzy, Terri Goss Interviewee, "Redbird Buzz Episode 1: Terri Goss Kinzy, May 2022" (2022). *Redbird Buzz*. 1.

<https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/redbirdbuzz/1>

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Redbird Buzz

Episode 1: Terri Goss Kinzy

May 2022

Rachel Kobus 00:09

Welcome to the first episode of Redbird Buzz. I'm Rachel Kobus from Alumni Engagement. Our listeners have come to know our guest well over the past year as she has been welcomed into the Redbird family with open arms. Dr. Terri Goss Kinzy holds a bachelor's in chemistry and a PhD in biochemistry. She began her academic career in 1995 as an assistant professor at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, and has been making great impacts in her field ever since. As a recognized world leader in the study of protein synthesis and drug development, and as an administrator in higher education, specifically research and innovation for campuses such as Rutgers University and Western Michigan University. Then in the summer of 2021, Dr. Kinzy became the 20th president of Illinois State University and the first female to hold the roll.

Rachel Kobus 00:54

Hello, Redbirds. We're here with the 20th president of Illinois State University, Dr. Terri Goss Kinzy. So President Kinzy, what's the word, Redbird? Campus is alive with celebration as we're gearing up for spring commencement. How excited are you?

Terri Goss Kinzy 01:12

So I am both excited and slightly overwhelmed, and I think it's overwhelmed in a really good way. I'm just so impressed with the really wonderful variety of ways we have to celebrate our students as they, you know, fledge out of our nest here. So of course we have our six graduation ceremonies, and I've never seen this before.

Rachel Kobus 01:34

That's true. Yes, it's going to be your first big spring commencement.

Terri Goss Kinzy 01:37

It's all new to me, so I'm excited to see, you know, the different cultures of the different colleges. In December they were more together but there was still this wonderful energy about how happy people were to be together celebrating, so I'm excited to see that. I'm really excited about Lavender Graduation, Umoja, and all of our ways that we bring our students to celebrate in their communities. And there's so many things going on, I know there have been year-end dinners to celebrate our student athletes and I wish I could go to them all. I can't, so -

Rachel Kobus 01:42

And you're only one person, but we know you try, you are great at being there and representing Illinois State in - it's great to see you truly care about our students and the fact their families are here to celebrate too. It's great to see the whole community come out and celebrate what our Redbirds have accomplished this past year and past four years, obviously, being at Illinois State, so, yeah.

Terri Goss Kinzy 02:29

It is. I think sometimes we forget that the families are such an important part of the success of our students, or friends or the entire support network that our students really need to succeed. We want to be a part of that, but it's - just to watch parents - often, you know, this is a first-time graduate for a family and that's an amazing experience. And as a first generation college student myself I just remember that my parents, they were just in awe because they had no idea what to expect.

Rachel Kobus 03:03

And so speaking of that, does this bring back memories of yourself in college even too? So, like, let's talk about that, your journey through your college career and how that experience was, how - some fond memories, I guess.

Terri Goss Kinzy 03:16

Sure, so it's, it's funny when I got my undergraduate degree because I was a chemistry major and I worked in industry at what was then Standard Oil of Ohio. I actually would go to school a semester and then I'd work a semester, which was great because it helped pay for college, but it meant that I ended up graduating in four and a half years and that was before big December graduations were a thing, so I actually never went through commencement as an undergraduate because five months later I was off working, I didn't really have any vacation and so I did not have that experience. I lived through it a bit vicariously when my brother graduated from the same university a year and a half later. When I did get my PhD at Case Western Reserve I went through all the pomp and circumstances -

Rachel Kobus 04:03

Rightly so!

Terri Goss Kinzy 04:04

So it was really wonderful to be a part of that big group. I graduated with a cohort of friends and one of the things that's really special and which I'm really glad that we're still able to do here this year, is the hooding ceremony for our graduate students. So I not only remember that I paid the extra \$75 for the hood that I was actually hooded in. My advisor was sitting in the front row and I wore that hood at every graduation I've attended until I became president of Illinois State because now I proudly wear the presidential regalia, but - so I can understand for our students and their families why this is such an important event.

