

**INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT FRANCIS  
FORMER VICE PRESIDENT FOR OPERATIONS**

**April 6, 1988**

**Dr. Hartzell:** This is an interview with Robert Francis at his home on Siesta Key, Wednesday, April 6, 1988. Mr. Francis was

**Robert Francis:** Vice President for Operations from September 1981 through October of 1988.

**Dr. Hartzell:** All right, question 2, what year did you come to Stony Brook, you said 1981.

**Robert Francis:** 1981.

**Dr. Hartzell:** How old were you at the time?

**Robert Francis:** I was 32.

**Dr. Hartzell:** And from what institution and position did you come?

**Robert Francis:** I came from a regional university in Ohio called Wright State University; I was Executive Director of Campus Planning and Operations there, that was my last position there, I had a number of positions, including a faculty member and I was Assistant Dean of Liberal Arts, and I left there in 1981 to come to Stony Brook.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I see. Who was primarily responsible for your coming to Stony Brook?

**Robert Francis:** Well, there's the official cause and effective cause. When President Marburger hired me, I would say that Jerry Schubel and the Three Village Inn recruited me, it's quite lovely setting, and I first came in the late spring and early summer, and I really enjoyed the area.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Who was it that you succeeded?

**Robert Francis:** Well, I had one of those wonderful experiences where I didn't succeed anyone in the sense that the position for Vice President for Operations was a new one.

The responsibilities had been split under the Vice President then called Finance and Business, later Administration, it was Transportation and Security.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Who was in that?

**Robert Francis:** That was Carl Hanes at that time, it was then called Vice President for Finance and Business. There had previously been an Executive Vice President, and under him an Assistant Executive Vice President who was in charge of the physical plants.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Who was that?

**Robert Francis:** The Assistant Executive Vice President was Mitch Gerstel.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I see.

**Robert Francis:** And the Executive Vice President at the time was Alec Pond.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Alec Pond, I see, was he there at the time that you were hired?

**Robert Francis:** He had stepped down from the position and gone back to a faculty position. This was prior to his going to Rutgers.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I see. All right. And then you were interviewed by Dr. Marburger and anybody else?

**Robert Francis:** Jerry Schubel headed the search committee, which consisted of I think probably about 15 people, and I recall a number of their names, Ron LaValle, Dick Brown, the union people were on the search committee as well.

**Dr. Hartzell:** By union, you mean the Student union?

**Robert Francis:** The classified and faculty unions, there was a student on the search committee from student government.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I see. Okay, why did you come, this is question 6, what factors were important in your decision?

**Robert Francis:** Well, a number of the things were personal, a number of the things were professional. I had finished my doctorate that year at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. I had been at Wright State for ten years at that point in a variety of positions, and it was programmatically similar in the sense that it had a medical school,

not a hospital, but an ambulatory care facility, roughly the same size student body, a smaller physical plant. And I wanted to see what else was out there in the world of education that I might do that would provide a new challenge and Stony Brook was bigger and it was in New York, and the east coast appealed to me. And I later found out about the academic eminence by then; at the time I looked at it, it was a real stepping stone for me in title and size.

**Dr. Hartzell:** In your field.

**Robert Francis:** In my field, which for better or worse as you go through these careers you end up in a line of work and so I suppose my line of work is service management.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Okay. Seven, what was your understanding of the purposes behind the creation of Stony Brook, how much did you know about it?

**Robert Francis:** Well, I learned fairly early on that the idea was to create a Berkeley of the east, that Rockefeller's vision was to have a university on Long Island that would move the then science teachers college at Oyster Bay, the campus at Oyster Bay into the first ranks of universities, would be a full-range university with all the programs, and have a graduate research program of top rank competitive in the nation.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Do you have any impressions of Stony Brook when you got there?

**Robert Francis:** Well, I can tell you what Roxanne, my wife, said when she first saw it and wondered whether or not it were for sale, because really it looked pretty rough, physically it looked pretty rough, and that was what

**Dr. Hartzell:** What do you mean?

**Robert Francis:** Oh, the grass wasn't mowed, the windows were broken out and so on, and there were, at the very time I came in, they were just coming off of a month-long electrical problem due to catastrophic failure of the power supply, so I thought, gee, this is just the set of opportunities I was looking for. There is lots here to do and really exciting to try to solve these problems and work with people to meet their needs. So, unlike Wright State, which I found out very quickly was kind of an ideal place where

there were very few plant problems and very little problem with money, and Ohio was a little bit like Florida in that it's a state with comparatively no bureaucracy.

