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2010

Deon Hornsby

Deon Hornsby '97
Illinois Wesleyan University

Rae Rein 2011
Illinois Wesleyan University

Recommended Citation
Hornsby '97, Deon and Rein 2011, Rae, "Deon Hornsby" (2010). *All oral histories.* Paper 16.
http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/oral_hist/16

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Homecoming 2010, The Ames Library

Rae Rein: If you can say your name and your year of graduation and your major.

Deon Hornsby: I'm Hornsby, Class of 1997, and I'm a—was a Business Administration major.

Rein: Okay, and I'm Rein, Class of 2011, Political Science major. So…is there a favorite story or memory that you have about any aspect of life here at Illinois Wesleyan?

Hornsby: I don't know if I have a favorite story, I mean, there are so many different aspects of campus life that I had when I was here just being, you know, just being—the time I was here it was a smaller minority community, so just being intertwined with them and having fun with them and I was in a fraternity on campus and, you know, my fraternity life—

Rein: Which fraternity?

Hornsby: Tau Kappa Epsilon—and just the adventures that go on there…[laughs]…They'll remain nameless to protect the guilty. And I was a football player, so it's like a lot of—it depends on which aspect you want to go. A lot of them, obviously, are football-related. That's where you get the biggest adrenaline rush but a lot of the good times were had just away from classes, just getting to know people and spending time with people and hanging out and just meeting so many different people.

Rein: You said you were part of the—like a minority group—

Hornsby: Right.

Rein: What was—

Hornsby: Black Student Union.

Rein: Okay.

Hornsby: You know, I was a member of that. I tried to be as active as possible but it was just—it was far fewer minority students on campus then than there are now. I think the number of ALANA students that's in this freshman class was 93 if I'm not mistaken and there weren't that many total by the time I graduated, so my class had eight and we graduated five, so it's a—you know, it was more of a tightly-knit community for the most part.

Rein: How was that experience—being so few people?

Hornsby: It was definitely noticeable. It didn't phase me that much, you know, you would think about it but it wasn't that major of an aspect on a day to day but it was definitely something we noticed and we knew it just didn't seem right, I mean, if you could get the few of us, you know, if the campus—if the university could get a few of us to get to campus, why wasn't that a bigger emphasis and why couldn't we have more—

Rein: Mhmm.

Hornsby: Students on campus?

Rein: So—

Hornsby: But it's one of those things that, you know, in a way you kinda knew it coming in but you don't really understand, you know, how serious it is until you get on campus and you're here and, you know, you're living day to day.

Rein: What did the Black Student Union—like, what kind of programs did—

Hornsby: A lot of the programming that you may see now that's from the Office of Multicultural Affairs or Multicultural Student Affairs is derivative of what we did back with the—with the BSU in early days. We did—had the Soul Food Dinner, the African Culture Fest, we did—we tried to bring speakers down on campus to bring different perspectives, just things like that especially in the, you know, in the years that I was there, you know, there wasn't that big of a push, a university push, not as big as it is now and it's, you know, it was definitely not a point of emphasis on the admissions side until, you know, we had one year where students got involved and really pushed it and we got the class of 2000, which is the largest class that we had on campus in many, many years, so…

Rein: So you mentioned how big of a difference there is in terms of students, how else do you think IWU's diversity has changed since you attended?

Hornsby: Um.

Rein: Or has it?

Hornsby: I think it—just the numbers have changed, you know, just the fact that, you know, it's not, you know, for me, if you're walking across the quad, it was a rarity to see an African American student across the quad. I talk to kids now with a lot of work I do with the Minority Alumni Network and, you know, there are packs of people walking by and, you know, there are chances where people don't even speak to each other, so it's a good thing that we have the numbers but it also—it's also a bad thing because apparently the community is kind of splintered right now, you know, there's not really that same cohesion that we had when I was on campus and that's something—I don't know if that's right or wrong or how we can get it back or if it's something that it really should be worried about because the numbers are, you know, larger than what they were, you know, in comparison to ours.

Rein: What work do you do with the Minority Alumni Office [meaning, the Alumni Relations Office]?

Hornsby: I was—I've been a part of the executive board since 1999 and I was the chair of the Minority Alumni Network for the past seven years. This past summer is when I passed the torch…

[Both laugh]

Hornsby: To Tony Gray, so been pretty active, you know, through, you know, since I graduated.

