

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH SPSU VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS ZVI SZAFRAN

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Interview with Zvi Szafran
Conducted by Thomas A. Scott and Laura Beth Daws
Edited and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
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Location: Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, SPSU

TS: Zvi Szafran has been the vice president for academic affairs at Southern Poly since 2005. I know you grew up in Syracuse, New York, and you had an undergraduate degree from Wooster Polytechnic Institute, which I presume is in Massachusetts.

ZS: Yes, Wooster, Massachusetts.

TS: Somehow or another you got to the University of South Carolina for a doctoral program, so maybe a good starting question is what got you to the South?

ZS: Well, when I was an undergraduate at WPI, one of the aspects of chemistry that really interested me was nuclear magnetic resonance, which is a technique that is the chemistry version of MRI, a medical technique. NMR came first, and MRI developed out of that. I got really interested in that, and it turns out the University of South Carolina was designated as a national center for NMR by the National Science Foundation, They got a big grant to buy some of the first absolute top end equipment and were doing some real interesting research. I thought that would be a real good place to go, so I applied there.

TS: You got through in remarkable speed.

ZS: With chemistry five years is typical. I know in the humanities it typically takes much longer. We in the sciences feel very bad for our [humanities] colleagues.

LD: In chemistry isn't it true that you combined your master's with your PhD; it's a dual degree of some sort?

ZS: Correct. This isn't universally true, but in chemistry generally you go in directly for a doctorate, and if you don't complete the doctorate, you get a master's degree. There are a couple of places where people go specifically for a master's, but that's unusual in chemistry.

TS: Okay, so by 1981 you've got your degree in hand and then you go back and teach at northern universities again. What was it that attracted you to Southern Poly in 2005? You were already a vice president for academic affairs and a dean.

ZS: I was at a small liberal arts college [New England College] in [Henniker,] New Hampshire, and I'm trying to think of a polite way of saying this, the college...

TS: Had limited offerings?

ZS: No, no, no, what the situation was was I was asked to do something that I didn't want to do at the college. Specifically, I was asked to impose a particular academic program on the faculty. I supported the program. In fact, I had written the curriculum for the program. I had written the budget for the program and so forth. So, obviously, I supported it. But we brought it to the faculty, and this would have been the first fully online degree program at the undergraduate level that the college offered. So the faculty wanted a little more time to consider it. It hit them at the last spring meeting, and so they rolled it over until the fall. Okay, we had people on the board of trustees who wanted to implement it sooner because they saw some opportunities with it. They came to me, and they said, "We'd like you to impose this on the faculty." They didn't quite put it that way, but that's what it came to. They said, "Will you do that?" I said, "If you asked me to do that, I will try to talk you out of it because a program that doesn't come in with faculty support is unlikely to be successful." They said, "What if we were to insist?" I said, "Well, I would try harder to convince you not to do that." They said, "What if we still insist?" I said, "Well, then I would resign."

TS: Good for you.

ZS: The following Monday the president came in and said, "Time to find a new position." So the faculty voted no confidence in the president at that point and voted confidence in me. I had a sabbatical at the end of this period which I used to search for a new position, and one of the positions that I applied for was at Southern Polytechnic. What interested me about it was it was a polytechnic like my undergraduate college, and I very much believe in applied learning, which is kind of the polytechnic style of learning. When I was looking over the information on the web about SPSU, I saw what I thought were some opportunities that SPSU hadn't yet gone after. I applied, and they invited me down for an interview. Much to my surprise, a day or two or maybe it was a week before coming down here, I got a phone call from another faculty member at New England College saying, "Zvi, would you be willing to serve as a reference for me?" I said, "Sure, where are you applying?" He said, "Oh, some school I'm sure you've never heard of in the South, Southern Polytechnic State University." I said, "Have I got a strange coincidence for you." So I told him that I'd be coming down as well, and he was actually following yet a third person from New England College who had by himself made his way down here. So we wound up with three of us, two biologists and a chemist, all in the same department, all from New England College.

LD: Did they end up here?

ZS: Yes, Michael Beach, Mark Sugalski, and me.

LD: Oh, no way, I didn't realize that!

ZS: And just to make the coincidence a little more remarkable, the dean of arts and sciences at the time was Alan Gabrielli who got his PhD at the University of South Carolina with me. He got his degree two or three years earlier than I did, something like that, but he

was a fellow inorganic chemist, and so I knew Alan, but I didn't know he was here, so it was very much the small world. It was almost like it was meant to be.

TS: How about that! Sounds like the Board of Regents last October or November made the same mistake as your board of trustees up at New England College of not consulting anybody beforehand before they made a decision.

ZS: Well, they made a decision. We don't get to change it. It's our job to implement it as best we can. But, obviously, there are a lot of folks at SPSU who would have chosen a different path.

TS: Or would have liked to have been consulted at any rate.

ZS: How's that for a polite way of saying it?

LD: Good rhetoric, very good!

TS: Well, I think it's going to be interesting someday to get the true history of how this decision came about because I don't know who knew on our campus ahead of time, but I certainly didn't know, and I don't know anybody that had even an inkling that consolidation was about to take place.

ZS: I kind of knew the night before because President [Lisa A.] Rossbacher sent out an e-mail asking not only the normal folks on the senior staff to come in but also the deans. So I said, "Hmm, something big is up, what might it be?" I weighed a couple of factors, and said, "Okay, it's merger"; and sure enough...

TS: One of the reasons that I was reading your *Weekly Blab* is that you had a very, very nice column on November 4, 2013, right after the decision was official. There was just a great quote in there where you said, "The good news is that Kennesaw State University is a fine university, and it will be finer still when we become part of it." Then you started talking about all the good things that were going on here, but it was more like bullet points, one after another. We were thinking that maybe it would be a good structure to this interview to get you to elaborate on some of these things which are obviously changes that have occurred on this campus in your tenure here. And the very first thing that you had on the list is you said there are many magnificent things at Southern Polytechnic State University, and the first one you listed is "our new and our traditional degree programs." It looks to me that you really have expanded the number of degree programs. Among other things, you moved, it looks to me, from the engineering degrees being almost exclusively engineering technology to kind of straight civil engineering, mechanical engineering, and electrical engineering, but also a lot of other things too in the fine arts and a lot of programs and teacher certification programs. But anyway, would you talk a little bit about the growth in the programs on campus during your tenure here?

ZS: Sure. When I got here we had about 3,600 or 3,700 students, and our enrollment had been largely flat over the past several years. The real question that kept being asked when I got here was how come we can't grow like some other universities have. Similarly, of course, having our strong emphasis on engineering technology, a lot of people were saying, "Why can't we get engineering?" Perhaps, foolishly, when I got here, I said, "Well, we can go after those very things." The issue that I confronted was that I think people saw SPSU's mission as overly narrow. They had done a strategic plan a couple of years earlier which had in it a SWOT [Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats] analysis, and one of the things that they had as a weakness, if I'm remembering it right, was the narrowness of our mission. But another way of saying a narrow mission is a well-focused mission. In looking at this, I had some conversations with President Rossbacher, and I was arguing that we can actually use this mission to pry open some of the doors that have hitherto been closed to us by trying to move towards becoming a more comprehensive polytechnic university. This is something that nobody's really done before. If you look at Virginia Tech, for example, they are comprehensive, and their name says they're a polytechnic, but everything that they do isn't polytechnic. What I wanted to be was a university that exemplified both parts of our name, right, the state university part meaning we would offer the full range of programs that you would expect to find at a state university.

TS: Like a degree in chemistry.

ZS: Or a degree in fine arts. But the polytechnic part would mean everything with a technological focus. Nobody had done for before.

TS: Oh, chemistry with a technological focus, and fine arts with a technological focus?

ZS: Precisely. So the first thing that I did was we had a couple of degree programs that had kind of funky names. For example, we had a degree program that was called International Professional Communication, and perhaps I'm wrong here, but one's average seventeen year old has no idea what that means. I consulted with the folks downtown [at the Board of Regents], and I said, "This is an English degree. Why can't we just call it English?" They said, "Because of your mission." I said, "Well, what's the closest thing to English that you would let us call it that somebody might recognize?" We talked back and forth for a bit and finally settled on [a Bachelor of Arts in] English and Professional Communication. Then we had a Technical Communication degree that had a longer title which escapes me at the moment what we called it, but we shortened that to [a Bachelor of Science in] Technical Communication. That's in your department [Department of English, Technical Communication & Media Arts].

