

PRESERVING MEMORY: NEWARK AND RUTGERS
IN THE 1960'S AND 1970'S

An Interview with

JAMES H. RAMSEY

Conducted by

Gilbert Cohen

February 10, 1992

INTERVIEW: James H. Ramsey

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GILBERT COHEN: This is Monday, February 10, 1992. This is Gil Cohen. [Break in recording] Okay, we are back. I'm meeting with Mr. James Ramsey in his office on the Newark campus. Mr. Ramsey is associate provost for student affairs at the university in Newark. I usually ask the narrators to give a biographical sketch of their academic and professional careers, but I think that considering the special nature of your background, it might be useful if I were to read this press release dated in 1985, which was issued by the Office of Public Information, about your career.

“For immediate release, Newark: Former Montclair mayor, James H. Ramsey, associate provost for student affairs at Rutgers University at Newark, this month received the Dr. Martin Luther King Award from the Essex County Board of Freeholders. The proclamation cited him for ‘exemplifying the values and ideals of the late civil rights leader.’ Mr. Ramsey, who holds a bachelor’s degree from Tennessee State University and a master’s degree in teaching from Brown University, began his career as a biology teacher in the Cedar Grove School System. He came to the New Jersey State University in 1969 as director of the Academic Foundations Center on the Newark campus and was named to his present position in 1983. A long-time Montclair resident, he was elected in 1980 to the Montclair governing body, and was named deputy mayor, a post he held until 1984. He served as mayor from 1984 to 1986, and left public office last year. Previously he was a member of the Montclair Board of Education from 1972 to 1980, serving as board president in 1976-79. Since 1967 Mr. Ramsey has been secretary-treasurer of the Union Development Corporation, a Montclair-based, not-for-profit housing corporation. He has also been active in civic affairs in Newark where he serves on the boards of the Newark Daycare Center, the University Heights Development Corporation, and the Pre-College Consortium composed of members from the New Jersey Institute of Technology, the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Essex County College, and Rutgers University at Newark. He is co-chair of the Academic Task Force of the Newark Education Council and secretary of the Downtown Park Committee.”

With that background, I'd like to launch into the era of the seventies when you came on board as director of Academic Foundations, right?

JAMES H. RAMSEY: No, no.

COHEN: If you could go into that period beginning in the seventies.

RAMSEY: Actually during the summer of 1969 I received a call from Malcolm Talbott's office, asking me to come in for an interview. How that happened was that my niece, Patricia Smith, who was among the four students who took over Conklin Hall, had submitted my resume to Vice President Talbott, upon his request, for the students to provide to him some black or Hispanic

people who could fulfill positions here at the university. So I got a call. I came down. I met with him. And he asked me if I would meet with John Martin. And upon meeting with John Martin, I was offered a teaching position in science, biology specifically, in the Urban University Department. That took place in August of 1969.

COHEN: So it was called Urban University Department at the time.

RAMSEY: Yes.

COHEN: Mentioning the Conklin Hall takeover, what was the sequence of events that led from Conklin Hall—what led up to Conklin Hall? In your perception, what was the main grievance there?

RAMSEY: Well, I think that—and this is from hearsay because I was not here at the time, but if you go back to 1968, there were only seventy-five black students on campus. And so black students, who most of them lived in Newark at the time, felt that the university, in particularly the Newark campus, was not being responsive to the black community. Throughout the academic year of 1968-69, they had met repeatedly with the administration, trying to get the administration to do something to show its good faith relative to bringing on campus more black students. They were frustrated over their efforts. They felt that their efforts were not being successful. And at some point they felt that something drastic had to be done in order to really get the attention of the administration. So I think that the takeover of Conklin Hall came after the students really tried to discuss and rationalize and negotiate and all those kinds of things. That was the last straw as far as the students felt.

COHEN: Now what was the line from Conklin Hall to UUD, Urban University, to Academic Foundations Center to Academic Foundations Department? And the Economic Opportunity Fund? I'm not quite sure what the sequence there was.

RAMSEY: That's going to take a little time to build.

COHEN: People frequently use those terms interchangeably.

RAMSEY: The university's response to the Conklin Hall takeover was the establishment of an Urban University Department. The Urban University Department was to be a unit on campus that would admit students who did not have the qualifications, the normal, traditional admissions qualifications, to be admitted. To admit these students, to bring them in, to provide remedial courses, developmental courses, for them, to provide financial assistance to them, and to prepare them to enter into the mainstream of the college. This was called the Urban University Department. At that time it was an extension off by itself; as a matter of fact, we were—in 1969 the office was located in a rented building on Washington Street. We held some of our classes on campus. But many of our classes were held in the warehouse, the federal warehouse, which is also located on Washington Street. So we were really not considered a main part of the campus enterprise; it was an extension, it was an offshoot of that.

I was hired to be a biology teacher in that Urban University Department. There were three different areas—four different areas: English or communications skills, math, science, and social studies were the four areas developed that first year in the Urban University Department. The classes were designed around a skills development rationale. Yes, the idea was to teach real content material. But you taught it in a way that the skills required to understand and to develop were the main focus of the instruction. Literally students came from everywhere. I would imagine that the first year we had as many as three hundred students in the Urban University Department. They just pulled them right off the streets of Newark. No one cared anything about the level of preparation. As long as they had a high school diploma, they were pulled in.

COHEN: At that point then would you consider the program an open admissions program?

RAMSEY: At that point I think the program could truly be called an open admissions.

COHEN: When did that change?

RAMSEY: Okay. Let me talk about that year a little bit more. During that same year or the previous year, the university did establish—the College of Arts and Sciences—did establish a special entrance program. Dr. Cecile Stolboff was the director of the special entrance program, and that program was not open admissions. And it did bring onto the campus a small number of black and Hispanic students in that program.

COHEN: This was after Conklin Hall?