Rachel Kobus 04:04

Yes, well, thank you for sharing that. And, you know, you started, obviously you ended with your graduation, but how did you decide to get into STEM and get into science and especially as a woman, it's great to hear, we want to hear from a woman what's important about getting into the STEM field.

Terri Goss Kinzy 05:03

Right, so I think when we think about science or technology, engineering, math, all of those disciplines are ones of curiosity, are ones of problem solving, are ones of sometimes just appreciating our natural world and trying to understand it. And as a child I was really interested in all of those things and my parents just found ways to encourage that, even though neither of them had gone to college and they were definitely not scientists, they had the subscription to National Geographic, and I had the little chemistry set, and I had the little microscope and so I could go out in the yard and put things under the microscope. And just the ability to explore was just - in childhood, I believe that children really do actually have a natural curiosity about their world and so I think we just have to encourage that and make people realize they can do it. And I think for me, it was my high school physics teacher, Mr. Hathaway, who really said, you are really good at this and you really, like, you should consider going to college and doing STEM. And I don't know without that encouragement - and again, not that my parents weren't encouraging me, but they just didn't know how you would pursue such a thing, and so I credit him with putting that spark in my mind. And I ended up loving chemistry, and, you know, going from there into biochemistry, but it just sort of became a natural extension of solving problems and trying to understand how things work.

Rachel Kobus 06:32

Great. It really is just what you said earlier in our interview, it's about a support system. It can be family, it can be friends, it can be a mentor. And I know that's something you pride yourself on, is mentorship. So what can you say to people about looking for a mentor or trying to be a mentor for somebody else? What does that mean to you? I know that's a great pride point of yours.

Terri Goss Kinzy 06:53

It's something that I think is one of the most rewarding things you can do and what I would say to someone who is looking for a mentor, someone to help them along the way, or what's also sometimes called a sponsor, somebody that will help you to find the opportunities, is slightly different but similar concepts is to understand that when you go to someone and you're like, you know, I really have never done a podcast and I'm really interested in this, could you tell me a little bit about how you do it?, is that you actually find that the vast majority people want to help. They find it really rewarding to give back, and there's a chain of mentorship that happens, that we just, we all just contribute a little bit, we can all help each other. And I think that that's what - sometimes people are afraid to ask, and sometimes you will get turned down. There was once a very senior faculty member and someone said, oh, he's great, go ask him for help, and he was just like, I'm just too busy and you're not in my department. And I was, you know, I was kind of like, you know, not, - a little bit discouraged -

Rachel Kobus 07:56

But if you didn't ask - you wouldn't have known if you didn't ask.

Terri Goss Kinzy 07:57

I wouldn't have known, but yet, that's the one person in my entire career that has said that to me and I've had lots of mentors along the way, so I think don't give up.

Rachel Kobus 08:04

Yes, great. So you give advice to a lot of other people. How about what would you share as advice to 18-year-old Terri or 23-year-old Terri, as you were going through, deciding on your career and your path?

Terri Goss Kinzy 08:18

Right. So I think for 18-year-old Terri, is this idea that you don't have to have all the answers to start. And I tell every student, I just met with a prospective student yesterday, looking at coming here for athletics, who's undecided, and I'm like, that's great, explore what interests you, you still have a lot of time and careers aren't ladders, they're forked rivers, where people have experiences along the way that changed their mind. And I actually had not started out exactly as a chemist, I had thought more about being like a clinical technician, but came to realize that I wasn't so interested in the medical part. I was definitely interested in the basics of chemistry. So I think as an 18-year-old, just to know it's okay to change your mind as you explore and discover your passion. And it's funny, at 23 I was married, actually got married before I graduated undergraduate. Hi, Scott! And so I would say that, what I'd say to myself then is, and I've had to say that to myself a few times before, is it doesn't actually matter what other people think, that you will do things that might not be what everyone else does and that's okay because you talk to people you trust and you have a network of people that will be honest with you. And those people on the outside, they don't know you and they don't, they aren't there to, it's not their right to judge you. People make different sorts of decisions.