LD: Right.

ZS: Similarly, our Business Administration program at that moment was called Management, but the master's degree was a Master's in Business Administration [MBA], so we changed the undergraduate degree to [a BS in] Business Administration. Construction, we were looking at the possibility of Construction Engineering, so we changed

Construction to [a BS in] Construction Management. We did a couple of changes like that and that was maybe two or three months in.

TS: Two or three months into your tenure?

ZS: Yes, into my tenure. The more important thing was that our Civil Engineering Technology faculty had prepared a degree proposal for a new major in Construction Engineering. This had been on our campus for a couple of years at this point and basically just shuttling around from various offices because folks didn't want to submit it downtown. When I got here the faculty took the opportunity of popping it onto my desk for me to look at it. I looked at it, and I thought there were some problems with it. I noted what those were, and so they did a re-write. I looked at the re-write, and I still thought that there were a couple of problems with it, but I figured since they'd already re-written it, I'd re-write it this time. I did the track changes thing on the computer, and I sent it back to the department and said, "I've made some additional changes. Take a look at them and let me know what you think." They sent back a note saying, very cleverly, "If we accept your changes, would you submit the proposal?" That actually surprised me because I wasn't aware of the earlier history of it shuttling around on campus. I said, "Well, if we're in agreement, why wouldn't I submit it?" They told me the previous history, and I said, "No, of course, I'll submit it. I'll have to talk to the president first." So I talked with the president and she was fine with it, so we submitted it, and precisely what everybody predicted happened, which is that it hit the Board of Regents' staff, they asked the folks at Georgia Tech what they thought, and Georgia Tech thought we shouldn't do it. They had pretty much of a monopoly on engineering programs. I was brand new, so I didn't know what would happen now, so I called the folks downtown and I said, "What happens now?" They said, "Well, you go and you talk to the folks at Georgia Tech and see if you can get them to change their mind." I said, "Is that going to work?" They said, "No." I said, "Then why are we doing this?" They said, "Well, that's the process." I said, "Okay." I got the chair of the department and a couple of other people who had developed the proposal together with me, and we went down to Georgia Tech. We did a little strategizing before, and I think that maybe the key element of the strategy was that instead of making the argument why we were worthy to get the degree, we made the argument of what's in it for Georgia Tech, if we get the degree, because after all, it was they who needed to change their minds.

TS: What was in it for them?

ZS: Well, when we got down there, we were meeting with the new department chair of Civil Engineering. That's where Construction Engineering is in the Georgia Tech curriculum.

TS: Civil engineers build roads and such I guess.

ZS: Yes, Construction Engineering is a specialty of Civil Engineering. We were talking to him, and they had some concerns with what we might do in the future that they didn't want us to do, but they also really didn't want the competition. We pointed out that we were actually aiming at a very different market than theirs. Their market is students

going into graduate programs and so on, and our market is students going directly into industry. We used the phrase “our program would be complementary to yours, not competitive.” This complementary not competitive idea took some hold, and after the discussion, the chair of the department basically said, “You know, I think you’ve made some good arguments”—and we made some other arguments which I guess I’m not going to mention—and he said, “You’ve made some good arguments, but I don’t think our faculty would accept this.” I said, “Well, what would they be concerned about?” He said, “They’d be concerned that you might in the future someday offer doctoral programs in engineering and thus directly compete with us.” I said, “Would a memorandum of understanding between us help?” He said, “Yes, it would.” I said, “Shall I draft it or would you like to draft it?” He said, “Why don’t you draft it, and I’ll review it.” I drafted it, and I sent it to him, and he made a minor change in it, and then he said, “I will recommend that we agree.” This was the day after, but after we agreed to do the memorandum of understanding, we were walking out of there, and I turned to my colleagues from SPSU, and I said, “What do you think just happened? It sure feels like they’re going to go along with this.” They said, “Can’t believe it, but we think you’re right.” We agree on the MOU like I said and they recommended this to their provost who called me up and said, “Zvi, I don’t know how this happened, but, yes, it looks like I’ll talk to the president about this.”

TS: Protecting their graduate programs was their concern.

ZS: Well, it was part of their concern, and we addressed a couple of other concerns that they had, which again I don’t know that we need to get into.

TS: No, but it sounds like even as you’re moving toward straight engineering as opposed to engineering technology, they’re still more applied than Georgia Tech does?

ZS: Yes, absolutely so. I want to be careful that we were never moving toward engineering instead of engineering technology. We wanted to offer engineering and engineering technology. We had no intention of eliminating our engineering technology degrees, and I never have.

TS: Is there a short definition of what the difference is between engineering technology and engineering as it’s taught on Southern Poly’s campus?

ZS: Well, the traditional definition is engineering is focused more on creation of new things, and engineering technology is focused more on optimization of existing things. The two of them overlap quite a bit, so a lot of people who have got engineering degrees wind up doing optimization jobs, and a lot of people with engineering technology degrees wind up being hired as engineers. The reality is if you look at—I’m going to go visual here for the tape, but I’ll describe it—so if engineering is your left hand, and engineering technology is your right hand, the reality is it’s not this widely separated hands, but it’s this overlapping on at least two fingers. There’s a lot of overlap in-between.

TS: Right.

ZS: As I said, it went up the chain at Georgia Tech, and Georgia Tech withdrew their objection at the Board of Regents, which, I think, surprised everyone. So they looked it over themselves, and after we and Georgia Tech had agreed, there really wasn't all that much to discuss at that point. I think there were maybe a couple of little things that they found. So then it went down to the docket at the Board of Regents meeting, and they voted to approve it [on June 7, 2006]. That was our first engineering program other than Software Engineering, which we already had. We also had a master's degree in Systems Engineering. What we decided to do at that point was to go for a number of "boutique" engineering degrees. We followed up the Construction Engineering degree with a Mechatronics Engineering degree, which was something that the Mechanical Engineering Technology folks had been working on along with the electrical.

TS: What exactly is that?

ZS: It's actually robotics. We wrote up a proposal for that and then followed precisely the same pattern. We submitted it to the Board of Regents, but this time before we sent it to them, we met with the folks at Georgia Tech. We met with the relevant department chair and explained to him what we wanted to do. He said, "Well, can't you call this Mechatronics Engineering Technology?" We said, "Well, we could, but that's not what we want to do. We want this to be an engineering degree."

LD: Do they have a Mechatronics program at Georgia Tech?

ZS: No.

LD: What were their reservations?

ZS: That's a specialty of Mechanical Engineering. So again what we're doing is instead of doing general degrees, we're doing specialized degrees.

LD: Sure.

ZS: This was the year after the Construction Engineering degree. He would have preferred it to be a Mechatronics Engineering Technology degree, but did not object to its being an engineering degree. Again, the provost and the president went along, and we submitted it to the Board of Regents, and they said, "Have you consulted with Georgia Tech?" We said, "Yes, they will not have an objection, and here's a note from them saying so." So that got approved [at the October 10-11, 2006, Board of Regents meeting].

LD: I had no idea Georgia Tech had such an influence today on our programs.

ZS: Oh, they do. So we were forming a partnership of sorts with Georgia Tech in that we were very careful to design the programs to be complementary, not competitive. We were very much stuck to that idea.

- TS: So if you stay down here you can teach in our conflict management program.
- ZS: Maybe so [laughter]!
- ZS: You can see when we got the Mechatronics Engineering degree, it's one of very few in the country, and it's a very hot area, and you can see we decided to make a commemorative t-shirt, and the faculty gave me a framed one to thank me for helping them get the program through. Then we did an undergraduate degree in Systems Engineering, which is another specialized form of engineering. That passed maybe six months later, eight months later, something like that. Then what we wanted to do was go after the big three, civil, electrical and mechanical. There Georgia Tech was saying, "Whoa, these are our bread and butter." We were talking with them about a few things, and then as it happened we had a new chancellor. The chancellor came on our campus, and somebody asked the inevitable question, and we'd already been talking.
- TS: Was this Erroll Davis [Erroll B. Davis Jr.]?
- ZS: Erroll Davis, and we had already been talking with Chancellor Davis. But they said, "Chancellor Davis, what could we do to get the big three engineering programs on our campus?" He said, "Well you'd have to do this in the way you've been doing it, in a way that's complementary to Georgia Tech. So perhaps you might want to focus it on a different market. Maybe you might want to think about doing an evening program in engineering." We got together with the folks at Georgia Tech, and they wanted to commission a study to see if there was any demand. We jointly did a study with them on if there was a demand for an evening engineering program and where that demand might be. The study showed metro Atlanta, not surprisingly, was where it would be, and that there was a sufficient demand. This was something that Georgia Tech didn't really have an interest in doing, offering an evening program.
- TS: The faculty didn't want to stick around at night?
- ZS: Well, for whatever reasons. They're doing their research, perhaps. This is going to sound like it happened real fast, but it didn't. This took a while to work through the details and to overcome people's concerns, and to again come to agreements on all manner of things, but ultimately they decided that they would go along. They actually had a president change in there, which we obviously had a little concern would derail this, but, no. They had a provost change in there too, so their leadership changed, but we were working steadily. Like I said, this became a partnership between SPSU and Georgia Tech. Long story short, we brought all three degrees simultaneously to the Board of Regents, and the president of Georgia Tech was there on that day to support those programs should the question be asked.
- LD: Wow, that's wonderful.
- ZS: That was a wonderful day, needless to say. As it turns out nobody asked any questions because everybody knew ahead of time that Georgia Tech was not opposed to doing this.