RAMSEY: This was during Conklin Hall.

COHEN: During Conklin Hall!

RAMSEY: During Conklin Hall. As a matter of fact, the year of sixty-eight, sixty-nine was when this program started.

COHEN: So was the SEP started before the takeover of the building?

RAMSEY: Yes. Yes, it did. Before the takeover the building. But you see the SEP did not satisfy the black students because they felt that the SEP was a creaming program. Do you know what I mean by a creaming— In other words, the cream rises off of the top.

COHEN: The best, most qualified students.

RAMSEY: The best, the most qualified black and Hispanic students.

COHEN: Before the Conklin Hall takeover.

RAMSEY: Before Conklin Hall.

COHEN: Nineteen sixty-nine.

RAMSEY: Right, right. So that was in operation at the time that the black students were in fact negotiating with the administration to bring more black students on campus. In 1970 the Urban University Department.... I took over as acting director of the Urban University Department the summer of seventy. It was that summer that the university agreed to make the program an Educational Opportunity Fund site. Now let me talk about that for a minute. In 1968 the State of New Jersey legislature passed a piece of legislation establishing the Educational Opportunity Fund program. And several colleges and universities in New Jersey in 1969 established EOF programs. But Rutgers did not. Rutgers did not want the state dictating to it in terms of educational opportunities, in terms of educational policy, and in terms of educational decisions. So the Montclair States, the Keans and so forth did in fact establish an EOF program in 1968. But Rutgers chose to establish an Urban University Department that was not funded by the state, but was funded by the university. So it was not until 1970, after the first year, the university struggled with how do I fund this UUD that I established? Made the decision that, hey, this doesn't make sense. All we've got to do is to make it an EOF program, and then we will get funded from the state. So in 1970 the Urban University Department in fact became the Educational Opportunity Fund program. That's how EOF came into being.

COHEN: Okay.

RAMSEY: In 1971 the SEP program and the EOF program merged because, again, the deans and the administration, looking at the fact that now we had two special entrance programs, if you will, a special entrance program that's doing the creaming and another special entrance program that's going out into the streets and saying, Y'all come. Okay? It did not make sense. It was expensive. You had duplicate administrations. You had duplicate courses. All these kinds of things. So they put the two together. At the same time, President Gross, Mason Gross, appointed the Schwebel Committee.

COHEN: Professor Milton Schwebel.

RAMSEY: Milton Schwebel, dean of the Graduate School of Education, chaired this special committee. The purpose of this special committee was to come up with a structure of the EOF program or all of these special entrance programs, if you will, regardless of what they were called, because Rutgers College had something and Douglass had something, come up with a structure, a university-wide structure, if you will, whereas these programs can become an integral part of the university instead of these extensions and appendages as they were. This group met for about a year. Had representatives from Newark, New Brunswick's various colleges, and Camden. The representatives from Newark were Dr. Norman Samuels, Dr. Cecile Stobalt, Charlie Pine, and Jim Ramsey. And we used to caucus on the Newark campus, and then we'd go to the university-wide committee, and we'd discuss various pros and cons relative to structure and organization and so forth.

The Newark section of that committee came up with the structure that was eventually called the Academic Foundations Center. Camden came up with a structure that it called the Academic Foundations Center also, but it was different than ours. New Brunswick did not. New Brunswick said we want no part of a structure called Academic Foundations. Basically the difference is that

in Academic Foundations, the college said, for academic support services such as tutoring and for remedial and developmental coursework such as English 100 and Math 100, we're going to take them out of the department, and we're going to put them under a special umbrella of their own. So there will be one site on this campus whose responsibility it is for developmental education, remedial education, and academic support services.

COHEN: What did this name change signify, changing it from Urban University Department to Academic Foundations?

RAMSEY: Well, I think that Academic Foundations was a name that more specifically depicted the mission and the function of the unit.

COHEN: What was Urban University Department doing prior to this move?

RAMSEY: It was doing similar kinds of things. It was doing remedial instruction, it was doing tutorial—

COHEN: But not out of one center?

RAMSEY: It was out of one center, but I think the Urban University Department really was a misnomer. It did not have a context to it. It was the name of a unit, Urban University Department. Whereas Academic Foundations Center says this department, this center, has a business, and the business is the underpinning of the academic enterprise. And to make sure that students who come here underprepared will have a place to go and to be served. So the name Academic Foundations carried a meaningful context to it. Urban University, I mean there's so much about the urban scene that it was really a misnomer.

COHEN: The Academic Foundation Center then becomes the Academic Foundations Department. Okay. What's the significance of that change?

RAMSEY: Well, let's talk about that. That was really not a change.

COHEN: Oh.

RAMSEY: The Academic Foundations Center was the umbrella. Under that umbrella you had the teaching arm, which was called the Academic Foundations Department. It was a true department with a chairman, reporting to the dean of the college the same as every other department. See, we wanted to legitimize this. Now you remember we moved from this appendage over here, EOF, UUD, SEP, all those were appendages with adjunct faculty and so forth. We moved to a structure. Whereas the Academic Foundations Department was chaired by a chairman, had faculty members with faculty rank in tenured tracks, the same as every other department.

COHEN: That was the change.

RAMSEY: That was the big change.

COHEN: What was the situation? How would you describe the situation before that?

RAMSEY: Before that? Well, before that you had people—and I don't want to call them faculty members—you had people who were teaching the underprepared students in courses, but had no connection with the faculty of the college. They were in fact not called faculty; they were called teacher-counselors. That was the official name given to this group of teachers in UUD and EOF by the administration, by the university. If you go back and you look at my first appointment, the title that I was given was teacher-counselor.

COHEN: Teacher-counselor.

