THE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS, F.I.T.

THE FASHION INDUSTRY LEADERS

(ORAL HISTORY OF F.I.T.)

JEANNETTE JARNOW
FIRST CHAIRPERSON OF THE
FASHION BUYING AND MERCHANDISING DEPARTMENT
AT
THE FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Date of Interview
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Interviewed by
Mildred Finger
Q: ...for the Oral History Collection of the Fashion Institute of Technology, this will be an interview with Jeanette Jarnow, Professor of Fashion Buying and Merchandising. The date is November 1st, 1984; the interviewer is Mildred Finger.

Professor Jarnow, you became Professor Emeritus just very recently, and up until then you had been, for a number of years, the Edwin Goodman Professor. But before we go into your story at F.I.T., could we hear about yourself—where you were born, what your interests were when you were young?

A: Well, I was born in Brooklyn, New York, and I don't think I ever thought... in fact, if I... I remember when I went to college, my mother thought I should become a teacher and I said, "That's the last thing I'll ever do in my life." And it looks like it IS the last thing I'm doing in my life. I never had any intention of teaching. When I went to school, I went to Barnard. I graduated from Barnard in 1930, and I was a Psych major, and when I graduated Barnard, I had planned on entering a Psych clinic, to follow a career in Psychology. And I remember that at Barnard a gal, an alumna of Barnard, by the name of Lillian Friedman, who was then Training Director of Abraham & Straus, came to talk to the students about career opportunities, and she talked about retailing. She talked about the fact that they were doing a great deal of aptitude testing in Abraham & Straus, and I was very interested in aptitude testing as a psychological device at that time, so I decided that that was going to be the place for me. I applied to Abraham & Straus for their training squad and made it...

Q: Incidentally, in those days you were Jeannett Abelow. I take it you were not yet married?
A: No, no. And I think I spent, after my training period at Abraham & Straus, maybe one month in the Training Department. Then I decided that the action was not up there and I didn't want to be confined to an office. The action was on the floor, and that's how I got into merchandising. So...

Q: What department did you go into, or how did you get into merchandising?

A: Well, I went into the Training Program at Abraham & Straus. I was assigned for a short time, at my request, in the Training Department, to do psych testing, and when I went down on the floor I think the first position I had was an Assistant Buyer in something that was then called "Moderate Priced Dress Department." And I was made a buyer within two years, of that Moderate Priced Dress Department. During my career at A&S, I was a buyer in the Moderate Priced Dress Department. I then became a buyer of the Junior Dress Department. When they expanded to Junior Dresses there was a vacancy in the Junior Coat Department. I then bought for both Junior Dresses and Junior Coats, and when the sportswear field came into being and there was no such thing as Junior Sportswear at that point, we created a Junior subdivision in our ready-to-wear division. I merchandised and bought, with several assistants, for the Junior Dress Department, the Junior Coat Department, and what was the beginning then of a Junior Sportswear Department. As a matter of fact many years....I don't know how many years, really, when it happened...I thought that maybe I really should have gone and pursued a career in psychology. So I took a leave from the store and went to a Psychological Institute where I did testing, and I decided again that this was not really what I wanted, and I went back to Abraham & Straus.
So, I was at Abraham & Straus...I'm not even sure when I quit Abraham & Straus... It must have been in 1944, and became pregnant and quit to have two children.

Q: You had been married when?
A: I was married in 1933, and I never had any children until 11 years after we were married. I think what decided me to have children was that my husband was drafted, and I thought if he was going off to Europe that was my last chance. So I became pregnant, had one child in '44, and knew after a couple of months or maybe even a month or two that if I was going to have a second child I'd better do it quickly, because I was going to go back to work. So I....

Q: So you really were one of the early mothers in a career situation.
A: Well, I was very fortunate. My mother lived with me, which made it very easy to do. So, I had another child in '45. I decided I wanted to go back to work, but I wanted to go back to work part time. And Abraham & Straus offered me a position working - at that point every buyer worked at a six day a week job in '45. And I wanted to work...I had my own ideas. I wanted a real part time job. I only wanted to work five days a week; I wanted to work part of the day only, and they were not willing to give me that. There was a man by the name of Mr. Nelson Miller who had been a Vice President of Abraham & Straus, and he became President of Namm Loeser's in Brooklyn, and he was very eager to get Abraham & Straus people. While I had never worked for him, we kind of made a deal. I was going to work five days a week from 10:00 to 4:00; I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do or he wasn't sure. I was willing to take a substantial cut in salary...