**Dr. Hartzell:** In other words each individual institution is its own boss, doesn't have to go through a central?

**Robert Francis:** Each individual institution in Ohio is established in statute, it's not constitutionally based, but each university in the Ohio system is separately established in statute and the Boards of Trustees of each of the thirteen schools in Ohio is empowered to transact all of its own business as an independent governing board, unlike New York.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I see, a decentralized authority.

**Robert Francis:** Yes.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Going along with responsibility.

**Robert Francis:** Well, the accountability was certainly there too.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Okay, and what about the people?

**Robert Francis:** Well, I had anticipations about what I would find in the genus New Yorker, and I think they were all fairly accurate. I hadn't overblown the myth of the New Yorker, and I liked the New York pace, and I liked the New York style, and I like New York people, they are just a little more of almost everything than midwesterners are. The pace is quicker, the people seem to have a higher level of energy and certainly it was true at Stony Brook. You could just walk around and it just felt energy intensive, and so when I would go out to the dormitories at midnight to meet with the student legis, as they are called, the student legislatures, the governing body of each dormitory, the intensity was certainly there.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Midnight!

**Robert Francis:** Well, nothing starts before midnight at Stony Brook. Occasionally you could get a meeting at 11, but not too many people would turn out that early. If you met, this is in the early days, this is 1981 and 1982. And I remember Fred Preston and I, together and then separately, had two, three and even more nights a week where we would be out in the dormitories and the meeting would always start somewhere between

say 11 and midnight, and we'd get over maybe around 2, and then we would go home and sleep till about 7 and get up and do it again. So the energy was definitely there.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Present was, what was his specific title?

**Robert Francis:** Vice President for Student Affairs, he came at the same time. I think he came a month before I did.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Okay. What about the top leadership?

**Robert Francis:** Well, I was very impressed by my boss-to-be. He was a genuinely nice person, and I like to work for nice people. He had a vision and articulated a vision.

**Dr. Hartzell:** This is Jack Marburger.

**Robert Francis:** Right. And always gracious and enjoyable to be around, even when dealing with difficult issues there was a dignity and a sense of the importance of people in whatever we did.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Let's see, Dick Schmidt had left. Did you ever have anything to do with him?

**Robert Francis:** I didn't meet him. I think he left in the summer of 1980. President of Marburger arrived, and then I didn't arrive until the summer of 1981, so I didn't meet him. I had a chance to meet John Toll, but I didn't have a chance to meet Dick Schmidt.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I see, okay. All right, now let's see, nine, what events, what persons, what experiences stand out in your mind?

**Robert Francis:** I suppose I'll meld all three together. I think dormitory life, which may be an oxymoron, but the dormitory life that I saw was very prominent in the sense that there we had a community with 7,200 people, it's a small city, very homogenous in terms of the age of the people, their intellectual capacity, it was not homogenous in a racial or ethnic sense, there was a very cosmopolitan mixture in that regard, but otherwise intellectually the community was pretty homogenous. And, of course, people at that particular time in life have very high expectations and the higher their intellectually capabilities generally the higher their expectations. So it was a fairly demanding group. And I will never forget going out to the dormitories meeting with people in these

impassioned meetings until late in the morning. I will always remember the incredible contrasts, for instance going up to meet distinguished professors Jan Kott, I think is one that stands out, where you have an internationally prominent humanitarian who had an interior 110 square foot office on a corridor with no windows, so you would get that kind of thing. You would have

**Dr. Hartzell:** That was in the Library?

**Robert Francis:** That was in the Library. There were prominent laboratories in the biological sciences building where research on the cutting edge was going on and the cultures were dying because we couldn't keep the building air conditioned, a remarkable study in contrasts. You know to have the best and the brightest in not very attractive physical surroundings is a kind of an anomaly.

**Dr. Hartzell:** All right. You were talking about students dealing in an impassioned way with their problems; what were some of the problems that you first came across, what were they impassioned about?

**Robert Francis:** Well, their grass wasn't mowed, and their rooms weren't clean. And the morning after the night before, the entire dormitory would be filled with a very strong stench of beer, overpoweringly cloying the nostrils, this post-party smell.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Weekends or any night?

**Robert Francis:** Thursday nights and weekends particularly, but not just Thursday nights and weekends. And then otherwise just shabby conditions, winters without properly functioning heating conditions, and of course dormitories aren't air conditioned, so that wasn't even a matter of importance, but I mean I've studied the photographs of Jacob Riis because I like pictures of the lower New York from the 1880's, and he studied social conditions in the Bowery. And they are certainly not related, Stony Brook is not and never will be the Bowery, but, I think on a comparative level to the people who lived in the dormitories, that's the way they felt.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Did the students themselves from their background tend to create some of these conditions?