RAMSEY: Okay. And it was teacher-counselor one, teacher-counselor two, and so forth. It was not until 1972, when the faculty, the Newark College of Arts and Sciences faculty, approved of the Academic Foundations Center structure, with the Academic Foundations Department as a part of that center, did we come into being as a true part of the college and a true part of the university.

COHEN: How did this change then affect the effectiveness of the Academic Foundations Center and its operations?

RAMSEY: Well, I think ultimately it did a lot. Let me just say a couple of things. During the negotiations to get this approved by the faculty, several things happened. Number one, we agreed that this department had no business teaching science courses, specifically biology and chemistry and so forth, because we were a foundations, an academic foundations, department. We really wanted that defined in a meaningful way. So we stopped teaching biology and chemistry.

COHEN: Oh, they had been before.

RAMSEY: We were teaching the whole...we were like a little college.

COHEN: I see.

RAMSEY: We were like a little college over there, teaching anything we wanted to.

COHEN: Okay.

RAMSEY: Secondly, we got out of the business of teaching social science courses like political science and sociology and all those courses. Okay? Now, we had faculty people, we had teacher-counselors, who we had hired to teach those various kinds of courses.

COHEN: Before it became....

RAMSEY: Before it became a department.

COHEN: Yes.

RAMSEY: So one of the negotiations was that you must move some of the people that we had with good credentials into those departments, on a tenure-track level in those departments. Now what that means is is that some of the people who had been hired to teach science, biology, specifically biology, actually moved into the Biology Department on a tenure track. There were some of our people who moved into the English Department on a tenure track. One of our people moved into the Psychology Department on a tenure track. And I think we also may have had a person move into the Math Department on a tenure track. But the point of it was is that when we became an Academic Foundations Department with the purpose of remedial and developmental instruction, then we were no longer in the business of those other things, those other academic units. The second thing that happened is is that we successfully negotiated that some of our courses receive credit, academic credit, toward the degree.

COHEN: Yes. Did you have a difficult time with that one?

RAMSEY: Yes. A very difficult time with that one. And I guess the true negotiations took place over two issues, that issue and faculty status for our people issue. And in order to get the credit, we agreed that we would only seek academic credit in the area of communications skills and math.

COHEN: And the areas that were excluded were?

RAMSEY: Biology and sociology and political science and so forth.

COHEN: But you're out of the biology and political science business.

RAMSEY: Right.

COHEN: Okay.

RAMSEY: But that's the time it took place.

COHEN: Okay.

RAMSEY: See?

COHEN: So after the establishment of AFD, the department, since the department is no longer in social sciences and biology....

RAMSEY: Right.

COHEN: So that everything....

RAMSEY: Everything that we did—

COHEN: Now being taught by Academic Foundations.

RAMSEY: Were skills-oriented.

COHEN: Skills-oriented.

RAMSEY: Developmental in nature.

COHEN: And for credit?

RAMSEY: We had two courses, two math courses, where you could get two credits each. And we had three levels of communications skills where you could get three credits each. But there was a maximum number of six credits that you could get out of Academic Foundations. In other words, you couldn't just keep going and get, you know, twelve credits or fourteen credits. There was a maximum of six.

COHEN: So we're saying English and Math?

RAMSEY: English and math. Right. Now there was another area for no credit. We taught science skills courses because we felt that just like math skills and just like English skills, we felt that there's a certain skills development area in understanding science. And since this college had no course like the introduction to physical science. This college has never had a course like the introduction to natural science, which a lot of universities do have. We thought that those were the kind of survey, introductory skills-level courses that our students needed. So we agreed to teach that but for no credit.

COHEN: How did you teach a skills course in science? I mean science is so....

RAMSEY: The scientific method is really a skill, the critical thinking. You know these are the various kinds of skills that we taught in the area of science. It's almost like what is being done now. I mean right now in some of the science courses you will have these learning centers.

COHEN: Yes.

RAMSEY: Right now the Biology Department has a learning center where the material is broken down into bits and pieces, and then you build up.

COHEN: Talking about learning center, how does the learning center in the Academic Foundations Center fit in? I mean what is its function distinguished from the functions of the other people in the center?

RAMSEY: Let me finish the story, and then that will—

COHEN: I'm sorry.

RAMSEY: There were three components under the Academic Foundations Center. There are three components. The one was the Academic Foundations Department that I described. The

second one was a counseling component that really came into being because the Educational Opportunity Fund legislation provided money for counselors in these various programs. In other words, the piece of legislation recognized the fact that if you bring these underprepared, nontraditional students onto these college campuses, unless this is a community and a structure to nurture them, they're going to fail. So there had to be, in addition to the skills that you're trying to teach them in class, there needs to be a counseling component that holds their hand and nurtures them, that assists them in all of those non-classroom traits, if you will, that are required to be successful in college. So they funded counselors. One counselor to one hundred students. So there was a counseling component under the Academic Foundations Center. And the third component was a learning center. The learning center was headed by a faculty member in the Academic Foundations Department. And then the learning center's responsibility was to provide individual tutoring, small-group tutoring, group study sessions, and so forth. The learning center was designed to....

[Break in recording]

COHEN: We're back. Okay. Yes, the learning center, you were talking about, its role on the university campus as a whole, if you could get into that.

RAMSEY: Each of the—and if you use English and math as the two best examples, the English Department had this course called English 100. And it also provided tutoring in English for its students. The Math Department had a course called Math 100, which was a remedial math course, no credit. And it also provided tutoring. So the Academic Foundations Center, as was passed by the faculty, said, English Department, you don't need to be in this business any longer. The Academic Foundations Center is going to provide all those services. The learning center will provide the tutoring, and the department will provide the teaching of the remedial courses. So you're right. The misnomer from day one—or the misconception from day one—is that this Academic Foundations Center was only for EOF students. But it was not designed that way at all. Let me give you another example of not being designed for EOF students. The English Department has always had English placement tests to determine the students admitted that were ready to go into English Composition 101. The Math Department has always had a math placement test to determine the students who are ready to go into College Algebra. Even before there was a UUD, an EOF, or an Academic Foundations Center, those two departments were testing students. And if the students did not place into English Composition and College Algebra, they went into these 100 courses. After Academic Foundations came into being, the regular admitted students, who were tested and did not place into English Composition had to come to Academic Foundations to remove that deficiency. And if the regular admitted students who were tested for the math placement into algebra, had to come to Academic Foundations. So from day one there was a mixture of EOF students and regular admitted students in the classroom in Academic Foundations. That's another thing that simply never got to the consciousness of a lot of people.