Q: Incidentally, what were salaries like then?
A: I think maybe I was earning $150 a week when I quit Abraham & Straus, but I can tell you that I got married when I was a buyer in 1933. I think I was earning $75 a week. And that was a pretty top salary, because that was at the height of the Depression. I think I was earning more than my husband—who owned his own business! I guess you remember those days, too.

Q: Oh, I do.

A: So, he agreed to let me work... We weren't quite sure doing what, for five days a week, 10-4 p.m., and in the summers, one day a week, because I wanted to be with my children.

Q: So did you indeed manage to make that deal and stay with it?

A: I stayed with them until... From 1948, when I joined Namm Loeser's, and I stayed with them until 1955, when I decided I wanted to do something else, which was teaching.

Q: Could we just talk a little bit more about your job with Namm Loeser's, before you came to F.I.T.? For example, was this a store that had branches? Were there such things? In a store that size?

A: They opened up their first branch during the time I was there. When I started there, I sort of worked out of the boss's office, and what he had done—Namm Loeser's, strangely enough, was on a computer—had a computerized unit control system, which was very elaborate, much more elaborate than they needed. When he came into the store, he threw the whole thing out. And what happened was he left the store without any inventory control systems or unit control systems. So that was my first assignment—to reinstate some type of unit control systems—and that's what I did.
Then, the next assignment I had was to work with their Junior Buyer, who was a very bright gal; to try to help her and help Namm Loeser's develop their junior business, which was not doing as well as it should, despite the fact that she was a very capable buyer. And I'm not sure exactly... Maybe I was there a year, doing inventory control and working with this junior buyer, when one day said to me, "How would you like to merchandise the main floor?" And I said, "There's no way I can merchandise the main floor, working 10-4, five days a week, and one day in the summer." And he said, "We'll see." And I remember coming into work the following day, and everybody was congratulating me because I had made Merchandise Manager of the main floor. I had told I didn't think so, and the only reason I was able to merchandise the main floor and do it on such a part-time basis, was that I was reporting to a Vice President of Merchandising of ready-to-wear. They had another V.P. for hardware.

Q: Was Namm Loeser's a department store or...?

A: A department store.

Q: It was a department store.

A: I reported to him and he was willing to cover for me. In other words... If I worked from 10-4, and at 5:00 my buyers needed an order signed, they would then go to him and he would take care of it. The same thing happened during the summers. I used to.... I spent summers out at Fire Island. This was quite an arrangement. I would come in on Tuesday to do my "open to buy" with my buyers, and to do my sales promotion plans (because I was a divisional merchandise manager at that point). On Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and I guess the following Monday, he would sign orders and take care of any problems coming up with advertising.
Q: That was a very unusual arrangement.

A: A very unusual arrangement. And I did that for... And I pretty much stuck to those hours. Of course, I took a lot of work home; but that was my own business. In other words, when I used to work my so-called 10-4 p.m. hours what I did, after hours, at home -- whether I was doing merchandising work or sales promotion planning or anything else -- I was doing that on my own. So it worked out, and in the summers it really was only Tuesdays.

Q: Were you being paid as if you were working a full time job?

A: Oh, at that point my salary had been raised considerably. I was merchandising the main floor and the main floor was growing like crazy. I had a good bunch of buyers and we really did a great job down there. We made "history" in some departments where... I remember, we had a sale in the blouse department and we had a $5,000 day which, in those days, for us was a little unusual. I don't think we had ever hit anything over $1,000 in those days. I had a very good buyer working for me. A fellow by the name of Lewis Davis. I don't know whether you ever knew Lew Davis...who later went to Macy's to become a....

Q: Is that L-e-w-i-s?

A: Yes. He was the G.M.M. at Burdine's in Miami. I think he then became President of a store. He was a bright guy. So, without good buyers, you know....I'm sure you've been in business; you know this.... you couldn't do it.

Anyhow, somewhere around '55, my kids were growing up; they got to be nine and ten, and even though my hours were not that full for Namm Loeser's, I felt that I wanted to spend more time at home. So I got the idea...
I went to see... Actually I got my job at F.I.T. through people at A&S. I went to see some of my friends at Abraham & Straus, and they told me there was a school called F.I.T., a college that was beginning, and they were looking for people to teach. They had been on the F.I.T. Advisory Board, to start with, when F.I.T. was planning a curriculum in Merchandising, and so it was through Abraham & Straus that I... But before.... I remember, along with that.... I decided it would be lovely to teach one course somewhere at a college.