**Robert Francis:** Yeah, I think that's absolutely true. I think it's absolutely true. Part of it might be owing to their background from the metropolitan area. They were brought up in the metropolitan area and bring that perspective on physical arrangements to the campus. A lot of damage was, is and probably will continue to be done at Stony Brook by students. Now students do a lot of damage at other institutions, and I find that in public schools, students also do damage, but not quite on the scale that I saw at Stony Brook. Yes, certainly. And this, nowhere have I found more well developed this desire not to be dominated by any authority than I found in the dormitories at Stony Brook. We are independent, we are free, stay out of our buildings, but why do they look this way. So I think that certainly there was a very strong responsibility on the part of the students for the conditions, but not completely.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Were they willing to assume any of the responsibility, did they face it?

**Robert Francis:** I didn't detect in very many of them a willingness to be responsible. But that's difficult when you are in a room with 300 other students and raise your hand and say, well, I don't agree with the other 299 of you. So at least in the public forums there wasn't a willingness to compromise in that regard. As the years passed, more of that spirit did emerge, that we share these problems. In the first two or three years, they were the administration's problems, not the students problems.

**Dr. Hartzell:** You were able to get some cooperation later on from the students?

**Robert Francis:** I think that there's some, in terms of who got the cooperation as time went by, I would say that the President in particular got more cooperation as time went by and I think Fred Preston also earned considerably more cooperation as time went by from the student government. I'm not sure that I have the same experience in the sense that in my first three years the constant battle was in getting rid of and reducing dormitory cooking, and I was the agent for a series of price increases in the dormitory cooking program and took them from about \$50 a term to about \$200 a term in the space of four years. And I came in

**Dr. Hartzell:** Cooking privileges?

**Robert Francis:** Right, to cook in the rooms. I came in to fix all the heating problems, and even though I believe very substantial progress was made to restore the basic mechanical systems, the simple point is that over a period of years you start to inherit part of the problem and become identified with it rather than being the solution any more, you are identified as part of the problem, so I think that my ability to have impact probably diminished in the last year and a half to the last two years I was there. And I think that particularly the well publicized closet fire in the Lecture Center in October of 1986 was a point at which my ability to have a positive influence started to decline, because I came under a lot of pressure for my positions at that time.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Okay.

**Robert Francis:** I didn't mention Sunwood, by the way, which should always be brought up. It's one of the things that I saw when I came, and it was in dilapidated condition when I came. And I want to give as much credit as can be given to Ann Forkin for her role in building up the business there enabling us to make progress to restore the house and it was really at the time of the fire almost all the way back to being a beautiful property. Of course, that was a very sad thing, and I think that the burning of Sunwood took a lot of anybody who was in a position of responsibility there at the time.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Stay with Sunwood for a minute. My memory is that it was a home that had been built about 1918 and that when we took it over from Mr. Melville, it was in 1957 or 1958, it was given, and the wiring and the plumbing were out of date and outmoded. Mr. Melville have given, I think, something like \$55,000 to be used for rehabilitation, that didn't last very long. It was the only place that had any charm, and that could be used to attract candidates and was used for that purpose. And we could not get from the central office a recognition that it was a sufficiently important asset to be cared for the way it was needed.

**Robert Francis:** One of the many tragedies, and I think it was a greater tragedy to the people at the campus than it was to people 220 miles away. But that's true, the recognition was not given. And a home like that, an estate like that is certainly



inexpensive to rehabilitate. I would say that in the five years I was there, including recycled funds from Ann Forkin and the funds that I managed to put in from my budgets, I bet we put over \$100,000 into the house. But still, even after \$100,000, we had only started to make the progress that we wanted to see, more was required. And that is a real shame, whatever the disadvantages of the house were in terms of its fine point, the size and arrangement of rooms and so forth, you are absolutely right, it had a charm and a grace that is important in academic life that the buildings on the campus for the most part don't have, and so we lost a physical expression of charm and grace that could never be restored.

**Dr. Hartzell:** We couldn't get people from the central office to appreciate the value of it the way we did. As far as you were concerned, what expectations did you have when you came, how long did you expect to be there, did you understand pretty well what the problems were?