Rein: Do you just keep in contact with people like—

Hornsby: Just people within the Network? Oh, no, no, not—I talk to—try to talk to as many people as possible. I'm still really close with one of my—well, a bunch of my fraternity brothers, you know, one's in Chicago, one's in Heyworth. I just try to be, if anything I try to be a resource

because I think I know a bunch of different people from a bunch of different backgrounds and, you know, I can kinda be, you know, I can kinda be the gatekeeper as far as, you know, getting information out and getting—connecting people to people.

[Interviewer leaves, pause for about 15 seconds before speaker starts, reading from list of potential questions.]

Hornsby: Class selection process—that was pretty—it was—for me, it was pretty much based on major and interest. You know, of course you're gunna take the classes that you need to satisfy your major requirements and, you know, do what you can to get out as soon as you can, that's gunna be most helpful for the career path that you wanna take. Outside of my major it was more just—it was more, you know, things you're interested in.

I know I remember my freshman year for January Term I took illustration, didn't realize that it was—you know, I was going to be graded like I was, you know, an art student but it was something that I always, you know, loved to dabble in and play around with, so I thought it would be a good idea to take and some of the classes that you would take, you know, that people wanted to take, you know, Human Sexuality, Acting for Non-majors, they saw those as kind of easy grades to fill out their and—fill out their requirements and bump up their G.P.A.s.

What traditions have changed? I'm not sure if a lot of—the biggest tradition to me that changed is the, you know, just the—from what I'm hearing from current students—the lack of attendance at Black Student Union meetings, I mean, it's an organization that's been on campus upwards of forty-five years and it's a little bit discouraging to see that, you know, that the students today don't see it as being a vital part of the campus community. I'm not sure if they feel that they're getting all of the feel or all of that information or the same type of programming from the university and the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs that they don't need the Black Student Union, but I think that it's still just a part, just the fact that it's a—you know, it's been on campus for so long and, you know, basically was the key outlet for students of color, I think it's something that should be—try to be preserved and maintained.

Did I experience culture shock? Of course. I grew up from—in Joliet, Illinois. I went to a high school that was about 2500 students and, you know, I'd say it was, you know, maybe 35-40% African American and to come to a campus where there are 30-40 total students of color on campus was definitely a culture shock but the fact that those 30-40 students were so—you know, they would do their best to look out for everybody else. No one wanted to be excluded. You were only excluded if you wanted to be excluded and didn't participate in programming or participate in just, you know, just different activities and hanging out with just—with other students of color, so it was just a matter of just, you know, just adjusting to living on a campus to where there weren't as many, you know, African American students.

For me it really wasn't as big a deal, I mean like I said earlier, I was in a fraternity, Tau Kappa Epsilon, and, you know, there I was one of three African Americans in the house of, you know, fifty to sixty people and, you know, there of course, with any situation, you're gunna have some incidents bubble up but they were handled, you know, we talked about it, we discussed it, we may not have changed minds or opinions but our thoughts and, you know, and us as people were respected, so it wasn't uncomfortable living there. I mean, if there were people you didn't want to deal with, you didn't want to deal with them. That's pretty much how it is all through campus.

Favorite memory from IWU involved interacting with people who were different—pretty much that was everyday. You know, it's—if you interact with people that were, you know, exactly like

you, you weren't gunna have any growth. I enjoyed the fact that there was so many people that were from, you know, smaller towns that before I moved to Bloomington I never knew or never heard of but just understanding that, you know, despite where you, you know, where you came from, where you grew up, you know, who you spent most of your time with, that most of the people were virtually the same. You had the same upbringings and the same challenges, you know, but, you know, you're just from different parts of the state or different parts of the country, so it was good to learn and understand, you know, how other people grew up and how they lived their lives because your way isn't always, you know, it isn't always the best way, it isn't always the right way, but it just—it is what it is and it's good to expand your, you know, your own horizons on how people grew up and the things that they did.

I think there's huge value in learning how to communicate with other people from different backgrounds. When you—once you graduate from here and you go into wherever your next destination or, you know, your, you know, wherever the work or educational world may take you, you're gunna deal with people that are definitely unlike you and to be able to, you know, to understand and to speak to them with an open mind I think is very important. I mean, the, you know, the world is becoming more and more diverse day by day and, you know, to be respectful and to understand other peoples' backgrounds is gunna be key and being able to survive and thrive in the world that we live in now, so I think any opportunity that you get when you're on campus to learn and to understand about back—you know, people with backgrounds different from your own is very, very, very important.

[Recording ends.]