LD: Do you remember what year this was?

ZS: It was like five years ago so around 2008 or '09.

TS: According to the Fact Book in 2009—Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering [August 12, 2009], and also [a B.S. and M.S. in] Accounting that year [March 17, 2009].

ZS: Right. So that was kind of the one big push in the engineering area; the other push...

TS: Excuse me, but I wonder how many people off campus know that, that Southern Poly has moved in this direction?

ZS: Well, a lot of them do. We've got very large numbers of students in engineering.

TS: I guess I'm saying, until I started doing my research, I wasn't aware that you had the engineering degrees.

ZS: Yes. In fact, the full complement, so we've got seven engineering degrees now at the bachelor's level. We've got several at the master's level as well. We've got a couple of proposals ready to go for four more master's degrees as soon as we're allowed to proceed.

TS: Oh, I saw where you were going to have an architecture master's by this fall?

ZS: We've got that.

TS: Sorry, excuse me, but before I interrupted, you were going to go on to some other programs.

ZS: The other things that we were trying to do was, like I said, broaden the curriculum so that we become a more comprehensive polytechnic.

TS: Is that where the growth in students has been primarily in broadening the curriculum?

ZS: Between the two things.

TS: Oh these two things together, and engineering.

ZS: Yes. We wanted to, again, do things that you would expect to find at a state university but always with a technological focus. We added a degree for example, in Psychology, but the focus of the Psychology degree is Industrial Psychology, the so-called man-machine interface. We added a program in Accounting but the focus was on lean accounting which is Industrial Accounting.

TS: Lean accounting?

ZS: Yes. That's the kind of accounting that industry uses. We added a degree in New Media Arts in your [Laura Beth's] department.

LD: Right, which has become really popular. It has grown tremendously.

ZS: Which is the hottest degree that they've got.

LD: We have over 100 majors.

ZS: And then we went for some additional specialty degrees in our normal wheelhouse. For example, we had degrees in Computer Science and Information Technology and Software Engineering but we added a [B.S.] degree in Computer Game Design [May 12, 2009], and we've got the only ABET accredited degree in the country in that area. Needless to say, Computer Game Design is very, very popular. We also hired a really good new dean [in fall 2007] in that area [School of Computing and Software Engineering], and we worked together, and the enrollment, which, everywhere in the country had been in decline in the computer area, turned around very nicely, and now that area is exploding with growth.

TS: Who's the dean?

ZS: Han Reichgelt. He's been an exemplary dean. We hired new chairs, like the chair of your [Laura Beth's] department [Department of English, Technical Communications and Media Arts], Mark Nunes [July 2006] who had the kinds of skills to see that the degree program in New Media Arts could be created and to help bring focus and direction to the department. He's done an exemplary job.

TS: Sounds like you're bringing in very entrepreneurial type people.

ZS: Exactly, and telling them when they were interviewing with us about this concept of the comprehensive polytechnic, which they found very compelling, and they wanted to help build it. All of this stuff, I didn't write the degree programs in engineering. This was done by our faculty, but I helped with the strategy and the negotiations for getting them through. I didn't write the degree program in New Media Arts. I don't know anything about new media arts, but I helped bring in the chair who did and helped support his writing it and getting the faculty and getting the resources to make it happen. The Computer Game Design, again, I don't know anything about computer game design, although I have written computer programs, but the way that one came about was obviously a confluence of a couple of ideas. I had actually seen an article in a magazine about how some college had set up a computer gaming lab to teach students, but in the afterhours to have just students be able to hang around and play. They were doing this as a retention issue. I said, "That sounds like a good idea." So I sent an e-mail with a copy of that article to Han, the dean, and I said, "Have we ever thought about doing this?" Maybe within a day I had a proposal on my desk...

- TS: So they had obviously been thinking about it.
- ZS: Well, no, for me to give them like \$50,000 or something to set up that lab! They said, “Yes, this would be a fine idea.” And they apparently had been talking about it, and so they said, “If that guy wants it, let him pay for it.”
- TS: So you had \$50,000 just sitting around.
- ZS: As it turns out we had a capital budget, and we steered some of the capital budget towards this in Academic Affairs. Soon thereafter we talked about doing the degree proposal, and we submitted it, and we got approval of it, and the whole process took like six months. So I think this was really the fastest degree program ever.
- TS: And you’re the only one in the system that has it?
- ZS: Yes, we were ahead of everybody on this. We’ve subsequently gotten it accredited by. There are other places that do computer game design, and maybe part of a computer science department, which may be accredited by ABET, but we’ve got the only stand-alone degree that’s accredited.
- TS: What does ABET stand for?
- ZS: Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology. It’s the premier accrediting body for engineering, engineering technology, and the computing fields.
- LD: It seems our students respond really well to these fields too, if you think about the Game Jam that we have on campus every semester where students lock themselves in the J building and design computer games over a weekend.
- ZS: Oh, yes. These degrees are really perfect for us. They exemplify the kind of university we are. They really speak to our students. We’ve hired the right faculty who are student oriented and innovative and entrepreneurial, like you said. So they come up with stuff like doing the Game Jams and so on. Again, I can’t take credit for those things. At the time it came up, I didn’t know what a computer game jam was, but they did.
- LD: I think it’s one of the largest in the country now, if I’m not mistaken.
- ZS: Yes, and when our faculty have had good ideas and when our departments have good ideas, I’ve supported them as quickly and as strongly as I can. Anyway, those were the two big ideas curricularly. We were always looking for opportunities that fit our mission, that could be done in a technological way, but that would broaden what we were doing. The Secondary Education programs, the teacher certification programs, fall into that category, but, notice, we did not go for Elementary Education; notice, we did not go for a general Secondary Ed. We went for science education because that’s what we do. We tried very hard to stay within our mission, but to have our mission applied broadly.

TS: Right. Presumably, the consolidation is not going to change or affect any of these programs, I would assume.

ZS: I hope not. It may affect some. Kennesaw has got a very large education program, and so it remains to be seen how our flavor of education programs are going to co-exist or not with the Kennesaw programs. I have not heard anything yet from the OWG [Operational Working Group for Education] as to what the outcome is on that one, so we will have to see.

TS: That would probably be the closest to what Kennesaw already offers.

ZS: You also have a degree in Psychology.

TS: And Industrial is just one of the smaller fields.

ZS: Right, so we'll have to see how those link up. We've got other degrees. Our Biology degree was focused on biotechnology and bioinformatics and environmental biology and so forth, and your Biology degree has got some of those aspects. In fact, Kennesaw has a degree in Biotechnology, which we were going for just before the consolidation and that had your [KSU's] cooperation on, but then the consolidation made it moot. So those were the two general thrusts in terms of expanding the number of degree programs.

TS: Sure, sure. Well, the second thing that you put in your *Weekly Blab* was about the facilities—the beautiful campus and new facilities. Could you talk a little about the growth in buildings on campus since you've been here?

ZS: Again, everything is tied to everything else. We had an excellent strategic plan that we developed, which was to expand our degree programs, expand our enrollment, and then expand the resources that are necessary to keep them growing. That was our strategic plan. Alongside of it, we had a facilities master plan that we developed, and we used the entire senior staff with the president, and so we worked on this. What we had to do was basically jump start the enrollment because nobody was going to give you additional resources if you had a flat enrollment. We moved towards more aggressive recruiting, and obviously our Admission folks had a large share of that. We moved on the faculty side to much stronger emphasis on retention of students and stronger support for students, and that helped.