**Robert Francis:** Well, I came when I was 32, although I had already completed a career in this field, so I wasn't new to the field, and I was full of the feeling that I could come and make a difference. I believed that and of course, even now, at the ripe old age of 39 I still feel exactly the same way that I can go and make a difference. And the things that in retrospect appear to have been overwhelming, didn't appear to be overwhelming at the time. They just seemed like detours that you had to get around, the bureaucracy, for example, was a detour that you simply had to

**Dr. Hartzell:** Can you go into that specifically?

**Robert Francis:** Sure. First of all I think it's important to distinguish bureaucrats from the bureaucracy. I'm a bureaucrat in the variant sense, and I can regard that as being a pejorative term, it's an expression for working in an institution that's complex, and all of the people that you meet at various levels of state government and otherwise are ordinarily genuinely interested in helping you solve your problems, and this is true of all the central administrators -- and I'm very fond of many of them and have had an

excellent working relationship with them; and the same thing goes for people in the Division of the Budget and the Dormitory Authority and every other place.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Stop there, can you mention some of the individuals with whom you dealt.

**Robert Francis:** Sure, starting with the Director of Engineering Services, there Dick Murray, he was our campus coordinator for physical facilities, a wonderful man. Two people who are really prominent in my career are Lindo Cignarelli, Associate Vice Chancellor for Capital Facilities, and Irv Freedman, the Vice Chancellor for Capital Facilities. My career overlapped Oscar Lanford's career only by a few months, and I only met him a few times. And then on the other side in the Construction Fund, Mort Gasman and Elwin Stevens, Steve as he is known, wonderful guys, and all of them really dedicated to building the entire State University and also dedicated to Stony Brook. Ordinarily pretty clear about what they perceived as the problems, and I didn't always agree with their perceptions of the problems, but they still had a genuine interest in helping. But moving to the more abstract, the bureaucracy, that's a very grinding experience, and working in New York over time incapacitate you, and I think probably other people have expressed similar thoughts.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Were you there long enough to see any change produced by the Friday Commission, the one that Wharton appointed to see if it couldn't generate some legislative changes.

**Robert Francis:** Self-sufficiency, the whole process of self-sufficiency, or as I used to refer to it insufficiency. With every initiative, there is a price. You pay for what you get, that's from "The Sun Also Rises," I think that's one of my favorite passage, but the point is that, this comes from my perspective of having been an administrator all my career now in times of shrinking source bases, so I've been cutting all my life. I've never had a chance to build things up; I have always been cutting. The self-sufficiency movement had a price in it which was the extraction of resources at the other end. The '83-'84 year

was a bad budget year where we lost a lot of money, and a lot of resources. The Friday Commission came after that for roughly

**Dr. Hartzell:** You lost the money because it was not given to you, is that right.

**Robert Francis:** Right.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Not because you didn't spend it.

**Robert Francis:** We never lost money that we didn't spend, we always lost money that was taken away from us. The campus has had an excellent record of spending its money. I think that if you look at the financial record you will find it one of the more remarkable studies in spending the budget, but each year the Division of the Budget is remarkably clever in devising new ways of extracting money from you in ways that are very difficult for legislators and the public to understand, therefore, they are quite

**Dr. Hartzell:** Did the Division of the Budget deal directly with Stony Brook or did it deal through the central office.

**Robert Francis:** Well, the formal chain is always through the central office, but of course, informally we had extensive contacts with the people in budget and that could almost be said to be on a day-to-day basis.

**Dr. Hartzell:** How much help did you get from our central office with the budget?

**Robert Francis:** Well, I think that the prevailing campus mood that we needed a lot more help than we got.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Why, why didn't they give it to you, weren't they able to, didn't they understand what the needs were?

**Robert Francis:** Well, to give the benefit of the doubt where it may not be entirely justified, I think they understood the needs, it may be arguable that it's not possible for a person who doesn't have the same kind of academic background to understand the needs of a campus like Stony Brook, let's give them that argument. But then look at their position where you have this campus, Stony Brook, which looks to the other 31 or 63, depending on how you count them, campuses in the system, are always beating on the central administrators saying why is everything going to Stony Brook. They had the

perception in the system that Stony Brook dominated the system, and there were some pretty influential interests anchored in the western end of the state and

**Dr. Hartzell:** In Buffalo.

**Robert Francis:** In Buffalo, and in the center of the state, Binghamton was a very powerful Senator, and then of course you have Albany in the capital, and along with four-year campuses they made an impact in terms of restraining whatever tendencies there might have been to redirect needed resources to Stony Brook. And of course Stony Brook is a metropolitan area campus, like Farmingdale and couple of the others, and Long Island, I always used to rebel against the 'we're different' argument, but it's simply true that a campus in the metropolitan area has different environmental forces acting on it than does a campus in Plattsburgh or Binghamton or Albany.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Can you cite some of the forces that you have in mind specifically, just tick them off?