COHEN: During the seventies, how would you, considering the students coming through the learning center, either...well, being referred by English, by math, let's say that for the moment, how would you characterize the changes in the socioeconomic background of the students coming for help?

RAMSEY: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. The socioeconomic background of the students who have traditionally attended the Newark campus of Rutgers University has been lower than those students who attended New Brunswick. They were always commuter students. They came from communities within the North Jersey area, a lot of ethnic communities. And they always were from working-class parents and lower socioeconomics. So the students who came in through the regular admissions route and finally had to receive some remedial support from Academic Foundations were really not that much different than many of the students who were admitted through the EOF program. They went to better schools in the suburbs or in the communities in the non-Newark, non-East Orange communities. But socioeconomically a lot of them were not that much different. Now the one thing that the EOF legislation did was to make a statement that said, the poorer you are, the more you will need this support. There is some correlation between academic attainment and socioeconomics. I mean if you look at the more wealthy districts, they have SAT scores that are higher than if you look at the poor districts. So there is that correlation. I have never felt that the financial cutoff for EOF was a realistic cutoff because it cut us off from the group of minority students who probably had the best chance of succeeding.

COHEN: The support wasn't high enough.

RAMSEY: Right. In other words, they say you can only take the poorest of the poor.

COHEN: Poorest of the poor. Mm-hmm.

RAMSEY: Okay. Which we know has the least amount of academic preparation.

COHEN: Now the department, as we mentioned before, the establishment of the department, really grew out of the Conklin Hall action.

RAMSEY: That's right.

COHEN: To what extent then did the establishment of the Academic Foundations Department really meet the needs of black and other minority students in these communities?

RAMSEY: Okay.

COHEN: Was it a victory? [Laughter]

RAMSEY: Well, I really think it was. Another thing happened with the establishment of the Academic Foundations Center, and that was the open enrollment that we talked about.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

RAMSEY: The open admissions that we talked about, that no longer was the case. We made a decision that we here at Rutgers could not serve every student who came to us, regardless of their level of preparation. I mean we could not be all things to all people. There were some schools who should be open admissions maybe, but Rutgers University in Newark was not one of those

places. Now, the difference—once we made that decision, then we had to ask ourselves, well, okay, how are you going to tell who this student is? We didn't want to use SATs as the criteria to say yea or nay. We didn't mind using rank in class because we always did feel that rank in class was a good indication of a student's achievement within the community that he or she found themselves. So I mean if you are tops in your class, it means you competed within that community. So we did want to pay attention to rank in class, but we didn't want to give a lot of weight to SATs. We came up with an interviewing process. We called the students in. The first game that we came up with is this one: We called the students in for an interview. And we gave the students a packet of pictures, five or six pictures, beautifully-done pictures. And we said to them, look at these pictures, and you pick out the picture that says something to you, the picture that makes a statement to you, the picture that you think you have something to say about. And then you write us several paragraphs about that picture.

COHEN: This was students who were applying under the....

RAMSEY: Who were applying under the EOF program.

COHEN: EOF program.

RAMSEY: And who we wanted to do something more than simply look at SAT scores.

COHEN: Okay.

RAMSEY: Okay? So we let the student sit over quietly and look at this picture and study it and pick out the one and then write a statement. Now, what were we looking for? In that statement we were looking for—yes, we were looking for sentence structure, we were looking for grammar. But we were also looking at how the person put his thoughts on paper. We were also looking to see if there was some organization to what that person wanted to say. You know, what was the thinking process that this person brought to this particular assignment? That was more important to us than whether the subject and verb was right.

COHEN: Were there any distinctions, in going over the transcripts of the students, made between different schools? Some schools with more competitive requirements, other schools with less competitive requirements. Did this weigh in the balance in selecting students?

RAMSEY: I'm not sure that we saw an awful lot of difference, particularly.... well, most of our students came from Newark. Then we used to get a lot of students from Jersey City. We got a lot of students from East Orange. Then we used to get a lot of students, Hispanic students, we got a lot of Hispanic students from Union City and West New York, New Jersey. We used to get an awful lot of students, much more than we do now, from Paterson because there was a good bus line from Paterson right into Newark. So we used to get a lot of students from Paterson. But I don't think that we were ever able to make that much difference between them depending on the schools they came from or the municipality that they came from.

COHEN: What recruitment methods were used?

RAMSEY: Well, we used to go out to schools with the admissions officers, and we would sit through the regular admissions presentation. And then after the regular admissions presentation was over, then we would talk to students. Secondly, we would develop a relationship with high school counselors, and we would say to the counselors: We'd like to come back and interview those students who you identify as students whom you think have potential but you know are not going to be admitted to Rutgers. Because you are in the business. You know just about who can be admitted and who can't be. So if you identify the student, we will come back and interview that student. So we did a lot of that.

COHEN: Was the Academic Foundations Department given enrollment numbers by the administration at that time?

RAMSEY: By the time that we got to be the Academic Foundations Department, we began to have enrollment limitations. The first two years.... In 1971 we admitted—I think we admitted four hundred new students, in 1971. And everybody knew that that was too many. Everybody knew it was too many. I mean we just could not...know way could we handle. Because you see, developmental education is labor-intensive education.