We changed a few administrative policies that were basically punishing students for administrative failures with academic punishments, which makes no sense. So we changed that, and that was helpful. We institute a grade forgiveness policy, which I think was important. We had some people who took several times to pass physics or calculus or whatever and would have to carry all those F's on their transcripts and were in a hole that they couldn't get out of. We put in a fairly common grade forgiveness policy, which then eliminated that from their grade point average. It stayed on the transcript. So that was helpful. We had talked about if we believe in this plan, then we need to stop

worrying about how we're going to fill the new residence hall we had put up. We were concerned we had to make the pro forma for it, but we had to shift to, "We're going to be out of space real quickly, and we need to put up new residence halls."

At the beginning of the next year, we had an 11 percent increase in enrollment, which had never happened before. It was a combination of all of those things. We used that as, "Well, here's the proof that our plan is working, and here's the physical resources that we're going to need." With a bit of good luck, the University System [of Georgia] was simultaneously changing the way it was allocating its capital money to a six-year budget cycle. We asked for money in year one. Normally, in year one you get design money, and in year two you get construction money. I've forgotten whose idea this was. I don't think it was mine, but somebody had the idea of why don't we use the college's money for the design, and ask for construction money in year one. So we put up the design money as our match.

TS: After all, you've got a School of Architecture or . . .

ZS: Well, no, there are Board of Regents policies; you can't do it that way.

TS: You can't?

ZS: No, although the architects played an incredible role. Anyway, we put in our proposal that we should get funded in year one, and President Rossbacher, of course, lobbied hard for this. We had had a building that we had asked for on the previous methodology of capital, which got wiped out. So between all of these things, it was our moment, I think. We got an allocation to put up the new Engineering Technology Center. Originally, it had been proposed as just for Electrical Engineering Technology and for Mathematics, but Mechanical was actually the area in the worst shape, space wise, on our campus, and it was growing like crazy. We were simultaneously planning on the Mechatronics Engineering degree. After some discussions, we decided to change it so that it would house Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Technology and, if we got them, Engineering. That got funded.

Then we got funded for a new Architectural Studio building, and at the same time we did a private/public venture to put up new residence halls because we were getting the growth now to justify it, and a new dining hall. The other thing that was kind of interesting was originally the building was scheduled to be located in the current footprint of building I1, the old Architecture building, which was lying empty at that point. When our numbers started to trend upwards, I remember having a conversation with the president saying, "You know, we really shouldn't tear down Building I1." The dean of [the School of] Architecture, Bill Barnes, Architecture, Construction and Civil Engineering Technology, was very much against tearing that building down. That was his original building, and he loved it, and he was very much into adaptive reuse. He had come and talked to me, and I said, "Yes, you know, he's right because if we're going to grow like we think we're going to grow, we better keep every square foot we've got."

So I went and talked to the president about it, and she agreed. She said, “I’d like to go for a walk with you, Zvi.” So we went for a walk, and she took me over to the Elks Lodge, and she said, “We’ve got an opportunity to buy this property.” We looked at it and talked about it, and, “Yes, we should be buying this, and this is where the new Engineering Technology Center should go.” We talked in the senior staff, and this all became the plan. We had open forums on campus about this, and there were some people who were against this because in those days there were trees in between us and the Elks Lodge, and mentally it was far away to people. They were saying, “Who would want to be over there? It’s so far away, that’s crazy.” But now, of course, the residence halls are there, the dining hall is there, and the parking deck is over there.

TS: I thought you were about to say they were fighting to save the trees!

ZS: No, no.

LD: I can’t imagine our campus if it didn’t look the way it does now.

ZS: Yes, and so we just moved the center of the campus instead. Obviously, everybody isn’t delighted with that. At the same time we spent year-end money very wisely in construction projects on campus. So we rehabilitated a number of things. Again, we were well aware, and this was in the facilities master plan, that as we grew we would hit bottlenecks. Everybody knows that if you have Engineering you need space for Engineering. That’s not any shocking news, but what people don’t think about is engineers take lots of other courses outside of engineering, for example, they take a lot of science labs. So that means you’re going to run into a bottleneck in your science labs that you won’t be able to get around. What we decided to do was we had—and you can see this is a set of dominoes—we had an open computer lab in Building H [Architecture Building]. We moved that lab into the [Lawrence V. Johnson] Library, thereby revitalizing the library. It became the Knowledge Commons in the library, and the librarians loved the idea. That opened up the space in Building H.

So we took that space and a little bit of adjacent space, rehabilitated it completely, and we took Physics out of the Science building and moved it over there because of course Physics uses only dry laboratories. They don’t need water and gas and so forth in their labs, so we moved Physics over there. That freed up space in the Science Laboratory building, which we then converted into new laboratories, and we rehabilitated the old laboratories. Step by step we moved the dominoes around in order to stay ahead of the demand curve for new facilities, and we’ve largely been able to do that. So we’ve spent our money very wisely, I think, in doing this. What we wound up with is a beautiful Engineering Technology Center, a parking deck that really fits into our landscape, beautiful new residence halls, and the Architecture Design Studio. You asked, what did the architects do? Well, when we hired the architectural firms to design these buildings, our architects were part of the teams, and they worked with them. I’m not sure that the private architects found it so wonderful because they had other architects who were there arguing with them and making a million suggestions and so forth. So they either thought

it was the greatest thing ever or the worst thing ever, I don't know which. But actually I think they thought it was the greatest thing ever.

I was on a couple of these committees and had a chance to toss in a couple of ideas, some of which they even did, which is very cool. As a result, we wound up with buildings that have spectacular designs and have won national awards. The most attractive building on campus I think is this Design 2 studio building and it has won, I think, seven different national awards for its innovative use of bricks and all sorts of other things. It's just very, very cool. The net effect has been that step by step, working with our colleagues in the facilities area and the vice president for business and finance and the rest of the senior staff and the president, of course, we've been able to, step by step, upgrade the facilities on our campus, both with new buildings and rehabilitation of older ones. Of course, new facilities and beautiful new labs and so forth attract more students. As a result, we've had a consistent growth rate. That first year we had 11 percent and thereafter we've been pretty consist at 6 percent growth each year. It was kind of funny too because the faculty's reaction in the beginning was why can't we grow. When we had that 11 percent spike, they said, "Oh, my gosh, we're growing too fast.

TS: Too many students in the classroom.

ZS: "If we keep growing at 11 percent, we're all going to lose our hair." The 6 percent is basically the fastest we can grow and maintain quality. So we've stayed on a fairly constant 6 percent growth. We've been able to achieve it with strong recruitment and strong programs and new programs and adding quality faculty like yourself [Laura Beth]. I think the real moral of the story is we had a great strategic plan, we implemented it and had a little bit of luck and a lot of hard work, and that's how it all happened.

TS: You mentioned earlier some of the retention strategies you had like the grade forgiveness and so on. Would you talk a little bit about—because I know you're on the Operational Working Group too that has to do with retention, progression, and graduation—about Southern Poly's record there? It looked to me like in the last fact book that I saw on the website it was 33.7 percent [for the fall 2005 cohort of first-time, full-time freshmen who started at and graduated from SPSU by summer 2011].

ZS: We're at 38 now [38.03 percent for the fall 2007 cohort of first-time, full-time freshmen who started at and graduated from SPSU by summer 2013].

TS: So in the last couple of years you've made good strides.

ZS: When I got here it was 23 percent graduation rate. That sounds horrible, and it is horrible, but it's also deceptive in the sense that that refers to first-time, full-time freshmen able to graduate within six years.

TS: Transfer students don't fit in the figures.

ZS: They don't count, and if we had a student, for example, who came here and was majoring in, say, Engineering Technology and wanted to switch and go to Georgia Tech and major in Engineering, that student was counted as not graduated for us, even though they went

to Georgia Tech and they graduated. Students who transfer from here to somewhere else and are successful are counted as a loss. They made our numbers worse.