**Robert Francis:** Externally, there's the housing market; the housing market has a dramatic influence on the recruitment of everybody from the incoming freshmen through the graduate student to the professor of medicine. I had a wonderful friend who was a professor of obstetrics and gynecology, had a remarkable career in front of him, he just simply left because he simply couldn't afford to live in our area. That's sort of at the upper end of the scale. So that the housing market had a tremendous effect. I think we had a more cosmopolitan student body than, that would also be true of Farmingdale, and maybe to some extent Purchase, than you would find in schools farther upstate. Stony Brook had and still has, I think, a very strong percentage of oriental students. The religious composition of our student body, I think, was different. The religious composition of our faculty, I think, probably was also different.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Was the Catholic, Jewish

**Robert Francis:** My guess is that the Protestant membership of those groups was relatively small, Catholic and Jewish memberships was relatively large and membership from other religions was comparatively large

**Dr. Hartzell:** Islamic, particularly from foreign students.

**Robert Francis:** From foreign students, so if you stack Stony Brook up against an upstate campus, I think that we had more representation of that kind of, but many of these things, I think talking about events, I think I might be straying a little bit from the question, but one of the events that is most remarkable in terms of negative impact on the campus, the entire Dube incident which maybe could more properly be termed the Selwyn Troen incident, since he is the visiting professor from Israel who filed the initial complaint against Professor Dube. And I'm sure that you are going to hear

**Dr. Hartzell:** This is the first time in any of the interviews that this has come up.

**Robert Francis:** It is.

**Dr. Hartzell:** In the

**Robert Francis:** Well, I'm surprised.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I remember it specifically, give just a couple of sentences as to what the problem was.

**Robert Francis:** Okay, quite briefly, the background was that Professor Dube was teaching a course called "Politics of Race." He made the term paper assignment that he published a list of possible topics. I don't remember the precise character of the list, but it had perhaps a hundred possible topics on it, one of the possible topics was the notion Zionism is as racist as Nazism. A Jewish student from the class was troubled, took this list of possible subjects to Professor Troen, who was visiting at the time from Israel. Professor Troen filed charges against Professor Dube and then promptly left to return to Israel and immersed the campus in a tremendous stew because immediately the Anti-Defamation League and eventually the Governor came out and made very strong statements against the campus and against the faculty for not censuring Professor Dube, put a lot of pressure on the President to do something. And he worked extremely hard to try to rebuild relations with the Jewish community. But of course, and properly so, Professor Dube was very quickly cleared of any impropriety in terms of his academic freedom. In fact, in an impartial finding it was determined not to have done anything that

was out of the ordinary, it just turned out that this potential topic was very troubling for a particular person. Well, this immersed the campus in debate in trouble over several questions. Professor Dube was from South Africa so there's the South African question, there's the apartheid question. There's generally the question of oppression of third world students; the extent to which the academic community provided support for the quality of life for third world students. And on the other side, interestingly enough, there was the something called the Jewish Defense League, which is splinter group and has some violent tendencies, came onto our campus and stirred the pot considerably, so I think that incident helps express these environmental factors that I was talking about -- the religious melting pot, the expressiveness of New Yorkers in general, the tradition of demonstration at Stony Brook that apparently goes way, way back to the early days, long before we ever even knew about

**Dr. Hartzell:** It goes back into the sixties.

**Robert Francis:** And I think some of that tradition is still there. I would go to student meetings and, remember what our students won for us in the sixties, remember the rights that were won for us in the sixties, so that feeling is still alive on campus. And in 1981 and 1982 it was very strong. It's also important to remember that there are a couple of historical artifacts still at the campus who were students in the sixties, and they are still

**Dr. Hartzell:** Mitch Cohen.

**Robert Francis:** You can mention others, and you know he is a great guy but he's still there dedicated to the cause that he's always been dedicated to.

**Dr. Hartzell:** All right, let's get back to the central office and the Bureau of the Budget. I have yet to interview personally anybody in the Bureau of the Budget except Norm Hurd, who was a former director under Rockefeller, whom I have known since the end of the war. What about Gillespie and Axelrod.

**Robert Francis:** David Axelrod and there were some others. I really can speak better about the specific budget examiners than the people who were higher up, Alex Rollo is another

**Dr. Hartzell:** That's a new name to me.

**Robert Francis:** He's the guy who has been in charge of the higher education. You knew people at the time the Division of Budget was in charge of giving it away in an orderly fashion. I knew people in the Division of Budget when their mission was to get it back, in an orderly way if that could be done, and if it couldn't be done, then they got it back however they could. That was their job, those were their marching orders under their administration, so that sort of shaped the character of our interaction, and we would have very friendly, be on very friendly personal terms, and they would offer advice about what we should do to help out, but ultimately the resources drifted away.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Was Carey Governor when you came in?