COHEN: Education period, is labor-intensive. [Laughs] Especially in the program.

RAMSEY: We never wanted classes larger than fifteen.

COHEN: Yes, I was going to ask that before. What did they run typically?

RAMSEY: Well, typically they are fifteen, eighteen at maximum. Right.

COHEN: I was going through some of the information in the information file office, and it mentioned some of the success stories of the Academic Foundations Department. I jotted down a few names like Dr. Edward Brown?

RAMSEY: Ed Brown, yes. He was a pediatrician. I'm not sure where he is. He practiced in the area for a while. I think the last time he was in Maryland.

COHEN: He came through the....

RAMSEY: He came through. He's a product of Newark. He came—

COHEN: The Academic Foundations.

RAMSEY: — through the Academic Foundations Center. He tutored in the Academic Foundations Center when he became an upperclassman. He went on to medical school. And it was rough. It was not easy for him. I think he repeated the first year of medical school, as a matter of fact.

COHEN: Another person mentioned was Dorothy Boyer?

RAMSEY: Dorothy Boyer. I think she's Dr. Boyer, as a matter of fact, and I really don't know where Dorothy Boyer is.

COHEN: What other success stories can you recall, either anecdotally or statistically?

RAMSEY: Well, that's interesting. His name just escaped me. He's in Washington, DC. He's a real success story, I think. Marvin McGraw.

COHEN: Oh, yes!

RAMSEY: That's his name. Now Marvin was not a UUD student.

COHEN: Oh, I see.

RAMSEY: He was here. He was part of the takeover.

COHEN: Oh, he was in Conklin Hall.

RAMSEY: He was part of the takeover.

COHEN: Yes. Right.

RAMSEY: But Marvin McGraw was hired by the UUD department as one of its first teachers.

COHEN: Oh!

RAMSEY: Right out of college. And he has gone on to really make a name for himself. I'm really trying to think of.... Let's go on, and I'll come back to it.

COHEN: Yes. Then what are the statistical success stories—or for that matter the statistical failures? I mean what's the ratio of attrition rate to people who got their degrees?

RAMSEY: Right now Newark is probably graduating forty percent of its students after five years. And you can contrast that with the regular-admitted population that's probably graduating sixty percent after five years.

COHEN: Let's see, Newark....

RAMSEY: The Newark campus.

COHEN: The Newark campus.

RAMSEY: The Newark campus. The Newark College of Arts and Sciences.

COHEN: They're graduating forty percent.

RAMSEY: They're graduating probably forty percent of its students after five years. And you can contrast that with the regular-admitted College of Arts and Sciences students.

COHEN: Oh, I see.

RAMSEY: Which is about sixty to sixty-five percent.

COHEN: As distinguished from the ones coming through the EOF, which is forty percent.

RAMSEY: Right, right. Now, we think that that's a tremendous success.

COHEN: What was it back in the old days, let's say, in the beginning of the seventies?

RAMSEY: Well, it was very poor. It was very poor. And I don't know how—I don't know where we started collecting good data. But in mid-seventies, mid-seventies to late seventies, if we were graduating twenty-five percent, that was good. But we've grown. A lot of good things have happened.

COHEN: What kind of support systems does the center offer the students other than of course the funding through the EOF. You had mentioned tutoring through the Learning Center. What else could you mention along those lines?

RAMSEY: I think basically the counseling and the tutoring are really the underpinning of the support. Now in the tutoring—or in the Learning Center rather—a lot of individual learning goes on. Right now, for instance, the Learning Center is very much computerized. So a lot of the tutoring is going on, SEP pace tutoring with the computer. Students writing and rewriting and editing their papers on the computer. Students doing mathematical work and receiving math tutoring through the computer. They still do a lot of small group tutoring because, you see, the other part about the nontraditional student is that the nontraditional student is much more of a passive learner than an active learner or an active participant in the learning process. And so we've found the way that you get students actively participating in this learning process is by having small group sessions so a student can't lost. I mean a student can get lost in a classroom of twenty people, just sitting back there, being quiet.

COHEN: Now how does the department relate to.... We have the College of Arts and Sciences, and then we have University College. Could you go into how it relates to those different colleges which presently.... Well, in the seventies, there were two different faculties, too.

RAMSEY: There were two different faculties.

COHEN: I never understood its role vis-à-vis these two entities, namely University College and....

RAMSEY: Well, I've got to tell you, there were two different faculties, and there were two different EOF programs. There were two different Academic Foundations Departments.

University College had its own EOF, Academic Foundations Department. And Arts and Sciences had its own. They got separate funding from the state.

COHEN: And that was your department?

RAMSEY: Well, I was Arts and Sciences.

COHEN: You were Arts and Sciences. You had nothing to do with UC?

RAMSEY: I had nothing to do with UC.

COHEN: Oh!

RAMSEY: Not at the time.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

RAMSEY: As a matter of fact, just before I came over to this office, UC and NCAS merged to become one faculty, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. At that time the two EOF programs merged.

COHEN: So how are the evening students now served by Academic Foundations?

RAMSEY: The evening students are served by the same faculty; there are faculty who teach in the evening.

COHEN: So they merged those faculties.

RAMSEY: They merged their counselors who serve an evening population. The Learning Center is open in the evening. There's one chair and so forth.

COHEN: As far as recruiting students is concerned, as far as admissions standards are concerned, are there differences between the NCAS students coming in through the public and the UC students coming in through the program?

RAMSEY: I don't think so. I think it's just a matter of students having accessibility to day or evening programs. But I don't think there's a difference.

COHEN: The question, you know, especially back in the seventies, the question of scholastic standards came up at the time. Particularly you mentioned in the early days when four hundred students were admitted who really didn't have the preparation. And I was wondering, over the years, how has the department and people in the department responded to this question which constantly comes to the fore? How have they presented it?