- TS: I know the system tracks the figures for those who transfer to somewhere else in the system and graduate. Do you know what yours is for those?
- ZS: The last time I saw it, which was several years ago, if you took our numbers, and you added in the ones that transferred to Georgia Tech, we were at the national average for graduation rates.
- TS: Sixty percent?
- ZS: No, science and engineering have lower ones, so it was in the high 40s somewhere [46 percent for SPSU freshman in the fall 2005 cohort who graduated from any University System of Georgia institution by summer 2011], and that's the national average. We want to do better than that, mind you, but you have to start somewhere. [The latest figure is 51.28 percent for first-time, full-time SPSU freshmen who started at SPSU in the fall 2007 cohort and had graduated from any USG institution by summer 2013].
- TS: So in 2005 you were at 23 percent [for the 1999 cohort].
- ZS: Yes, and now it's gone up to [38.03] percent, and this year, I think, when they calculate it [for the 2008 cohort], it will be 40 percent. We've been improving step by step very nicely.
- TS: That's been one of Dan Papp's big achievements at Kennesaw. It was 28 percent [for the fall 2000 cohort] when he came in as president in 2006, and the last figure was a 43.38 percent graduation rate for KSU's fall 2007 cohort of first-time, full-time students by summer 2013, and 53.40 percent for members of the 2007 cohort that graduated from any USG institution by summer 2013]
- ZS: So it's been growing proportionately [at KSU and SPSU]. [SPSU is] over 50 [51.28 percent] for those who stay in the system. The other problem we had, of course, was, given the narrowness of our curriculum, if somebody came here in Engineering Technology and ultimately decided that's not what they wanted, they'd have to leave. What else did we have to offer? So, broadening our curriculum also helps.
- TS: Actually the consolidation may help with that because they can switch to English or history or whatever if they want to.
- ZS: That's a possibility. Traditionally, we've had some number of students transferring to Kennesaw when they found out they didn't want engineering.
- TS: Right, so we won't lose them for the statistics.
- ZS: Right, so we'll see. Then we did a couple of other things. The president and I, for example, wanted to work with the technical college system. This was something that was actually recommended to us by the chancellor before I got here. I think our faculty actually rejected the idea at the time, which seems like a bad idea, but that's apparently what happened.

- TS: Oh really? They thought it was beneath them to cooperate with Chattahoochee Tech?
- ZS: I think that may have been a part of it. When I got here I was saying, “Well, no, if we’re the lead technological university in the state, then the technical colleges ought to be our feeders. We got together with the presidents of the technical colleges, and we talked to them about aligning our curricula so that a lot of the funkier things that used to happen didn’t have to any more. It used to be, they would take a bunch of courses at the technical college, and if they took these four courses and took this course over here, then they would get a third of the credits or something. That wasn’t good for anybody. We needed to have them align their curriculum with ours, so that all of the credits would transfer over, and the students wouldn’t have to start over again. We did a system-wide articulation with the technical colleges, and they adjusted some of their curriculum, we adjusted ours a little bit, and we developed a number of degree programs that could be done this way and also offered at a distance. So if somebody was at Altamaha Technical College, they wouldn’t have to come to Marietta to do it. They could do it online or in low residency.
- LD: Now, is that unique? I feel like that partnership is a pretty unique one. I know there are articulation agreements between the two-year colleges and four-year, but that’s a USG decision.
- ZS: I’ve never heard of another one, and, right, there are articulations between individual technical colleges and individual USG colleges. Albany Tech, for example, has got an articulation with Albany State, obviously. But we’re talking about, here, an across-the-system articulation and having specially designed degrees to work in it. We developed three Bachelor of Applied Science degrees to work with this because the Bachelor of Applied Science has got a nice aspect to it which you can bring over a technical block of courses as part of it. That’s very attractive for having some of the highly specialized classes that they teach at the technical schools.
- TS: I see, so they get a two-year degree at the technical school and...
- ZS: Bring it here for the four. That’s been very popular and well received, and so that’s another thing that’s brought more students in.
- TS: Do you have any idea about how many students are doing this?
- ZS: We’ve got a couple hundred. Another initiative that we took was having partnerships with various international schools that have the same kind of educational ethos that we do. The largest number come from China, that’s not unusual, but right now we’ve got a lot of students from Brazil who are coming here through the scientific mobility program.
- TS: Laura Beth was mentioning that before we came over.
- ZS: Right. Also from Germany and also from Cameroon in Africa, so we’ve got various partnerships with other technologically focused universities.
- TS: I think I saw over 300 Chinese students on campus here?

- ZS: Yes. So we've got good numbers from them, and they are excellent students. Obviously, the English is a challenge in the beginning and a bit of cultural assimilation, but I know that you [Laura Beth] are aware that the students are very shy in the very beginning, but they bloom.
- LD: They adjust very well.
- ZS: Usually in the third week you begin to see, oh my goodness, they are going to be able to make it.
- LD: Right.
- ZS: There were some growing pains. There were some faculty that were saying, "Why are we doing this? These students don't speak good enough English. Are they going to be able to succeed? But they graduate at phenomenally high rates, in the 90 percent range. I wish every student did as well.
- TS: We had some who were phenomenal in their math classes where language wasn't an obstacle, but they might struggle in a history class.
- ZS: That's how we started. While they're doing the more intensive language courses, and our ETCMA [English, Technical Communications and Media Arts] department offers some of these, we put them in more heavily mathematical courses in the beginning and more linguistically focused courses as their English improves.
- TS: That makes good sense. I saw something I didn't quite understand about a partnership with Georgia Military College.
- ZS: Right, we're always looking for places that are good partners for us. Sometimes they happen through planning, and sometimes they happen through happenstance. It so happens that we hired a new CIO, Chief Information Officer, our Vice President [for Information Technology] Sam Conn, and Sam came from Georgia Military. That was his previous place. We were kind of aware of it. This was one of the places we had thought about as being a pseudo technical college. What I mean by pseudo is that it had a program that was structured in a similar way. It was a two-year institution, but one that was more like us than your standard two-year liberal arts groups. We thought at some point that we might approach them. Sam was here, and he suggested that they were very interested, and so we went down, and we talked to them. Students who are coming to a military institution often want to do engineering and often want to do the sciences. [Georgia Military College has] campuses across the state. They wanted to deliver instruction using distance technologically, and we were scaling up in that area. It was a very natural fit. We got our respective folks together, and they were very interested, and we were moving forward when this consolidation hit. Again, we'll see what happens as a result. Hopefully it will continue.
- TS: What are you doing with the High Museum?
- ZS: That's another interesting one. It's always hard to remember how these things start. I think somebody approached President Rossbacher, somebody from the High Museum,

about our possibly affiliating with them. They were basically approaching every university in the state. If I'm remembering this right, President Rossbacher forwarded the stuff to me, and we had a conversation, "What do you think?" I kind of liked the idea. What I especially liked about the idea was that we were the last place in the University System of Georgia that anybody would think of that would have linkage with the High Museum. To me it was a man bites dog story, and I like that because one of my attitudes about a polytechnic is that every time two people bump into each other, something unexpected should happen and something interesting. I thought that this High Museum might fall into this category. We started to talk, and they were hosting an exhibit by a Dutch artist who was using robots to assemble rococo style decorative end tables. I said, "You know, our students could work with these robots"—our Mechatronics Engineering students. I remember we were walking around campus and had a bunch of people from English and our few art folks on campus and various others—architecture folks—and we were just throwing around ideas about how we might interact with an art museum. We decided to do it. I had some money in my budget at the time. "We'll affiliate." The first affiliation was those robots. As it also turns out, again, it was a funny coincidence. We were hosting the polytechnic summit on our campus that year and thought that the High Museum might be a wonderful venue to have the gala dinner. Also by a funny coincidence, we were gearing up in the area of sustainable architecture and construction, and at exactly the same time in a building across the street which is the LEED [Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design] Platinum certified building, they wanted to do an exhibit showcasing that.

TS: Platinum is the highest category?

ZS: It's the highest possible category for construction professionals and academics. All of those three things meshed. We had the polytechnic summit event at the High Museum. We had right across from it the construction thing. And at nine o'clock they swapped places, so they each could benefit from both. It turned out to be the greatest night ever. It was just a wonderful thing. But, anyway, long story short, we've had ongoing projects with the High Museum and the English, Technical Communications and Media Arts Department has been one of the leaders in this. They did a project called, "High without Walls" where they created a virtual High Museum. They did another one where they were in effect mapping the High Museum and getting input from people about what they liked best and so forth, again, using technology to create the museum of the future. One of our faculty members in our Architecture program, whose name is Pegah Zamani, saw that they were doing an exhibit on the life of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, two major Mexican artists. Their home was a strange place. It was two cubes connected by a skyway. One of them lived in one and one lived in the other, and if they wanted to see each other, they'd have to go out a window, climb up stairs that were up the side of the building, go across a skyway, and in through the skylight.