**Robert Francis:** He was.

**Dr. Hartzell:** And very shortly thereafter Cuomo.

**Robert Francis:** Right. The change of Governors didn't have much impact.

**Dr. Hartzell:** It was the nature of the state finances.

**Robert Francis:** The character of the state finances, I think, was pretty well set under Carey, continued under Cuomo, and so life was predictable during my tenure. I knew that every year I was going to have to cut. That's another think that you really can't survive for very long. In the beginning you can be more efficient and you can do more with less, and then you do the same amount with less, and then eventually you do less with less, and then people want somebody else.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Do you have any impression of Wharton's relation to the Governor's office?

**Robert Francis:** Well, I think Wharton as a Chancellor was a little bit detached from the day-to-day workings of the University. He was a very impressive public figure for the University, but not directly involved the day-to-day operation of the institution, and he kind of got involved in, I think, what got to be a nasty confrontation with the second in command at Budget, a woman named Susan, somebody will know what her last name

was; and I don't think he was treated very well. He wasn't treated with the appropriate dignity by the Governor's staff for several years. I think that was unfortunate.

**Dr. Hartzell:** That was one of the reasons he probably left. I'm going to have to interview people in the central office who I do not know. I have interviewed Charlie Foster, Larry Murray, Steve, but in the central office there are now people who I do not know. Can you tick off some of those with whom you had to deal and characterize them for me.

**Robert Francis:** I'll tick off the names of people for whom I have great admiration and respect and really appreciated working with them, and that includes Dick Murray; Lindo Signorelli, an Associate Vice Chancellor for Capital Facilities; Irv Freedman, Vice Chancellor for Capital Facilities; Mort Gasman

**Dr. Hartzell:** Where is Mort now, do you know.

**Robert Francis:** On Cape Cod, he's retired to Cape Cod, but still is active, and Elwin Stevens. There are some others I think of lower rank, but those are the people, I should mention a couple of names I really enjoyed in legal services too, because of the environmental issues we got into, Nancy Harrigan in Sandy Levine's office, the number two person. A couple of the attorneys I worked closely with were Pam Williams on the labor side, and Marty Ellerman, she handles most of the environmental issues which are getting to be very, very important. And in my last two years I spent a lot of time

**Dr. Hartzell:** What were they?

**Robert Francis:** Well, the problem of getting rid of garbage is a big one, and the associated problem that hospitals and research facilities producing toxic waste or biological waste have of getting rid of the red bag waste on the one hand, pathological waste, and then hazardous waste, radioactive and chemical waste, very big issues

**Dr. Hartzell:** The half-life of those is fairly short, isn't it?

**Robert Francis:** Of?

**Dr. Hartzell:** Of chemical waste?



**Robert Francis:** I would say that in terms of the scientific danger of the things that we handle, very, very low, extremely low, those decay to background very quickly and, of course, there is a great debate over whether or not infectious waste is actually infectious, and particularly after it is autoclaved. But the point is, to the citizen out there the iodine 135 that is part of my medical makeup or 125, whichever one it is, to them is Love Canal. The liquid simulation vial to them is Shoreham Nuclear Power Plant. People generally don't distinguish between those issues. I can see

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so one might question how really good it is to have a facility like Stony Brook plunked down in the middle of a populated area as compared with putting it out in Ithaca, New York. You know, Columbia runs into the same problems, perhaps even more so. But being in a dense urban area is a tough problem.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Okay. Want to talk about Steve in specifics.

**Robert Francis:** Steve has, I left out Bob Ruckterstuhl, so I'm glad that you triggered my memory. Steve has one of the better developed architectural senses for planning, and the architectural presentation of a campus plan, probably the best sense of that of anyone I ever met. He has a real dedication to architectural quality, plan quality, and of course was never afraid to say so. But after all that discussion was over with, he's just a wonderful guy and with really all the right instincts and all the right abilities about architecture and planning and probably one of the foremost authorities on field houses and physical education structures.

**Dr. Hartzell:** The field house is in the process of being built now.

**Robert Francis:** Yeah, it's my understanding that \$4 million was taken out of the budget right as the contracts were awarded and so I fear that what the campus ends up with is not going to be what Alex Kouzman, the architect conceived. It's going to be a nice building, but compared to what the original conception was, it's going to be another one of those unrealized dreams.

**Dr. Hartzell:** We can thank the Governor's office for it, probably.

**Robert Francis:** That field house should have been built seven or eight years ago. And the only reason it wasn't had to do with political haggling and wrangling. The money was there, the program was done, the need was there.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Where did the money go?

