

*Of all the notable scenes one is likely to encounter on the Emory University campus—helicopters touching down atop medical facilities, Buddhist monks in crimson robes chatting on mobile phones, film crews shooting major stars on the Quad—few are more captivating than the caravan of SUVs that signals a visit by a former United States president.*

## PROFESSOR SPOTLIGHT

by Paige Parvin

### The Carter Connection

Since he joined the faculty as a University Distinguished Professor 35 years ago, President Jimmy Carter has been a steady presence at Emory—fielding questions from first-year students at his annual Town Hall, holding regular luncheons with small groups of faculty and staff, meeting monthly with the university president over breakfast, and appearing in classes and special forums during the fall and spring semesters. “I’ve taught in all the schools at Emory,” Carter says. “It has kept me aware of the younger generation, their thoughts and ideals.”

When Carter returned from Washington, D.C., to his home state of Georgia in 1981, the former peanut farmer with a Naval Academy degree in engineering had a wide range of options for how to shape his post-presidential career. With offers from a number of universities, public and private, he chose to partner with Emory—a decision that he made with his wife, Rosalynn.

He remembers how then-Emory President James T. Laney convinced them “that he had a moral and ethical vision for the university that we could share and help to advance.” In addition, Carter says, “I wanted to speak to the students in a very frank way on controversial issues of the times, and I felt Emory would

give me that opportunity. Since I have been a professor at Emory, I have always been able to speak without restraint.”

In September 1982, from an office on the tenth floor of the Robert W. Woodruff Library, he launched The Carter Center, the organization whose work has consumed him and Rosalynn for more than three decades. Created in partnership with Emory to promote human rights and improve the human condition, the center would pursue conflict resolution as a special mission. President Carter placed few limits on the future agenda, choosing complex problems as the first to address: Middle East peace, international security and arms control, and health policy.

“I knew that the center would be unique, because it was to be a partnership between a former US president with enormous energy and a university on the rise, and nothing like that had ever been tried before,” says Steven Hochman, director of research and the first person Carter asked to join him. “However, no one imagined exactly how The Carter Center would develop.”

Now located just three miles from Emory, The Carter Center has blossomed into a thriving organization that reaches around the world. To help support democratic governments in countries where they are nascent or threatened, the center’s peace programs have made it a pioneer in election observation, monitoring 105

national elections to help ensure the citizens’ collective will. Programs in conflict resolution, human rights, and global access to information respond to challenges from multiple continents. The China program and the Latin American and Caribbean program bring special expertise to broad issues of peace and leadership.

The center’s health programs are deliberately focused on preventable diseases that have been neglected or overlooked by other major health organizations. As a recognized world leader in the practices that can achieve eradication and elimination, the center fights Guinea worm disease, river blindness, trachoma, schistosomiasis, lymphatic filariasis, and malaria in Hispaniola. The center also works to improve access to mental health care worldwide.

#### A Rich, Productive Partnership

The partnership between Emory and The Carter Center has kept pace, weaving a richly complex and robust network of connections between the two organizations. Many of the center’s experts have taught at Emory, and both faculty and students regularly participate in the center’s work. The connections have involved every school. The center also directs an intensive internship program that has given hundreds of Emory students the enviable opportunity to participate in its humanitarian efforts directly.



Photo courtesy Emory University

In 2001, the Lillian Carter Center for Global Health and Social Responsibility (then the Lillian Carter Center for International Nursing) was dedicated by former School of Nursing Dean Marla Salmon and President Carter. Named for Carter's mother, "Miss Lillian," the center serves as the focal point for the school's international nursing and midwifery work and facilitates the many domestic service-learning programs that focus on vulnerable populations. The faculty and students have worked with The Carter Center on mental health and public health training around the world.