TS: They had to really want to go over.

ZS: Yes, so that was a little bit odd, but they called it a machine for living. Professor Zamani got five undergraduate architecture students to do five design studies on their house, exemplifying different periods in the lives of these artists, and they called that "A Living Machine." They exhibited this down at the High Museum who liked it so much that they

had it on exhibit alongside the art exhibit that they had for a time. How cool is that? Our undergraduate students had their own architectural designs created and then displayed in a major American art museum. To me, that's the kind of thing that I was hoping for, that we would get these interesting combinational ideas, interdisciplinary things, going on that take advantage of the technical nature of this university and recognizing that it's all about the fusion of the liberal arts and the technologies. It's not about one. It's not about the other. It's about the fusion between them, which is something that we very much believe in here.

TS: Speaking of partnerships, Southern Poly has a long history of partnership with industry. Could you talk a little bit about how that's grown in the last nine years?

ZS: Sure. Again, I can't take credit for very much of this because most of this pre-existed me. But almost every academic department at SPSU has got an industrial advisory board, and these industrial advisory boards are really important when you've got a technological curriculum because our major mission is to create the highly skilled, innovative, values-added work force that the state needs. Our folks tend to go directly into industry. Some go to graduate school, and that's a great thing, but most go directly into industry. So you need to make sure that your programs are contemporary because it does no good to have a technological program delivering yesterday's technology. No one wants that. That's why we have this idea of the fusion of the liberal arts with the technology because people need to be able to change with changing times. The liberal arts end of it helps with that end, but the technological end needs to be kept up to date and fresh, and the industrial advisory boards help with that. They tell us, "Here are the new trends in our industries; here's what we need; here's something that we see coming. Can you create something in your curriculum to make that happen?" That's how we do it. We also, of course, asked them to help support our programs.

TS: I was going to say our advisory boards are in large part to try to get people to give money to us.

ZS: Yes, so we try to do that, but it's for both reasons. Most of our programs have got an industrial advisory board for that reason. Of course, I support these things. I've spoken at a number of them. I've attended many meetings of these things. But most of these advisory boards predated me being here so I've had the pleasure of supporting them.

TS: Sure. Great. Diversity was another thing on your list, and I know Southern Poly has been proud for a long time of its record in the number of black students and such as that. You've been really tops in the country in some of those categories. So I wonder if you would talk about that and what you've done to make it that way. In fact, I was even looking at your retention rates and graduation rates for black students, and they were a few percentage points above what they were for white students.

ZS: Yes, and that has been the case in the past when I have looked at the numbers. SPSU has a good history here. We've had a number of support programs for African American students historically, and we've been a very welcoming campus. The word has gotten out that this is a place where African American students can very much succeed and will be welcomed as they do so. To me, that's really the critical factor in that there are a lot of

places that say “we’re tolerant.” Where I sit, I guess, toleration is a real minimal standard. You’ve got to start somewhere, but if I went to a restaurant or something, and they said, “We’ll tolerate your being here”—is that any restaurant that I want to go to? No. I want the place where people are actively welcomed and appreciated for the variety of viewpoints and cultures and interests and backgrounds and so forth that they bring to the table. That’s what it’s supposed to be about.

TS: Do you have somebody who is actually on the payroll to recruit minority students?

ZS: We do. We’ve got, for example, somebody who recruits Hispanic students in a position that is funded by the Goizueta Foundation, and we’ve been members of the African-American Male Initiative. In various years we’re either first or second in size in the University System of Georgia in PLSAMP which is the Peach State Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation—pretty good, huh?

LD: Wow, that’s a mouthful!

ZS: These are all ways of either recruiting or supporting minority students and encouraging them to complete their degrees and to go on and even get advanced degrees. We’ve done a number of things of that nature and been involved in a number of these initiatives. At the same time, we want to have a culture on our campus that’s inclusive. Something that I initiated was this Cross-Cultural Communications series. We’ve got a committee that suggests events, and then we built those events. We’ve done all kinds of interesting things. We’ve had great authors here. We had Isabel Wilkerson, for example, the author of *The Warmth of Other Suns: [The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration]* (Random House, 2010), a Pulitzer Prize winner. We had a big turnout for that.

LD: She was wonderful.

ZS: This year we had the author of the book, *Soul Food: The Surprising Story of an American Cuisine, One Plate at a Time*, the history of soul food [by Adrian Miller (University of North Carolina Press, 2013)]. We had Cynthia Cooper who was the lead auditor at WorldCom who discovered the fraud that was going on there, the biggest fraud ever in America to that point, several billion dollars. We got to talk about the business culture. We’ve had the head of the Center for Maghrib Studies in Tunisia [Dr. Laurence Michalak] here talking just after the Arab Spring began in Tunisia. We’ve had a journalist who reports online about Iran and trying to get open and true information about that country. We’ve had the lead people from the United Nations on our campus. We’ve had Muhammad Yunus who is the Nobel Prize winner in economics on micro credit that he introduced in Bangladesh. Again, we’ve tried to have a program that’s wide. Twice a semester we have mini-conferences on our campus on bringing global issues into the classroom. We invite thirteen other universities in the University System in a consortium. We’re in fact going to have one next week. We regularly bring in consul generals from Atlanta to talk about issues relevant to their countries. We select countries that are of technological importance to keep with our mission. These are just some of the examples. We do lots of things to broaden the experience of our students, and we’ve done some things that are just straight cultural. We had a particular woman [Ms. Sasikala

Penumarthi] who was an exemplar of a style of dance from India. This year we had a group called Step Afrika! on our campus, which was very cool.

LD: I do enjoy the diversity among our student population. One aspect that I've always been interested in, as you probably know, is the lack of women on campus. I know that's something that you've worked very hard to improve, the percentage of women on campus. Do you want to talk a little bit about that? Have you seen that change over the past few years you've been here?

ZS: Yes, and that's a slower change and part of the reason that our percentage of female students on campus is low is because of the mix of degree programs that we offer. We did not want to go the route of having programs that didn't fit with our mission that we would put in just to attract women because then those programs would definitely be outliers and you'd end up with a bunch of alienated students and faculty because they just would have nothing to do with the mission of the university. That's not a good idea. What we tried to do was to grow this with our mission and so by adding programs like New Media Arts and the industrial psychology and so forth, those are areas that have got higher fractions of women in them, environmental science or biology, stuff like that though we've also added the engineering which basically has kept us very heavily male. But we're trying to attract through outreach more women to go into engineering and engineering technology. That's been one thing. Another thing is we've tried to increase the number of female faculty.

TS: Right, I noticed that it's 31 percent.

ZS: Yes, we've gone from twenty-something percent to 31 percent. It's hard to get higher than that because there have been hiring freezes because of the economy. We've always added faculty, but even if we were to add, and if half the faculty we added were women, our percentage would only go up very, very slowly because of the large numbers of Engineering and Engineering Technology faculty already here. But it has been improving.

TS: Has it helped to have a woman president?

ZS: It absolutely has helped, and the idea is the pipeline is very long. A lot of people think you can change things by going out and trying to recruit high school students, but you can't. It's far too late. Students are making decisions about what they are going to do, or, more importantly, what they are not going to do, as early as the age of ten or eleven, so you have to reach them then. We've done a number of things on our campus to try to reach out to middle school students and even younger. For example, we're the state home for Future Cities, which is an engineering and architecture competition that starts in the fifth and sixth grade. We want these young ladies—and the teams are more than half female—to encounter these fields and to be welcomed and to see what the possibilities are and to come onto a campus such as our own. We think this will pay dividends well down the road, but it will pay dividends. It's like the parable of the fig tree. It takes a long time to bloom, so that means you better plant it this morning.

TS: I guess males outnumber females about four to one in the student body. If my math is correct, about 25 percent of the student body is African American, which is remarkable.

ZS: Yes. Well, a couple of years ago we passed a triple milestone, actually a quadruple one. It was the sixtieth anniversary of the university, which was also Dr. Rossbacher's twelfth or thirteenth year here, whatever anniversary it was.

TS: It would have been her tenth year [2008].

ZS: Maybe it was. It was the sixtieth anniversary of the university, and that was the first time we had 1,000 African-American students, 1,000 female students, and 500 Asian students. All hit at the same time.