I went to see Mr. Edwards, School of Retailing, NYU, and he told me I would need a Master's. I remember going to see Mr. Axelrod, who was running a program at Brooklyn....

Q: That's Brooklyn College?

A: Brooklyn College. And he... This was in the spring... He told me that they didn't have any openings. And that was at the time when Mr. Brown, of Abraham & Straus.... I don't remember whether they called me or I called them, but that's how I made contact at F.I.T. And I quit Namm's in January or February....January. They asked me to stay through Christmas. And I registered for a Master's....

Q: January? What year?

A: January, '56. I had decided in '55 to tell them I was leaving. But they asked me to handle the Christmas season. I left in January, and I registered at a school called Long Island University, which, frankly... I took my Master's there. It was a pretty terrible school then. I'm sure it's improved a great deal. But, I certainly didn't want to travel all the way up to Columbia Business School. And NYU told me I could not start in February, I would have to start the following September, and I wanted to
start on a Master's. So I enrolled in Long Island University for a
Master's, started it with daytime courses, that spring of '56, and then I
had an interview with F.I.T.

Q: You had an interview with F.I.T.?

A: F.I.T., at that time... My first interview was with Rosalind
Snyder, who was the Dean at that point, and she told me they were not looking,
really, for a teacher. What they were looking for was somebody to head a
department; go out and start a department. Well, I really wasn't anxious to
start a department. I was just looking for a challenging job that wasn't
going to take up too much time. But when I was interviewed by Dr. Bethel,
to whom she sent me, he didn't think I had a well known enough name for
fashion. I think he was looking for somebody whose name was extremely well
known, per se, for fashion--either a famous designer or a famous magazine
editor--and as I once told Dr. Bethel a little bit later, at that point I
think...to them, it was more important who you knew than what you knew.

Anyhow, he really didn't want me. Rosalind Snyder wanted me very
badly, I found out later, but they didn't hire me until June. I think
it was about June 15, 1955, and I was supposed to ...

Q: '55 or...?

A: Oh, '56. And I was suppose to start working in September, and start
a Department by September, and I was going away the following week with my
family for the summer, and I remember asking Rosalind, "How do you start a
department if I'm going to teach courses? What do I do?" And she said to
me, "Well, I guess the first thing you do is do courses of study for the
courses you'd like to teach or think should be taught," and I said to her,
"What's a 'course of study'?" I really didn't have any idea what a "course
of study" was. And she said, "I would love to spend some time with you Jeannette, but number one, you're going away and number two, we are in the middle of accreditation, and our accrediting team is coming in and I absolutely have no time." So, I said, "Just give me some sample courses of study, and I'll work it out myself." And that's exactly what I did. I think I went away for the summer with some sample courses of study, and I think all I did was develop one or two courses, because actually, when I started, I was the Head of the Department, the foot of the Department, and the middle of the Department. I was a one person department. I had no title whatsoever, and I really.... We really didn't plan a curriculum. Well, you sort of planned it as you went along. And it was an interesting experience, I must tell you. They had admitted 25 students. I came into the school. The school was then located on the top....the main floor and I believe the top two floors of the High School of Fashion Industries, or the Needle Trades High School. And I remember coming in in September.... The room and time had been planned by the Dean's office. So when I came in I knew I was going to meet 25 students. I came in prepared with several courses. Two courses, probably, because they took other things besides Liberal Arts. And I didn't even have an office. I shared - I had half a desk on the main floor of the Needle Trades High School. We were all jammed in. And that's how we got going. And I guess it was in the.... We didn't think about recruiting. We didn't add any additional teachers. There was.... I was told that we were going to admit 50 students in '57, and therefore I could get another teacher. And I remember how I got the other teacher. They had talked to me about a Dr. Sloane, who had also applied for my job. He was an experienced teacher. He was teaching at the Orange County Community.
So I wrote him a letter in which I asked him if he knew anybody that I could get [for] another teacher, but between the lines I was really asking him if he would come. And he sort of got the message, and he wanted to come back to New York. He had applied for my job but they hadn't given it to him. And that's how we got our second teacher.

Q: Now, that...is for this particular program, right? Because in 1944...

A: There wasn't any merchandising program.