Carter and then-Emory President James Wagner founded the Institute for Developing Nations (IDN) in 2006 to encourage Emory faculty and student engagement with the developing world as well as collaboration with The Carter Center. Overall, the IDN has supported 56 student experiences, including four graduate fellowships for students across academic units, and it has hosted more than 80 lectures, workshops, and conferences. In fall 2015, at

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a special forum as part of President Carter's Emory teaching program, six Emory graduate students discussed their IDN-sponsored research publicly with him.

One of them, Abidemi Fasanmi, a student in the Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, commented on the honor of speaking with the president and went on to say,

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Dean Lisa Tedesco of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies notes how privileged the Emory community is to have access to a former US president. “The research university has a unique responsibility to apply our work to solve global problems,” notes Tedesco. “Our strength is our partnership. Having President Carter as a University Distinguished Professor helps Emory reshape the role of higher education in international development. Our long partnership with The Carter Center has allowed us to build a strong bridge to work on global action across disciplines, not in silos.”

When Carter received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2002, leaders across the university greeted the news with pride. Laney, after leaving the Emory presidency to become US ambassador to South Korea, had recommended Carter to the Nobel committee in 1994. “It could have come earlier, and it would have been eminently justified,” Laney said. “But now it is a grand capstone of his life and career for which we all rejoice.” William Chace, Emory president at the time, attended the ceremonies in Oslo and remarked, “This native son of

Georgia has advanced, in many different ways, a vision of healthy understanding among the nations and people of the world. He served his country well as president, but he is now being recognized for all that he has so superbly done since that presidency.” Carter himself is always quick to credit the partnership with Emory for some measure of the center’s 35 years of accomplishment.

In 2016, Carter, Laney, and Wagner gathered onstage at The Carter Center to reflect on the impact of the relationship and look to the future.

Wagner described the profound impression made on him when he met both Carter and Laney before his official arrival at Emory. Two years later, he noted, he and his wife, Debbie, traveled to Africa with the Carters to better understand the Carter Center’s work—a trip that further strengthened the partnership. “I think part of the Carter Center’s success has been its focus,” Wagner said. “It is interested in making a difference, not just making a statement.”



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Says Vice Provost for Global Strategy and Initiatives Philip Wainwright, “From my time as an Emory College student when The Carter Center opened its doors on the top floor of Woodruff Library in the early 1980s, I have seen Emory become much more global in its outlook and in the scope and impact of its work. The university supports research projects around the world, hosts students from many countries, and sends its students to study and do field work wherever global problems challenge us. The Carter Center has played a major role in bringing that international outlook to the university, especially through the inspiration provided by President Carter.”

“The relationship between Emory and The Carter Center is permanent and it’s virtually indestructible,” Carter said. “I have personally gotten more out of this partnership than Emory has. It has made the time since my presidency the best time of my life.”



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Paige Parvin is the editor of Emory Magazine.



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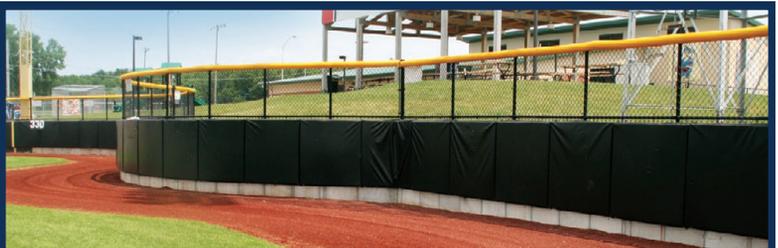
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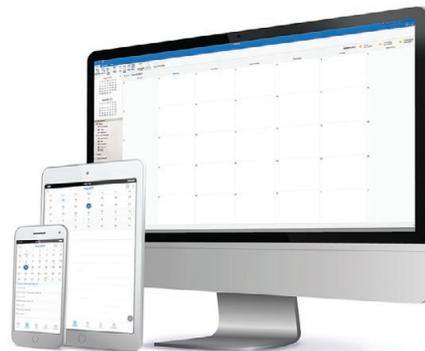
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