LD: Wow, that's wonderful.

TS: That's remarkable. I didn't see in the Fact Book any figures for Hispanic students. Do you know what the percentage is?

ZS: I don't, but it's relatively low. Part of the issue in Georgia, of course, is the issue of undocumented students and the USG's rules.

TS: They would have to pay out of state tuition.

ZS: Exactly, and that obviously cuts down, but we're working hard to recruit additional legal status Hispanic students through the Goizueta Foundation.

TS: Right. International students, you've talked about that number of students from Brazil and so, on but is there a major focus to try to bring in more international students? I think you said about eighty different countries are represented.

ZS: Yes. China has the highest number the last time I looked at the list, and the smallest number came from the island nation of Naru, which had one student here. That's not bad because all of Naru has 1,700 people.

TS: I don't believe I've heard of that nation before.

ZS: It used to be a dependency of New Zealand; it's independent now. Their big deal is they mine phosphate there. We tend to notice these things.

LD: You would, absolutely.

TS: In terms of achievements, I found a speech that Dr. Rossbacher made to the Board of Regents when they met on the campus here back in 2005, right about the time you would have been coming in, where she was talking about a master's program that was the first fully online course in the University System.

ZS: That's right.

TS: Quality Assurance or something.

- ZS: Our online master's degree in Quality Assurance was the first fully online degree in the USG. Following up on that, we've added other courses online and then certificates and degree programs, so we've got a very strong set of programs online. Last time I saw, twenty-something percent of our courses are offered online, and lots of students avail themselves of that, some in hybrid format, some in fully online, some in low res. You can take quite a number of degrees here that way. We've been very innovative in the way we've grown these programs. We've got a Teaching Academy for Distance Learning on our campus. This isn't something you do in an afternoon.
- TS: To prepare people to teach online courses?
- ZS: Right. This goes on all year long.
- LD: I've been through that, and I can speak to its effectiveness.
- ZS: It's a one-year commitment, isn't it?
- LD: Yes, and it takes a lot of time outside of the requirements to meet face to face too.
- ZS: Right. They create a course, and then that course has to pass muster with outside evaluators. So you don't just have to satisfy your friends. You have to satisfy people who have never met you, who judge whether your course is worthy, and then only then does it pass this course. What we've wound up with is some very high quality online courses and programs, some of which, like our Master of Science in Information Technology, if I recall correctly, is viewed as one of the top programs in the country.
- TS: Wow. I understand that you are very much interested in co-curricular programs on campus and their expansion. Can you say something about that?
- ZS: Well, it's not all about the classroom. Students do a lot of learning outside the classroom, plus you want to build an engaged culture on campus. Having more co-curricular programs is critically important. Most of this happens through, of course, our Student Life area, but our Academic Affairs area has also been heavily involved in trying to add an intellectual and critical analysis aspect to the co-curriculum. Something that I've always tried to push and, in fact, was starting to implement was a co-curricular transcript, which would capture these events so that students could showcase it: "Here's what I've done outside." That includes things like internships and service learning and various kinds of events on campus that prospective employers would be presumably very interested in.
- TS: Absolutely. I was glad to see in the newspaper that you're starting a sports hall of fame.
- ZS: Right. I have nothing whatsoever to do that. I just watch the sports.
- TS: Just reading your *Weekly Blab* about all the programs that have their special accreditation in whatever discipline it's in . . .
- ZS: Yes, we're very serious about accreditation here. We have a campus policy, which we've implemented. We've almost always kind of had it, but we formalized it while I was here. Any program that is capable of being accredited will be accredited on our campus. Our

goal is to make that happen for every one of them, so all of our programs are accredited by ABET [Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology] or ACCE [American Council for Construction Education], which is for Construction, or NAAB [National Architectural Accrediting Board], which is Architecture and other appropriate bodies. We recently had ABET on campus to accredit five new Engineering programs. The official word won't come until this summer, but what they do when they give their exit report is they tell if there were any deficiencies, any concerns, any warnings, and they had none on any of them. So far as I know, that's never happened before, ever, not just in our history, in anybody's history. A clean sweep for five programs?! We don't know what the final outcome is, but we kind of think we might be able to guess.

TS: Probably so. Well, the last thing on your list of things you are proud of is support for faculty growth and development. Does that mean to try to encourage more research—support for research, sabbaticals, what all is involved?

ZS: Well, of course, sabbatical is not a word we can say in the University System of Georgia, but we've tried to support faculty growth and development in lots of different ways, and so this Teaching Academy for Distance Learning is a good example. Our office of Faculty Growth and Development is a wonderful group of folks who work very hard. Some of them are professional staff, some of them are faculty who work with them, and they have in any given year more than 200 different activities to help people to improve their teaching, to form research discussion groups, better use of technology in the classroom, lots and lots of different things, better advising, how to avoid violence in the classroom.

LD: Really practical steps and workshops.

ZS: Right—across the board, just things that are very practical for faculty. That's one set of aspects. In order to encourage faculty research I've taken money from my budget, and the deans and I sponsor a set of mini grants that are offered each year that are focused. Some of the mini grants are for the purpose of improving success rates in bottleneck courses, courses that have lower success rates; some are to promote student research; some are to promote faculty research; and some are to promote both. We offer these every year, and we put anywhere from \$75,000 to \$100,000 for that purpose each year and make that available to our faculty. We put lots and lots of money toward supporting faculty to go to conferences and to attend workshops and to present papers. We've started an applied research center on the campus and we've got a number of research centers underneath it again to promote research. We started a grants center on our campus with some professionals to help faculty write grants and to get outside funding. Those are just some of the new things that we've done while I was here in terms of supporting faculty in their growth and development. There are others, but those are the main ones.

TS: What do you think the ranking order is in tenure and promotion decisions of teaching as opposed to service as opposed to scholarship, and how do you think Southern Poly compares to Kennesaw with regard to what really counts for promotion and tenure?

- ZS: Our systems are a little bit different. We evaluate them in four areas, teaching, scholarship work, professional growth and development, and service. At Kennesaw they don't have the professional growth and development, but they do have basically administrative leadership or something like that, so our systems are slightly different in that regard. Both the focus is most heavily on teaching, but the other areas are important as well. We require noteworthy achievement in three out of the four areas and satisfactory achievement in the fourth one. You can't give any area a pass. I'm not sure how this works at Kennesaw. In terms of the teaching, of course, I believe that all SPSU faculty are far better, but of course I don't know that, so I really have no idea comparatively how are faculty are in teaching. I know our faculty are wonderful teachers, and their teaching evaluations show it, and their concern for their students shows it, and I presume the same is true at Kennesaw.
- TS: I think we've evolved throughout our history. At one time teaching was everything, and service was the next area, and if you did scholarship, they'd pat you on the head.
- ZS: Right. We've had the same trajectory as you have, and so I think we're actually pretty similar that way. If I were to guess, I would say probably a somewhat higher fraction of our faculty are involved in publishing and other scholarship work than at Kennesaw, but that may not be true.
- TS: Well, I don't think it is.
- ZS: Maybe it's about the same.
- TS: Probably about the same because nobody gets promoted if they don't have some publications.
- ZS: Right now, I think we're pretty much in the same place. Again, are grants required, no, are they encouraged strongly, yes. Same thing is true at Kennesaw, so I think we are fairly similar in that regard though of course we focus on very different areas.
- TS: The consolidation won't make that a major problem?
- ZS: Well, who knows? I'm on the OWG that's dealing with promotion and tenure and...
- TS: Yes, that's been controversial.
- ZS: Yes, that's become a little controversial with the outside letters thing, and no doubt a couple of other things will pop up when we're done.
- TS: I noticed that you said that you didn't really believe in five letters for full professor.
- ZS: I argued that five was maybe a little excessive, but the committee went with five, and I think reality lies in-between. I think ultimately they'll probably choose something that's more than none and less than five. Both senates have endorsed two and I could live with two and I could live with three and I could live with four.
- TS: What do you have right now?

ZS: Two.

TS: I think that's why Kennesaw decided two.

ZS: Exactly.

TS: That sounds like enough to me.

ZS: Yes, and again some of us argued that, and others argued for more, and the consensus of the committee was a bit more.

TS: I guess you're going home in a sense to be president of the State University of New York at Canton, which isn't too far from Syracuse I gather.

ZS: No, two hours.

TS: It sounds like if you didn't know anything about all of this until late October, early November, I guess everybody had to start looking for work elsewhere just in case.