Rachel Kobus 09:47

Well, now I'm taking notes on everything to live by. Thank you to President Kinzy. And we know you are a scholar in your field and everything that you have done, but then you transitioned into leadership roles. So what was that like, taking a leap from an academic field that again, you have done so much in, and decided - was it one day you decided, I think I want to take a different turn? Or did it take gradual steps to get to more of those administrative leadership side? And how did you balance that, to keep your passion for the science field?

Terri Goss Kinzy 10:22

Yeah, that's a great question. And I think the answer is, it wasn't like one day I woke up and said, someday I'm going to be a university president. It's that a wonderful scientist and leader, a woman named Dr. Nicola Partridge, joined my medical school as the first woman chair of a department. And I was like, huh, that's really interesting. I didn't really know anyone that had done that, so I'd gone to her reception and just introduced myself and said, I'm really excited that you're here and I'm looking forward to seeing what you do. And she took me under her wing and she nominated me to be chair of the research committee, which doesn't sound like a big thing but that was my first step on this path. And then she's like, I think you should look at this leadership development program, and then I got asked to take over an MD-PhD program. And along the way, because people knew I was interested in seeing how I could have a broader impact - so leadership to me is about how can you have a broader impact and advancing everyone at your institution, not telling them what to do. Because people knew that they would reach out to me and they - that's how I found opportunities. And so it was sort of like a teeter totter. So when I started out I was way up in research and not doing any administration and then slowly over time it went the other way. And so I would keep my research going, I reduced the size of my

research group over time as my administrative responsibilities came up, but I also came to realize that I was getting to celebrate other people's research accomplishments. And I had my own graduate students, but then I had the whole graduate school at the medical school, so I was reading the names of 75 students as they graduated, and you feel like you can expand what you do. So when I finally made the decision, and it was, quite frankly, when I came here to Illinois State, to actually shut my research program down. I was still doing research as vice president for research at both Rutgers and Western Michigan University, it just came to the point where I knew that I couldn't give the students, which have always been the heart and soul of my research program, the time that they needed. So I continue to support my students that I graduated over the last couple of decades, but now I know that it's time for me to totally focus on this. But I'm still able to contribute to science, I'm on the National Institutes of Health Institute for General Medical Sciences Council for the next three and a half years. And so now I can bring my administrative perspective and my university perspective and my background to help advance research still in a different way, it's just not my own research.

Rachel Kobus 12:50

All right, but then you're still supporting - I feel like there's a theme going on. There's mentorship, there's supporting, it's really holding each other up and finding a collaborative environment and that's what you thrive in. I mean, every job you've held, you make sure that you have a team that you're there to support. You want to see others succeed and I think that's what kind of led you into being the president of Illinois State University, which, you're coming up on your first year.

Terri Goss Kinzy 13:12

Yeah, it's funny, I just, they just announced the person who's taken my role at Western Michigan yesterday and the chair of that search committee is a very good friend of mine back there and he is like, when did you actually say that you were leaving? We just had this conversation yesterday. And it's hard to believe, but May 14 is the day that I was announced as president and so it's coming up on the landmark of the interview, coming to campus and being introduced, starting on July 1. It's, it's - boy, it's gone fast.

Rachel Kobus 13:44

So what's been, I guess, the biggest surprise and the biggest reward you've had in one year here at Illinois State?

Terri Goss Kinzy 13:50

Okay, so the biggest surprise is actually that there weren't more surprises, that there's an authenticity in what you see about Illinois State that's true when you get here. Because we all put our best foot forward when someone's visiting, right? We want to be hospitable and we want to be gracious, and we want to be welcoming and we want to put all of our strengths forward. And I got here and what I saw from my own research and what I heard in talking to people was true. And so I think that that's really good because authenticity is something you can't buy.

Rachel Kobus 14:26

That is very true.

Terri Goss Kinzy 14:27

And so Illinois State is a very authentic place. So I wouldn't call that - that was like a pleasant surprise. The "what do I enjoy the most," that is so easy. I love when I get to be with students. And so yesterday when I was talking with Rodrigo [Villalobos] for the last time, our student government president, I was like oh my gosh, I'm going to miss these conversations that we have and just seeing his success and watching him graduate in just a few weeks. Going to the track and field meet and seeing one of our students just really succeed at break - hit a personal best, going to see Legally Blonde and watching our students in their environment, running across them in the quad and bomb - I love to bomb admissions tours and it's just so much fun to surprise people.