Q: Right. Okay. Because there were 100 students and 20 teachers ... Or 10 teachers, rather, but that was just for design and...

A: That was for design and production. The merchandising department did not start until '56, and we had 25 students that entered the merchandise program. And then there was a second class in '56 of design students who, in their second year, were given the option of taking a merchandising track. So, I was teaching students who came in for merchandising who were going to be there for two years, plus a class of students who had come in there for design and who had switched their so-called major. And that's how we got started. And for the first few years, we had only one other full time teacher...

Q: In your department?

A: In my department. But we did use a lot of part-time teachers. In fact, Abraham & Straus, when we wanted to put in an advertising course, loaned us one of their advertising people, a gal...You may even know her, Gilda Smithline?

Q: Uh huh. Sure...
A: Bill Tobey, who was the head of the Advertising/Sales Promotion Department at A.& S, released Gilda to come over and teach in our school two mornings a week.

We had other part-timers...Incidentally, many of them had been at Abraham & Straus. Another gal that taught a course there who had retired from Abraham & Straus taught for us part-time. Betty Tepper, who has been here a long time, taught for us part-time. So we really functioned for many years with two full-timers, several part-timers. The strange part of it is I cannot seem to remember when we added our next full-timer. But it was at least 5-6 years, at least, after the department started. So it might have been, though I'm not sure of it, early '60s, that we added a third full-timer. And, of course, in the '60s we grew like crazy. Those of us in the department did a lot of publicizing of F.I.T. For example, I think we...I, Dr. Sloane, and anybody else who was here part-time, decided we would write a letter to all the people we knew in industry, and enclose an F.I.T. brochure. We did a lot of other things in terms of... On our field trips, we were talking to a lot of concerns...

Q: Field trips, these were to manufacturers?

A: These were to manufacturers, visiting retailers a lot, and publicizing. We did a lot of publicity, really. At least I think we did a lot of it. As we went along we did a lot of publicity. For example, it must have been... I'm not even sure of the date but it was sometime in the late '60s, when we thought it would be a great idea to invite all the personnel people in from all the retailers around New York -- chains and stores. And at that time we had added other teachers and we put on a show. We put on a musical show that was really great. What it was doing was saying,
"We have a merchandising department at F.I.T. Here's what we do in our classes." And we did that for all the personnel people, and it really got a tremendous response. Because those personnel people were the ones who were going to, hopefully, give our students jobs and get to know F.I.T.

We got an idea that it would be wonderful if every student, for example, could spend a day in the market with a buyer. So, since all of us who were teaching at that time - part-timers as well - had had industry experience, we set up a minimum requirement. In other words we would hire... We felt that anybody who was coming into the school to teach, full or part-time, had to have a minimum of six years experience in the industry at the executive level. Well, the minute you do that, at the executive level, you know they've been in industry a lot longer than six years. So...

Q: At least in those days. Nowadays it's not...

A: Nowadays they get to be executives in maybe a much shorter time. But, for example, we thought that would be wonderful. So we proceeded to make a lot of calls to resident buying offices mostly, because to send our students for a day in the market with a buyer...the resident buyers, as you know, are in the market all day long whereas, at that time, store buyers were not spending that much time in the market. You know, they had a lot of responsibilities, store duties. And one of the things we remember is when we... The students would go out for this so-called "day in the market," and we would release them from other classes to spend a day in the market with a buyer, and they would come back and say, "But nobody ever heard of F.I.T." And I remember we would say, "They will. Someday they'll hear of F.I.T." Because we really were not that well known. I remember doing an article for Stores Magazine, which they printed. I can't remember exactly what topic it was on. I did several for Stores Magazine. But it wasn't
because I had any great desire to write; it was because I signed it Jeannette Jarnow, F.I.T., and at least everybody got to know... More people were being exposed to the name of the Fashion Institute of Technology.

So, along with the school's office efforts at publicity, we were doing our own publicity in our own department. Another thing we did, in cooperation I think with the recruitment office or the student office, was invited guidance counselors from high school. And at that point we could tell them...because very few people really knew what merchandising was. You know, I once had merchandising explained as "a big word in search of a meaning." I mean, nobody was ever quite sure what merchandising was all about. And so when we brought in these guidance counselors from high school, we tried to clarify what merchandising is all about, what the career opportunities were all about, and what we were doing in school. And so you see, along with F.I.T., we did our own efforts at recruitment. And I think we had a lot of input into getting our own students.

