

Williams College Oral History Project Interview with Philip Smith

September 2, October 7, November 12, 1992

Interviewer Length: 167 pages

Philip Smith (b. 1933), Class of 1955, returned to Williams in 1959 as assistant director of admissions, retiring in 1999. In 1991, Smith became the dean of admissions. He also taught one history class per year from 1960 through 1970, coached freshman soccer, and helped to start the ABC program.

In his interview with John Walsh, Smith discusses his undergraduate experience at Williams, including fraternities, athletics, and social life. He discusses President Baxter in some detail, asserting that he maintained a cap on how many Jewish students he would admit to Williams. Smith discusses Fred Copeland (then director of admissions) and the admissions process as it was when Smith arrived, the ABC program and other attempts to diversify the College.

Smith discusses the Ten Percent Program and coeducation. He explains that in the beginning President Sawyer promised that the percentage of women at Williams would not exceed thirty. Smith describes the transition to 40/60, and eventually to the 50/50 split of today. He states that the hardest part of coeducation was attracting strong female faculty and bringing them up into leadership roles.

Smith spends the second half of the interview discussing affirmative action and attempts to diversify the College. He states that 1969 was a turning point in the admission of African American students. Smith asserts that Harry Garfield (Williams President from 1908 to 1934) would write to black applicants to discourage them from attending. He discusses recruitment of Latino students during the 1970s and 1980s, and states that President Oakley will be remembered for making the College truly multicultural.

Smith also talks about the Board of Trustees; athletics; *U.S. News* rankings; SAT scores; and college size. He states that there were more Jewish students in the 1940s and 1950s than there are now; asserts that the abolition of fraternities opened the College up to more, not fewer, applicants; and states that grade inflation began during the Vietnam War, when faculty would not fail students because it meant sending them to war.

The transcript of this interview and accompanying audio file (if available) may be accessed only in the Archives/Chapin Reading Room.