Rachel Kobus 15:22

Do people have reactions when they see you, are you getting used to that? Like, oh, I'm a president, I never expected this? Or do people react differently around you now because you're president of a university? Or do you feel very, just, welcomed everywhere? And, like, how does that transition, I guess, been into a presidency role? Anything different?

Terri Goss Kinzy 15:39

So that's a great question. So I do think I stand out because I do dress like a president, right. And so when you're walking across the quad, you can usually tell administrators. Definitely nobody's mistaking me for a student, right? And there's this certain - and I do wear a lot of red and so people do tend to notice, I do tend to stand out because I'm very red all the time. I just got a new red and black winter coat. So I think - so people know who you are. I think at the beginning people either, you know, it was just happening so they weren't sure. Or you don't have - people don't understand how approachable you're going to be so there's a certain amount of hesitation. But as I've gotten to spend time with students, and students talk, I think they all feel like they know that they can say hi, they know that I'm going to stop at their bake sale, or they were doing a fundraiser for animals on the quad two days ago. So of course, I'm going to give them a couple dollars to pet the miniature horse, Cocoa.

Rachel Kobus 16:34

Rightfully so, everyone should do that.

Terri Goss Kinzy 16:35

It's awesome, right? Everyone should do that. And I just thought it's fantastic. So faculty don't have that problem. I mean, faculty are great about coming up and saying hi, and welcome, and it's been really a very - again, it's a very welcoming place here.

Rachel Kobus 16:48

And that goes back to what you said about Illinois State just being an authentic place. It starts from the top and your leadership showing that we're successful because we care, because we are literally, it sounds cliché, one big Redbird family, and everyone supports each other. And the other thing too is you are just very good at conversation and you are, you're fun to be around, President Kinzy, like you just, you brighten the room. And so as we get close to the end of this interview, you even volunteered to do this podcast, so obviously, I have to ask a few fun questions at the end of it if that's okay with you, kind of like a lightning round.

Terri Goss Kinzy 17:22

You got it, absolutely.

Rachel Kobus 17:22

All right, so let's have a little fun. Can you tell me - favorite ice cream?

Terri Goss Kinzy 17:28

Mint Chocolate Chip.

Rachel Kobus 17:30

Favorite book?

Terri Goss Kinzy 17:31

Lord of the Rings trilogy.

Rachel Kobus 17:32

All right. Favorite movie?

Terri Goss Kinzy 17:35

Lord of the Rings movie.

Rachel Kobus 17:38

How about your first job?

Terri Goss Kinzy 17:40

My first job was at a place called Varsity Isle, which was a an ice cream shop.

Rachel Kobus 17:45

Oh, so is that where you fell in love with mint chocolate chip ice cream?

Terri Goss Kinzy 17:48

No, because it was soft serve. That was - it was chocolate vanilla twist. But it's why my children were always impressed when we would go to a buffet restaurant that had an ice cream machine that I always made, like, a perfect ice cream swirl. I'm really good at the swirl. I have not lost that talent.

Rachel Kobus 18:02

Good to know. So if we see you in the dining center doing that perfectly - everyone ask her, give me the perfect swirl. We love it. How about favorite animal or pet?

Terri Goss Kinzy 18:11

So we are a dog family.

Rachel Kobus 18:13

All right, love it.

Rachel Kobus 18:14

Oh, I love it. And so he's traveled with you - every - 15 years, he's been with you all 15 years of his life, then?

Terri Goss Kinzy 18:14

Boki is a Shetland Sheepdog. He is the First Pet. So yes, he will be 15 on April 26. So he's an awesome dog, he's -

Terri Goss Kinzy 18:28

Yes.

Rachel Kobus 18:28

All right, then, okay.

Terri Goss Kinzy 18:28

So yeah, he was born in New Jersey. He was there with us at Rutgers, then he moved to Michigan, and now he's been here, and so he - and he was on our Christmas card this year.

Rachel Kobus 18:37

That's right!