RAMSEY: Well, I don't think the people specifically responded to the standards question, as much as they responded to the issue of, is this student at a level of preparation that we can do

something with? And by making that decision, there were students whom we simply said no to, that we cut off. I think that did in fact raise the standard, it did in fact raise the success rate, that did in fact raise the retention rate. But rather than looking at it from a pure standards standpoint, you see, the fact that we did not, and still do not, consider SATs as the major criterion, see that gets around that whole standards issue. Because most of the people who talk about quality and standards, what they're talking about is SATs. You can't even talk about GPA.

COHEN: Yes.

RAMSEY: Because the GPA in one school does not mean the same as the GPA in another school. You can't even talk about rank in class because they don't mean the same. So when people talk about excellence and standards and high this and high that, what they're talking about are SATs. The university as well as the state said that these are students who are educationally disadvantaged. That's the definition. So therefore it would be ludicrous for us to then use that same standard that you've laid out there. Now what we have always said in reference to standards, however, is that let's measure the exit standard of our students, and there should be no difference.

COHEN: Exit from Academic Foundations?

RAMSEY: Exit from the university.

COHEN: From the university! Yes.

RAMSEY: And there should be no difference. That absolutely when you get a Rutgers degree, it is a Rutgers degree. And there is absolutely no difference for a black student, a Hispanic student who came from Central High School, or a white student who comes from Livingston. That Rutgers degree has to mean the same thing.

COHEN: Concerning scholastic standing, after the students are in taking courses and maybe having a little trouble, was Academic Foundations in any way involved in the debates and the issues and working out questions of whether pass/fail or whether to take the course over?

RAMSEY: Let me give you a little story about that. The college always had one scholastic standing policy, and it always had one scholastic standing committee that was made up of faculty. We always had in Academic Foundations a scholastic standing committee of our own, and we used to look at students. But we were not the determining factor as to whether a student stayed or whether a student was dismissed. I remember probably in seventy-three or about a group of our students came up for academic dismissal. And I wrote letters of recommendation for every one of them not to be dismissed. You know I found something good and something redeeming about every one of them. And Norman Samuels, Dr. Samuels, was the—I guess he was the associate dean at the time. And he said to me—because he and I had been working on the Schwebel Committee, and we got to know each other pretty well. He said to me, he said, “Jim, if you continue to write letters of recommendation for every EOF student to stay here, then nobody's going to pay any attention to what you write because it means that you're not discriminating about your recommendations.” And I thought about that, and he was absolutely

right. So after that point, there were some students who I would write letters of recommendation for, to stay in because of some redeeming qualities and there were other students I would not. But the point I'm trying to make is that when that scholastic standing committee made its cut, our students were included in the cut. If the college said you must have a one point six average at the end of your freshman year, then our students had to have a one point six average at the end of their freshman year. And if they say that at the end of your second year and the beginning of your third year you progressively must raise that, then that's what our students were judged by. Now the difference being is that we were careful in the selection of courses and the programs that our students registered for in those early years.

COHEN: In the courses—the regular courses, right?

RAMSEY: Right. We were careful and nurtured them slowly. In other words, they were not thrown into fifteen credits of Western Civilization and French and biology and chemistry and college algebra.

COHEN: What courses would you recommend?

RAMSEY: Well, we first recommended—depending upon the student, of course.

COHEN: Sure.

RAMSEY: It depended on what we saw in terms of the level of the student's skills. But we used to recommend— The other thing that we were successful in 1972 was developing what we called intensive courses. An intensive course—Principles of Psychology is the first psychology course in the Psychology Department, Principles of Psychology.

COHEN: It was Academic Foundations...?

RAMSEY: No.

COHEN: You had developed....

RAMSEY: We negotiated with the department to offer these intensive sections of their regular courses. And the intensive section met an extra time per week.

COHEN: I see.

RAMSEY: So many of our students registered into the intensive sections of Principles of Psych. And the intensive sections of Intro to Sociology.

COHEN: Oh!

RAMSEY: And the intensive sections of Intro to Biology.

COHEN: Even though you were out of the business as far as the department was concerned, there was this liaison and cooperation between Academic Foundations and the department.

RAMSEY: That's right.

COHEN: That's fascinating. What other disciplines were involved in that sort-of cooperative venture?

RAMSEY: Well, we had intensive sections of English, intensive sections of College Algebra, intensive sections of sociology, psychology, political science, biology, geology, history, Western Civilization, which we always thought was the worst course in the world.

COHEN: [Laughs] Why was that?

RAMSEY: Well, it was just a course that our students just didn't—it was a pure lecture course. Western Civilization was a pure, standup lecture course.

COHEN: Well, how did they make that into an intensive section?

RAMSEY: Well, what you do is that even if you're lecturing for three fifteen-minute periods a week, on the fourth one you don't lecture; you discuss. You have a class discussion. So the students can get some understanding out of what you've been talking about for the last three days. See, the intensive section was to not necessarily give you....

[End of Tape #1]

COHEN: Okay, we were talking about intensive sections. Right. Okay.

RAMSEY: See, the purpose of intensive sections was not simply to allow professors to talk an extra fifty minutes or even to slow the pace down so that he would get the same amount of material in in an extra fifty minutes. But it was to change the teaching strategy to introduce—Remember I talked earlier about an active participant in the learning process?

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

RAMSEY: So that was the purpose, is to get an interaction going between the faculty member and the students so that there could be some active participation in this process. And that's what we meant by intensive sections. They first started— I also mentioned earlier that some of the teacher-counselors from the UUD EOF program moved into some of the regular departments.

COHEN: Yes.

RAMSEY: They became the first intensive section teachers because they knew from their previous developmental, remedial experience what that meant, to be interactive in the classroom.

COHEN: I see. That sounds like a sound pedagogical technique, intensive or otherwise.