Q: What was the student body like when you arrived here in '56? For example, were they...

A: I'm trying to think... They were good.

Q: Were they people whose families had been involved in any way? In the industry?

A: I think then, and even to this day, we do get students whose families have been involved, not so much in retailing, but rather in manufacturing. Though we do get children, then and even now, whose parents have small stores. I don't remember getting sons or daughters of corporate people. But small entrepreneurs, who had little retail stores, often sent them to our school. But I don't think that was the bulk of our students.
Q: What was the bulk?

A: The bulk of our students, strangely enough, were not even from New York. We got many Jersey students. We always had a problem getting boys, because I think boys, then and even to this day, are turned off by the word "fashion." So that I would guess the majority of our students, by far, were people from Long Island, Westchester, Jersey, not too many New York City students.

Another interesting thing about the merchandising department at F.I.T. is, number one, there were a lot of schools of retailing at that time. They were having a lot of problems surviving. For example, NYU had a school of retailing. Rochester had a school of retailing, and the schools of retailing were kind of dying away. We really didn't want to make this... Our conception of the merchandising department was not a retailing department, per se, because we all felt and believed (and when I say "we," I'm talking about my staff, whatever they were, and me) that merchandising takes place at the retail level, it takes place at the wholesale level, it takes place in magazines, and therefore we did not want to make it a retailing program and we didn't, from the very beginning, when we... Our understanding of merchandising is that it has to do with deciding what to make and what to buy and selling it at a profit, and that applies to all levels of the industry. I mean, we really had a little struggle at F.I.T., within it, because we had an apparel production department at that point, and they wanted... We had a battle...that we were a retailing department and they were going to be a wholesale department, and that included merchandising, and marketing. And we won.

In other words, the thrust of our courses was not retailing. It, of course, included retailing, but, as I say, it was a merchandising...
I don't know, I have a feeling we were the first merchandising program there was. Everybody else was giving retailing courses. As I say, they were dying away because students were very much turned off on retailing.

Another interesting thing... We felt our department should really be called "Marketing." Now that goes back 24 years. And marketing was not a very popular word.

Q: But the concept is still not clearly understood by a great many people.

A: In other words, we felt that marketing was the bigger term than merchandising. Merchandising is kind of... Marketing is the big umbrella and merchandising is really the buying and selling activities, under marketing, because there's a lot of other activities that go into marketing. And we argued the point... I remember Dr. Sloane and I, in a way, argued the point with Dr. Bethel, who was then President of the school, and he in some ways was much wiser than we. He said, "If we make it a Department of Marketing, nobody is going to know what you're talking about. Whereas if you call it Buying, everybody knows what you're talking about." And so where we had named the program, and it had been named Fashion Buying and Merchandising, and we had a much broader conception of what this program should deal with, he wouldn't let us change the name, and in retrospect I know he was right. What happens is that buying seems like a very glamorous job to high school students. When they get into buying, or learn more about it, they suddenly realize that maybe it isn't quite as glamorous as they thought. Because, even to this day, we find many students come in and they have a funny idea of what buyers do. They think they spend their lives looking at beautiful clothes and at fashion shows, and it's not a business, and we all know that merchandising is a business. But their conception of it was not of a business. So they often get turned
off on buying. Or I really should say, they get turned off on retailing. Because always the problem is, do you emphasize the excitement and the glamor part of it? Or do you really tell students what it's all about? And, of course, you're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't. Certainly, buying and merchandising in retailing is an exciting career. But from the very beginning we had a work study program, which means that our students go out for six weeks (and the opportunities for short term employment is mostly in retailing stores, because manufacturers or buying offices don't put them on for six weeks. Stores will take all the help that they can get and pay them for it, of course, six weeks before Christmas), and that's a terrible introduction to retailing -- the Christmas season, when the stores are open at night, and it's hectic, and a lot of people are too busy to teach them anything. And so that work experience very often turns them off on retailing.

Q: Does that still go on today, the work study program?
A: Yes. The work study program today.... Where we used to have it in the Fall and Spring, and the stores were very cooperative with us, and where they needed the help in the Fall, before Christmas, they would employ our students. And in the Spring, when they really do not need all these extra people, they did it. I mean, they were cooperating with us. But, as we grew in size, there just were too many students to have an additional work study period in the spring.