ZS: Yes, I think a lot of people wanted a back up plan.

TS: Maybe I should ask whether you were already looking around?

ZS: No, it happened pretty simultaneously. I was thinking about it to be honest, but when the announcement came it kind of sharpened the thinking about it.

TS: I was thinking, I guess it depends on when a president retires from some place, but a lot of searches were already underway by the time that the announcement of the consolidation came about.

ZS: This particular search feels almost providential. It opened just before, and they wanted to go on a fast track. It's a college much as SPSU was when I got here. It's got the same mission and wants to go in the same direction as we've gone, and the university system wants it to go in those directions, so it's really a wonderful fit.

TS: You sound like a perfect fit for them.

ZS: It's a wonderful fit for me. The huge bonus is that it's near my hometown, and my parents are there half the year, so it'll be wonderful to be with them.

TS: They're smart enough not to be there in the wintertime!

ZS: Exactly. Canton has less snow than Syracuse. It doesn't get the lake effect.

TS: My wife was born in Buffalo.

ZS: Buffalo and Syracuse get the lake effect, but Canton is too far north for that. The lake effect goes south of it, and it basically stops at Parish and North Adams and Watertown. Canton's is another forty miles up the road. It's just as cold but half the snow.

TS: From Canton, Georgia to Canton, New York.

- ZS: Yes, that's kind of ironic. The nearest city to Canton is actually Ottawa, the capital of Canada which is ninety minutes away, so it's closer than Syracuse!
- TS: Well, congratulations to you on that.
- ZS: Yes, they voted officially yesterday, so it's confirmed.
- TS: I really appreciate your time this afternoon.
- ZS: If I can make one closing comment: I'm very proud of the accomplishments we've had at SPSU, and I'm emphasizing the word "we" because every one of these things required lots of people working together on them, so it's not the results of any one individual, but lots of folks with good ideas coming together and honing those ideas and moving in a common direction in order to accomplish something wonderful for our students. That's what it's been all about. I couldn't have asked for nicer colleagues and people who had amazing skills, and we were able to work together to accomplish great things.
- TS: Mark Stevens has been singing your praises, and I guess I've been finding out recently that Mark's a pretty important person on this campus.
- ZS: Yes, Mark's a wonderful guy, and he was in fact moderator of the faculty senate either the year I got here or the year after that
- TS: He was because in 2005 when the Board of Regents met on campus he was asked to say a word to the Board as the moderator of the senate.
- ZS: It must have been the first year I got here. Mark was a pleasure to work with then, and he's remained a pleasure throughout.
- TS: Now that I'm getting to know him I'm sorry he's going to head to Miami.
- ZS: He's going to Florida, yes.
- TS: At any rate, I really appreciate your taking the time to talk to us.
- LD: Thank you so much.

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
Southern Polytechnic State University Series, No. 2
Interview with Zvi Szafran
Conducted by Thomas A. Scott and Mark Stevens
Edited and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
Part II, Thursday, May 1, 2014
Location: Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, SPSU

Dr. Szafran requested a second interview to talk about his research on diversity at SPSU in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the integration of the University System of Georgia.

TS: You told me you had done research on the integration of what was Southern Technical Institute in the 1960s. Why don't you start by telling what you found out about the integration of this institution?

ZS: The context of this was that the Board of Regents wanted each university to present something on the subject of diversity on their campus. Ultimately, it didn't come off because most campuses didn't actually submit anything. Anyway, when this thing came up, and we were trying to talk about what we might do at SPSU to address this, we did the obvious things, talking about what percentage of our students are now African American and women and so on and greater diversity of our faculty and so on. But then we started to get curious as to when this actually happened because this was also near the time when the University of Georgia was celebrating the 50th anniversary of its integration.

TS: So that would have been 2011.

ZS: Right, [and the years leading up to the 50th anniversary], which is probably what prompted the Board of Regents to want all the campuses to address this—a historic event, right? At that point, of course, we were part of Georgia Tech in the early 1960s when this occurred. So I said, “Okay, this is worth including.” So I went to a couple of places where I thought they may know the answer to when we had integrated. And nobody knew. So I said, “Okay, let's see if we can figure this out.” The first thought was we have yearbooks going back, and bear in mind, in those days the yearbook was not just of everybody graduating. It had pictures of everybody who was here. I don't know if that's a Southern thing or that was just a two-year college thing or whatever.

TS: We did that at Kennesaw also.

ZS: Right, so the first thought was when was the first time we could spot somebody African American in there, although that's not always that obvious. We also wanted to look at our paper records, but interestingly—from a historical point of view—I would have thought that [the records] would have indicated race, but they didn't in those days. Maybe it was just because it was understood that everybody was going to be white, but it didn't say. The first year that we could identify somebody that we thought was African American was 1966. We picked the four names that we saw. I checked, and it turned out that one of the four graduated and the other three didn't. So we thought, “Okay, let's make the story about the one who did.” I was prepared to start getting some information

on that particular individual when our registrar said, “Zvi, why don’t we just check the student Banner database?” I said, “Well, that’s not going to help. The student Banner database doesn’t go back that far.” We didn’t go onto electronic records until well after. He said, “Well, let’s do it anyway.” I said, “Well, sure,” because later on we did identify people by their ethnic background, as we do today. So we did a search and turned up a name from 1964 who had come back like a decade later in order to take [an estimating course and some continuing education classes to keep his contractor license current].

TS: And that’s how he got into the database?

ZS: That’s how he got into the database because otherwise he wouldn’t have been in there. This then told us that, no, there were earlier African American students [prior to 1966]. So 1964 seemed like it was the right answer because 1963 was when Georgia Tech integrated. I was pretty sure that we hadn’t gone first. So that seemed right. I ultimately found documents in the Georgia Tech archives [particularly a letter from Southern Tech director Hoyt McClure to L.V. Johnson, who exercised oversight over the Marietta institution in his capacity as director of Georgia Tech’s engineering extension division] of the conversations that were held about integrating SPSU. Those documents included the names of four potential students of which the one that we found from 1964 was one. As it turned out, the other three that were recognized as potential admits, they weren’t sure that one of them was an African American. There was a little penciled in notation, “Is this person black?” The [first] name looked like an Arabic name [Ahmed]. Anyway, long story short, of the four names considered, one maybe wasn’t even African American, two didn’t come, and the one we knew about was the fourth one. So we went with him as our first African American student, and when we talked to him, he, in fact, said that he was the first, and there were no others. [Please see Dr. Szafran’s *Weekly Blab*, Vol. 5, Issue 20, January 26, 2011, for an account of his visit to the Georgia Tech archives the previous week.]

MS: How did you find him?

ZS: He still lives in Atlanta, and he was on our Alumni roster. He had attended some Alumni events. Interestingly enough, this gentleman had been attending Tuskegee and had read that Southern Tech—in those days—had just acquired this massive [IBM mainframe] computer. This was a computer that like filled a room and was a very advanced computer for the time. It got some press, and he saw this, and he was very interested in the electrical engineering aspects of computing and wanted to be associated with that. Hence, he applies to SPSU or to Southern Tech as it was then—and thus prompted the consideration of whether we would accept him. His name was Willie [James] Hope. What better possible name could you have for your first African American student than someone whose last name was Hope? We interviewed him, and we’ve got a tape of the interview. The person who actually did the interview was Jeff Orr, and he’s the director of out ATTIC (Advising, Testing, Tutoring, and International Center).

TS: I googled Willie Hope’s name after you told me the story the other day and found the article about him in one of the Southern Polytechnic publications.

ZS: Righty, in the Alumni magazine we did a story on him [“Four Decades of Success Thanks to an SPSU Education,” *SPSU: The Magazine*, Spring 2010]. The previous year was a story about our first female student, Barbara Hudson Purdy [“Reflections on the Past,” *SPSU: The Magazine*, Fall 2009]. She was in our very first class [1948]. The first class had 115 male students and one female, and that was she. There wasn’t much question, was there anyone earlier, since she was in the first class. She graduated [in 1950], so there you go; there’s the story. The story about her was part of what prompted me to want to identify who was our first African American student. Mr. Hope is a delightful individual.... He graduated [in 1967] and he has since gone on to having an electrical engineering business [Hope Electric Enterprises, Inc.] in Atlanta, which at the time we interviewed him was still in operation. He has been to various Alumni events ever since. So he was our first African American student, and that’s the rough outline of his story.

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