RAMSEY: You know the other thing that a lot of people don't understand is that the whole negotiations and the whole discussion around the establishment of the Academic Foundations Department and the center had a lot of—a lot went into that, a lot of thought went into the whole establishment of that. And a lot of that's still going on. I'm very proud of what we were able to do. I don't know of another college that did it quite the way we did it.

COHEN: Now, how does this program.... someone mentioned to me about the national recognition the program has gotten. Is that something that you could comment on—or statewide recognition?

RAMSEY: Well, statewide recognition is very, very clear. The Department of Higher Education has held this program up as a model program, and it's because of the structure that you and I have been talking about. But it's also because it has to be one of a very few remedial and developmental departments or programs in the United States that carries tenured faculty, you see. That's an investment. That's a recognition on the part of the institution, on the part of the college—not Rutgers institution but on the part of the college—that this is an important part of our mission. Now, here's another name, Milt—not Milt Spragel [sp]. Henry Winkler. Henry Winkler in 1972, seventy-three, seventy-four, somewhere in there, came up with a statement that laid out the university's position on faculty status for these departments.

COHEN: In all departments?

RAMSEY: No, for the Academic—

COHEN: For the Academic Foundations.

RAMSEY: For the Academic Foundations faculty.

COHEN: Okay.

RAMSEY: In that statement he recognized that the terminal degree for a faculty member in the Academic Foundations Department may not have to be the Ph.D. That was one thing. The second thing that he laid out in that statement was the fact that the main job of faculty members in the Academic Foundations Department was teaching rather than research. Now it didn't mean that they shouldn't do any research. But it just said that the mission of the faculty in this department may not require a Ph.D. to be good and effective; and secondly, they should not be forced to take time away from their teaching, developmental function in order to succeed here in a tenured fashion.

COHEN: Has that policy been adhered to, do you think?

RAMSEY: That policy has been adhered to.

COHEN: You don't think there's been any discrimination

RAMSEY: It's been harder. It's been harder as the years went on, as the Bloustein years—and you've heard the faculty debate over not only in Academic Foundations, but a lot of other departments have had serious debates about the publish or perish, the research nature of the tenure process today as opposed to twenty years ago. So I think it has become more difficult for our people to get tenure in that environment than it was when we first started in the seventies.

COHEN: I want to move on to the administrations. What can you say about, specifically, as far as the administrators' influence on the Newark campus starting with President Bloustein, if you can sort of assess his—from our perspective?

RAMSEY: Well, you know, it was very difficult. I think that Mason Gross as president—and he had to—had kind of a hands-on involvement with the original establishment of the Urban University Department and the EOF programs and so forth. Because he had to, he had to deal with the issue. Hands-on. He came up here, and he met with us. We went down there, and we met with him. So he had. I never had the feeling that Bloustein had the same kind of focused attention, if you will, on the EOF, Academic Foundations programs. That's not to say that he did anything against them or that he, you know, he purposely tried to put them down. But I just never felt that it was a part of his central process. Now, if you go more locally, Blumenthal gave those of us at EOF at the time an awful lot of freedom and structure—freedom and latitude, an awful lot. In retrospect, he gave us too much. I started to thinking early on that as long as we had the freedom and the latitude to hire who we wanted to, fire who we wanted to, and teach the courses that we wanted to teach when we were the Urban University, as long as we were allowed to do that, we were never going to become a part of the mainstream of the college.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Yes.

RAMSEY: And only when the dean began to take notice of the quality and the people and the credentials and all of those kinds of things. So I think that we had too much latitude in the early years. I think that, you know, Blumenthal was a good man, so I really don't believe it was ill-conceived. I think Samuels was probably the first real dean, as associate dean by the way, not as dean, but as associate dean, that he really began to put himself into this whole thing that we were trying to develop and to create. And his involvement in the discussions about Academic Foundations and all of that, his involvement around discussing about the limitations of the number of freshmen that you could admit. I think he was probably the first one—and probably still remained until he came over here—the one person who I think really had us at heart. And yet there were still limitations.

COHEN: And that's when he was associate dean under Richard Robey?

RAMSEY: Richard Robey was dean.

COHEN: What was Robey's...?

RAMSEY: Robey and I... as a matter of fact, Robey was the dean in 1972 when we became a department, when we became official.

COHEN: That's right, after Gil Panson finished up as acting dean.

RAMSEY: That's right. And it was Robey and I who probably finalized the structure of the Academic Foundations. I was chairman of—I had the title of chairman of the Urban University Department, and I also had the title of the chairman of the EOF program.

COHEN: [Laughs] Busy name.

RAMSEY: Now, when we decided on the final structure for Academic Foundations, I felt that there should be one person who had the job of chairman of the center and chairman of the department, reporting to the dean. I lost that battle. And Robey, being the dean, he had the final word. He wanted two chairmen. He wanted a chairman of the department reporting to him, and he wanted a chairman of the Academic Foundations Center who was the EOF director reporting to him.

COHEN: Oh.

RAMSEY: Okay? I told him that he was going to destroy the thing even before it got started. He wanted—and the reason for it—he wanted.... See, he was an academician really. He wanted the chairman to have a Ph.D. He said this.

COHEN: The chairman of the department.

RAMSEY: Of the department to have a Ph.D. So when he went to the department chair meetings, he looked like, acted like, smelled like every other department chair. [Laughter] So every other department chair's got a doctorate, so this person's got to have a doctorate. So they opened a search, and they found a guy, a white guy by the name of Goldsmith, out of the University of New Mexico, who came here to be the first chairman of the Academic Foundations Department. He stayed here two years. And within that two-year period, Gil, he almost ruined the place. The center was built around a holistic concept.

COHEN: EOF, the Learning Center, and Academic Foundations Department.