Q: So now it's just...
A: So now it's just one work study period a year, and it's still a terrible time. It's still the six weeks before Christmas. And there are more and more jobs opening up for our students in the wholesale field. And right now, where at one time, when they graduated, about 70% of our students went into the retailing field – and maybe 30%, maybe; maybe it was only 25% went into retailing when they graduated, because that's where the jobs were.
And maybe 25% went into the wholesale field -- showrooms, Girl Fridays or ... However they got started -- It has turned around. We find that the manufacturers in this industry want our students, so we are almost 50% going into retailing and the other 50% going into manufacturing, and most of us in the merchandising department are very unhappy about this. We would like to see more go into retailing, because we feel that the schooling plus experience in retailing is an open door to any job in this industry. So we do our best to encourage them to go into retailing. And, of course, there's another thing happening....

We have now, as of the last four years -- five years at the most -- an upper division which gives the students four years of college and they get a Bachelor's.

Q: So it's two years of liberal arts and....

A: No, it's two years of marketing. The upper division is a market... You know, a much broader program. We go really for merchandising and spread out into marketing.

Q: But don't those four years encompass liberal arts?

A: Oh, yes, they include liberal arts as well. Of course. But it's also advanced marketing courses. And... I mean... They take accounting and marketing management and market research and marketing strategies.... The point I'm making is that the majority of our students are still two year students.

Now, there are many top retail stores who will not employ for their executive training squad students with two year degrees. I think they do it for two reasons: They want students with Bachelor's.... I think very often because they're more mature. They're two years older. So. I'm not sure why... if that's the reason, that they're looking for older students or students with
more schooling. It's probably a combination of both. So we find, because of that, that more and more of our students are possibly going into wholesaling, where they don't really care whether they have a two-year degree or a four-year degree. And that's our present situation. As I said, there are many good retail organizations which our two-year students joined, became buyers, did very well, but most cannot get into these organizations because they only have a two-year degree—there are occasional exceptions. An so our four-year students, who are fewer in number (they are growing) have more open... More jobs open to them with prestigious retailing stores. Macy's will employ only four-year graduates; Bloomingdale's will interview only four-year graduates. I would say that's true of other stores in New York, and out of town. Now... What else can I tell you?

Q: Do the students know they cannot go to those stores...?

A: You know what's interesting? We bring in a lot of guest speakers, amongst whom are many of our alumni who are either buyers in stores...we have a few Vice Presidents. We have a Vice President at Macy's. We have a Vice President of Gimbel's. We have a Vice President of The Gap amongst our alumni. We have buyers in practically every store in New York City. And we bring them in as guest speakers. Now, they have been... They graduated maybe five or more years ago, at a time when the stores...perhaps the stores were hiring more people or they had more positions than they had candidates. So many of these graduates who are holding good executive positions are only two-year graduates. The first question that comes up, when we open it for a question and answer period, is that two-year-four-year situation. In other words, our students are very concerned about two year vs. four year, and I think more and more of them are going into the upper division, but we still have many more in our lower division than our upper, and what the next few years
will be, I don't know. In other words, our President still says that we are basically a two year college. Those of us in the merchandising department feel that perhaps they're not being quite realistic now in terms of entry level positions for our two year students. See, I don't think that's true of any other division. I don't think the design students face that problem, of the two year-four year.... I know that the production students don't face that problem of a two-year competing with a four-year, but I do know that we face it. And I think, as I say, that it's something this school is going to have to face up to, in my opinion. What are we going to do? Are we a two year college, or do we reduce our two year and expand our four year programs in merchandising? Because there is a limit. We are loaded to capacity. And I'm not sure exactly of the numbers, but I think we must be accepting one out of six or seven of the students who are applying to our two year program, merchandising program.

Incidentally, another thing that's interesting in the merchandising department, and when it was early ... There are absolutely no textbooks in this field.

Q: What about Jane Troxell's book?
A: Well that's a much later one. What happened was....

Q: You mean that was published later than the early days you're talking about?
A: I'm only talking about the '60s, when there really weren't any good texts. I think Wingate wrote a text on fashion merchandising, which left much to be desired because I don't think he'd ever been a merchant in all his life. So it was very much unrelated to real life. It had really very little to do with it. And I think there was a very elaborate text on merchandising math, merchandise planning and control procedures, and those of
us who had been doing it couldn't even understand the text, so we didn't think our students could. So, what we did was we prepared a tremendous amount of instructional material which has evolved into textbooks which are used in the field. I know that we were teaching merchandise planning and control, talking about the mathematics...