**Robert Francis:** Well, the money got eaten up by inflation.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Why wasn't it done several years ago?

**Robert Francis:** The funds were there. I don't know what the initial delays were, starting seven years ago, but I do know that at the time of my arrival, roughly 1981, the University and Division of the Budget got into a debate over the so-called cap, the \$3 billion cap on capital spending for the entire State University system. The Governor's office, the Division of Budget wanted the University to list its capital projects in priority order within the remaining money in the cap. The University didn't want to do that. And it took three years to resolve the difference. During that three years the Division of the Budget held every capital project up which is why our field house got delayed for those years, and it was two years in design, so it was a five year delay for an essentially political squabble.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Have you ever heard of a Humanities building or Humanities Tower or something of the sort.

**Robert Francis:** The Humanities Tower I think was originally planned to go where the sundial is now, which is sort of a monumental statement of humor in a way.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Sundial?

**Robert Francis:** The sundial is out in front of the Administration Building, in the middle of the center mall, and that would have been the physical focal point of the campus, conceived to be the tallest structure and would have provided a unification of the plan, not to mention adequate housing of the humanities. And I think that the suffered with the general decline of attention toward the humanities that every university I know of went through starting with the late seventies and carried on. You see, I don't think it

was so much a matter the sciences got everything later one, I think it was a matter that insufficient attention was paid to the humanities.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Well, I think that's also partly the fault of the people in the humanities. They are individualists basically, they don't work well together, and they are not means minded, they are not well organized.

**Robert Francis:** They wouldn't make a good political action committee.

**Dr. Hartzell:** No, that's right. And partly they are separate physically, they are in five or six different places on campus. If you are going to have trade in ideas, you've got to make it possible for people to associate relatively easily with each other, and I think to get the humanities to cross fertilize, you've got to bring them together. Their laboratory is the library. And you should make it possible for them to be reasonably close to the library.

**Robert Francis:** There was an early move, when I say early, I'm talking about 1981, early in my tenure, by President Marburger and then Provost Neal to get all of the Humanities into the Library.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Into the Library.

**Robert Francis:** Yes, they were going to clear out all of the carrels on the fourth and fifth floors of the Library, and we were going to move in all of the big humanities departments. We started with Comparative Literature on the fourth floor, which was an excellent project, an excellent demonstration project, but the English Department balked, because they wanted to stay in Building 001, the then ivy covered Humanities Building the red brick building. And of course as time goes by, the initiative slows down, so we lost that mission.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Some day the Library is going to need space that is in the existing building, and I think they'd better start planning on another building. If it's going to be close to the Library, it's going to have to go up.

**Robert Francis:** Right, now there's an interesting point about that, which is that for stack space, really only the core of the old Library, the inner building, is suitable because that's the only building that has adequate floor loading capacity for stacks.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Really.

**Robert Francis:** Office parts that were built around the periphery all have 90 pound floors, they couldn't take stacks.

**Dr. Hartzell:** There are some stacks on the north side on the fourth floor.

**Robert Francis:** Let's see, there's the Institute for World Religions, but generally speaking

**Dr. Hartzell:** That's on the north side on the fifth floor.

**Robert Francis:** Fifth floor, right. The general way that we judge, we were looking at the east wing at one time, it wasn't structurally adequate to take bookstacks.

**Dr. Hartzell:** They'll have to move some of the working space in the Library.

**Robert Francis:** Yeah, right. And we've just, I'm speaking as though I were still there, but we've just finished converted the third floor from offices into bookstacks so that I think that there was room for three, four, five years worth of growth in the collection at that point. So that we bought a little time. Of course, the other thing that librarians don't like to do is create dead storage where you put unused parts of the collection into a separate facility, but that might be required. Of course, those are librarians decisions.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Okay. What do you feel that you have accomplished by the time that you left, that's fourteen.

**Robert Francis:** Well, I believe sincerely, and hopefully not in any egotistical way, that I did make a difference. I think that during my time the whole thing of dormitory cooking was reduced from 6,000 people to about 2,000 people. I think that made a real difference on the quality of dormitory life. Students wouldn't agree, of course, at the time but I think it did. I think that I was directly instrumental in improving the infrastructure, the electrical, the heating, the air conditioning systems there. I think that I made an impact in terms of being able to relate to the needs of the teacher in the