Terri Goss Kinzy 18:38

This is a very dog-friendly campus, not just Pawficer Sage, but the work we do to train service animals. So I really love that, I love to look out at the quad and see people walking their animals.

Rachel Kobus 18:49

And if you see an animal, do you run down and be like, excuse me, can I pet your dog please? Can I pet the horse please? Can I -

Terri Goss Kinzy 18:54

I did run after the horse, that was just so awesome, yeah.

Rachel Kobus 18:59

All right. How about beach or mountains?

Terri Goss Kinzy 19:02

Beach.

Rachel Kobus 19:02

Beach. All right, good to know. How about favorite ISU dining center food?

Terri Goss Kinzy 19:09

Boy, that's a tough one. It probably is the soft serve ice cream. It's a treat because you can't get it everywhere.

Rachel Kobus 19:15

That's true. That's true. And now that you're coming up on a year at Illinois State how about your favorite season on ISU's campus?

Terri Goss Kinzy 19:22

So I feel like spring hasn't really happened yet so I've not seen spring yet, so hard to say but I do love anytime that I can just get out on the quad and so you can see me - if I'm, if you see me out there walking with someone it's because I'm doing a walking meeting, which I really love. So the more I can get out there - so it's any season where I can walk around campus more.

Rachel Kobus 19:47

All seasons. And so this may - you've answered this, but maybe it's different, how about favorite place on campus?

Terri Goss Kinzy 19:52

Yeah, so that's - so I will say, the University Residence, which is where we live, is really nice and I really enjoy being on the golf course. And so it allows us to - we can actually go out when there aren't a lot of golfers out and walk Boki along the golf course and sometimes, and we see our golf team out there a lot. You see a lot of people, a lot of people come to campus to go to the golf course. So I think it's kind of an underrecognized gem and one of the really fun secrets is that our work on CoverCress, which is the new cover crop work that's being done by Dr. John Sedbrook and his team, they have an experimental plot -

Rachel Kobus 19:56

Oh, and no one - ?

Terri Goss Kinzy 20:24

- which people don't know where it is, but I found it and so I love to go check out the experiments on CoverCress, so yeah.

Rachel Kobus 20:38

Oh, that's nice. I love it. Thank you for sharing that secret gem. Remember, it's at the golf course. And so as we come to an end with our time together here I think it's only fitting to ask you a final question. What do you see as the vision and the good things to come for Illinois State University?

Terri Goss Kinzy 20:56

So I would say the thing that I said when I first came here, and which the provost independently has said, there is nothing but opportunity at Illinois State University. And I think what's exciting is we're coming out of a time where the university has gotten through some very serious challenges. And it's not just COVID, it's the reckoning that we're all dealing with, with the racial issues in this country, it is the social and economic impact that we'll see with a pandemic. And Illinois State is a place that is working on being part of the solution to these problems, whether there are solutions in how we approach education, whether there are opportunities for us to serve, expanding the nursing school, bringing in an engineering college and our investment in the College of Fine Arts that people are going to see start to

blossom. That change on campus, that investment in the excellence that we're known for, is - people are going to see these projects all coming to life. It's almost like spring for the university. So I think that the vision is one of executing really well thought out strategies that are about - our brand is excellence, we're here to make the world a better place and when our students leave that's exactly what they do.

Rachel Kobus 22:21

Yes, agreed. Well, thank you for sitting with us today, President Kinzy, you are enlightening, we love your mentorship, we hope for many success to see you as the leader of Illinois State University and we hope to see you maybe again on a future podcast.

Terri Goss Kinzy 22:35

Well, that would be great. I would love to reflect again on what's happened over the next year because I think it's going to be a really exciting year for all of our Redbirds.

Rachel Kobus 22:42

I agree with you. Thank you again.

Terri Goss Kinzy 22:44

You're very welcome.

Rachel Kobus 22:49

That was the 20th president of Illinois State University, Dr. Terri Goss Kinzy. Learn more about Dr. Kinzy's research and the path to presidency in the spring 2022 edition of Redbird Scholar at [News.IllinoisState.edu/Publications](https://news.illinoisstate.edu/Publications). Tune in next time to Redbird Buzz for more stories from beyond the quad.