RAMSEY: A holistic concept of working with these students in a holistic fashion. The counselors, the faculty, and the Learning Center. This guy came in, because he had the doctorate, he looked like, acted like, and smelled like [laughter], you know, your regular academic chairperson, which Robey wanted, right? He could not interact with the counselors.

COHEN: Was it all a black-white problem, or was it just a....

RAMSEY: No. It was not a black-white problem because we always did have whites in the department. Always did have.

COHEN: Sure.

RAMSEY: So it was not that. It was the...I think it was his elitism. And it was the faculty who was as much against him as everybody else, the other faculty who had been there for two or three years. After he left, after two years, Bill Jones became the department chair. Now Bill Jones does not have a doctorate. But Bill Jones came to the Urban University Department the same August of 1969 that I did. So he grew up with it. He knew the importance of this holistic concept of educating these disadvantaged youngsters. And it was able to pull back together even though Robey's structure of a separate person reporting to him still exists today. But we were able to do it because of Bill Jones being the chairperson who understood what it was that we were trying to do. Did not have a doctorate, did not have this elitist attitude.

COHEN: Bill came in as chairperson?

RAMSEY: Bill Jones came in as a teacher-counselor.

COHEN: Teacher-counselor.

RAMSEY: In 1969.

COHEN: Okay. Then he became chairman—?

RAMSEY: After Dr. Goldsmith left.

COHEN: Okay. Where are you now?

RAMSEY: I am the EOF director, director of the Academic Foundations Center and the EOF director, reporting to Robey.

COHEN: Oh, you're the director of EOF.

RAMSEY: And the center.

COHEN: And the center. And Bill is the department chairperson.

RAMSEY: Right. But he doesn't report through me.

COHEN: Doesn't report through—he goes directly to the dean. So now the structure—isn't there now one....

RAMSEY: No, it's the same.

COHEN: It's the same.

RAMSEY: They're still the same. Raymond Smith took my place, and he is the Academic Foundations Center director as well as the EOF director. Arthur Powell is now the Academic Foundations chair.

COHEN: I guess I should have done my homework somewhat better. Okay. Thank you.

RAMSEY: So Robey, in my opinion, was a guy who because of his concept of this whole academic, academia did not do well.

COHEN: But that structure is still in place.

RAMSEY: That structure is still in place.

COHEN: It's just that the...okay. And Arthur Powell has a doctorate.

RAMSEY: Arthur Powell does not have a doctorate.

COHEN: He doesn't! Oh, I thought he had a doctorate. Oh.

RAMSEY: He does not.

COHEN: Sort of winding up, getting back to administrations, what can you say about Malcolm Talbott's contribution to the whole situation?

RAMSEY: Well, I think that Malcolm Talbott was a fantastic person. I think that his contribution to the development of the Urban University Department and EOF was extremely positive. I think that he was supportive of all those things that we were trying to do. I think that Malcolm's involvement within the Newark community was key to the success of that. I really think that had it not been for Malcolm Talbott, this campus could have blown much out of proportion during sixty-nine than it did. I think he was able to bridge the link between those, the city and the campus. I think Winkler was also good in that regard although he was not at the undergraduate level. But I think that his understanding of where we were in Newark and the fact that we could not build a wall around ourselves and completely isolate ourselves. So I think that Malcolm played a tremendous role in that as a matter of fact. I could never prove this, but I really think that one of the reasons that Bloustein decided to move Malcolm to New Brunswick was because Malcolm had too much of an influence on this campus.

COHEN: Well, that's been said before. Yes. Actually the first provost though on the campus was Jim Young.

RAMSEY: Jim Young, there was an acting between Young and Talbott.

COHEN: Oh, that was Horace dePodwin.

RAMSEY: Horace dePodwin.

COHEN: He was then the Dean of the Graduate School of Management, acting for...

RAMSEY: For a while; I'm not sure how long. Probably no more than a year.

COHEN: How did things fare under their administration?

RAMSEY: I think that Horace—Horace and I got along well. I don't know how much—because he was there for such a short period of time. Jim Young was a good provost for us. Jim Young came from Camden. Jim Young had had some experiences in Camden; because around the same time that the black students here were taking over Conklin Hall, there were some activities going on in Camden.

COHEN: Yes.

RAMSEY: This sparked a lot of stuff. Jim Young was in Camden experiencing some things that he had to deal with. And I think that when he got here, that experience helped in the process that we were developing here.

COHEN: Sort of a wrap-up, how would you assess the overall contribution of Academic Foundations Department to Rutgers-Newark?

RAMSEY: Well, I think that unlike a lot of people probably thought, that the Academic Foundations Department is clearly not an embarrassment to Rutgers-Newark. And I mean that from a pure academic, quality, standard, quote-unquote concept. It has not put a drain on the quality of the campus. I think that it has clearly enhanced the diversity of the campus. I think that I for a lot of years was in a key position to be influential in the decision-making apparatus of the campus because, Gil, I served on so many committees.

COHEN: Yes. I'm sure. [Laughter]

RAMSEY: And, you know, I used to not dare miss meetings. Because if I missed a meeting, there was nobody else there. [Laughter] So I really think that this has been a very good experience for the campus. And I think that people now who probably say that the Newark campus and its diversity is today where the demographics say that higher education will be in the year 2000, they talk about it proudly. But that's how we got to where we are.

COHEN: Is there anything we haven't touched on that you'd like to—any questions I haven't asked that I should have asked?

RAMSEY: Well, the only thing is that, you know, I'm sorry that my mind went blank when we talked about some of the individual success stories. There are a lot of them out there. I can tell you that there are not many places that I can go in the state of New Jersey that I don't run into a student who came to this program.

COHEN: Yes.

RAMSEY: And that's all the way from state government to private industry, the whole bit. We have hundreds of graduates out there. And it has to make a difference.

COHEN: Well, thank you very much.

RAMSEY: Okay.

[End of Tape #2]

-----[End of Interview]-----

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