classroom and the researcher in the laboratory, and I think that I made an impact in the sense that I was able to keep services up to a fairly constant level while I was cutting the budget year after year after year. So I was doing more with less and in the same amount with less for a long time, and I think that made a lasting contribution. Now, of course, the problem in being in charge of support services is that your influence is only felt over a finite period. The President's problems have their influence felt for a very long time, but I don't think that's true for people who have positions like I did. But I think at the time I made a real difference. I was a different kind of a person from the people who were ordinarily run physical plants. I had a different kind of a background, different age, maybe a little different sense of humor, didn't want to pay too much attention to limitations at the time, and so I think that helped bring a different perspective. On the other hand in positions like that, where your number one job always is keeping the confidence and morale of people up and trying to construct change in an effective and meaningful way, there is probably a sunrise and a sunset to the period that any person is effective, and so I think that five, six years was about the right length of time for me to be there.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Let me ask you about two things. One, the planting and the upkeep of the grounds. I have noticed an improvement and some imagination in the handling of grass, flowers, trees, trash, that kind of thing. Second is the morale of the working force. I only see the people in the Library. Ron Loman, for instance, I found him to be about as cooperative and resourceful with what he had to work with as you could possibly want. And in general the janitorial staff seem in pretty good shape. Those two things, can you comment on those two items.

**Robert Francis:** Well, a number of grounds initiatives were undertaken while I was there, major tree planting, walkway projects and things of that nature. So, I think that that will have the impact. Morale is something that's difficult because anything can shatter it, but I think

**Dr. Hartzell:** Elevators that won't work.

**Robert Francis:** Well, all the elevators in the Library were rebuilt during my time there.

**Dr. Hartzell:** They had to be.

**Robert Francis:** Yeah, and those are pretty serious transportation problems. But I think the morale of the work force, at least in the physical plant, remained pretty good while I was there.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Fifteen, who in your opinion stands out, or what individuals stand out as making an outstanding contribution to the University, not simply in your particular line of work?

**Robert Francis:** I think that Homer Neal certainly, while I was here, had a major impact on problems, and I think that impact is still being felt. Homer is a builder. He's a builder of programs. A number of things he started will continue. And Jerry Schubel in the same respect is a builder. I didn't have the privilege of knowing previous academic managers, they will certainly be felt in terms of their influence. It goes without saying that a president who has an eight year tenure, going on the ninth year, therefore, has served at the University for almost a third of its life, certainly will have influences felt over the years. And then I think that other than distinguished individual faculty members who bring students in with them, the chairman of departments at Stony Brook have a stronger influence, I think, than what I have seen at other institutions. The ability of the chairman of Physics, for example, working with somebody like Jerry Brown or working with a Max Dresden or working with a C. N. Yang, those are all names that will have a tremendous influence; Ron Douglas, first as chair of Math and then as Dean of the Physical Sciences, has and will continue to have an important influence. I think Marvin Kushner as Dean of the Medical School had major influence on the growth and direction of the Health Sciences. Jack Heller in Computer Science, I think, deserves mention in any list because under his leadership, Computer Science really moved into a position of prominence, and that guy wrestled more resources out of the administration than anybody

whom I've ever known, so that quite substantial contribution on his part; of course, Paul Lauterbur is no longer there, but his influence will continue to be felt for many years.

**Dr. Hartzell:** How?

**Robert Francis:** The legend, the person may be gone, but the legend is there, and so that's quite valuable. Those are the kinds of, even the fellow who went to Princeton from Microbiology took half the department with him

**Dr. Hartzell:** Cohen?

**Robert Francis:** Not David Cohen, he went to Northwestern, I can see him as clear as a bell now, but I think we had taken him from Princeton, then he went back to Princeton, but he certainly had a major influence on the biological sciences, as did David Cohen, so that those are the names that come to mind.

**Dr. Hartzell:** You have mentioned science.

**Robert Francis:** The musicians, any mentioning of Stony Brook has to include music, and so I think the Music Department has some very notable

**Dr. Hartzell:** Sam Baron.

**Robert Francis:** Yeah, Billy Jim Layton and Weisman, director of the Graduate Student Orchestra, that's a great orchestra, so we've had a remarkable influence with some of the individual humanitarians I think have had a much greater influence on the discipline than they will on Stony Brook. So you've got people like Tom Flanagan, who's quite powerful; and Jan Kott we mentioned earlier.

**Dr. Hartzell:** All right. I think I've run out of questions.

**Robert Francis:** Well, it's probably a good thing because I've run out of words, and I've got to go to a dentist appointment.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Oh, you do. Well, I can't say that this was like pulling teeth. Thanks very much.

**Robert Francis:** Well, I appreciate the opportunity, and I enjoyed the interview, and I also want everybody to know for posterity that I really enjoyed my time at Stony Brook.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Good, good, that's fine. Thank you.

[end of interview]