Q: You're talking about the late '50s and early '60s...

A: I'm talking about.... Yes, the really early '60s, we did a book... We started with a mimeo on merchandising math. We then had it put together in a binder. One of the department secretaries typed it. We had it printed and we sold it at a very nominal cost, no profit, through the bookshop. The so-called authors of this book never got royalties. We did not publish this, we were not publishers.

End of Tape 1 Side 1
A: Actually the history of that book was interesting because...

Q: Is that the one that's called Fashion Buying and Merchandising?

A: No, that is the one that's called "The Mathematics of Retail Merchandising." Eventually, and not so many years ago, Fairchild published that book.

Q: Which book?

A: "The Mathematics of Retail Merchandising," which started as mimeod instructional material, which we had bound into a paperback book, which the college... We really, in a way, published, and the college shop sold it to the students, and it just covered the cost of production. And that book has brought us a lot of fame. Fairchild has published the book. They have had two editions. It's now going into its third edition, and the interesting thing is, we're doing a lot of seminars for industry about that book. For example, we've done a seminar, an industry seminar, for Liz Claiborne. And they use the book as the basis for learning about retail math. That's the language of retailing. I remember Jantzen ordered 50 copies of that book from our bookshop. Even though it was published by Fairchild it sells through the bookshop. And I gather what they did was to distribute it to all their salesmen.

We've done other industry seminars for particular firms on retail math. And that started in the early sixties with instructional materials. We did then also..... We were giving sales promotion courses, and one of our teachers did a paperback book which we had printed ourselves and sold through the college shop called, I think it's called "Advertising and Sales Promotion," by Professor Winters. He had two or three revisions of that, still in the original paperback. The teachers got no royalties on it. As I say,
we wrote books because we needed them. Nobody tells you you don't write books for instructional materials. We did it. We didn't know it couldn't be done; we did it. It wasn't that there were any rules about it, but you know, now, when you think about publishing books, there's a whole big thing going on. And that book has been...is now being published by Professor Winters and a later full-timer in our department, co-authored by Professor Goodman, and that book is widely published. I'm not quite sure who the publisher is.

I did a book. It was called... Well, I remember when I first had it printed in the department... All I did was use reprints of articles and put them in an order about this industry, because there really wasn't any information about this industry. And so we put a lot of reprinted material, by categories... We had articles about retailers; we had articles about the textile field; we put in articles about manufacturing....

Q: What was the name of the book? Do you remember?

A: Sure I remember the book. It was called "Fashion is Their Business." And somehow or other...it again sold at a nominal cost, through the bookshop, without any royalties to anybody. I didn't write... I really just collated it and edited it. And then I began to write sort of an introduction to each chapter. Well, somehow or other the book got known, as F.I.T. got known, and many other schools began to order it right from our bookshop. Because we were the publishers of that book. And if I'm not mistaken, the first year we did it we gave it to the students free. We just handed it out in the classroom. We did it in a looseleaf notebook, and that was going to be part of their text for the course. Eventually that book... Wiley approached me I guess and I got a contract and I wrote a book. They wouldn't use the title "Fashion is Their Business." They wanted their own title. They were afraid ....I don't know what they were afraid of, but they wanted a new title so it's called "Inside the Fashion Business." And it's had three editions,
and it's widely adopted and has started an awful lot of other books. But that was the first book on this industry, I believe, that was published. When I say "this industry," I'm talking about the fashion industry, about the textile industry, about the manufacturing of apparel and accessories, about the retailers. To the best of my knowledge, there never was a book before this one.

Q: Not this kind of book. But your library has some books about very early beginnings of the garment industry, for example, in the late...

A: When I talk about the industry, the fashion industry. I am covering the private people, the apparel manufacturers, the textile people and the retailers and, for the lack of a better word, what we call "auxiliaries," because I'm talking about the fashion consultants, the fashion information services, the resident offices, the advertising agencies—none of whom either buy or sell merchandise but certainly fashion magazines...they are certainly people involved in our industry.

Now there have...there were early books, maybe, on the garment industry, per se. But I'm talking about the industry...what we consider to be...

Q: The fashion industry?

A: The fashion industry. And when we talk about markets, we're not talking about 7th Avenue. We're talking about wholesale markets and retail markets and consumer markets. In other words, it's much more of a marketing approach, not just one... But you're right. There were early books about maybe very specific segments of the industry, but none about the industry as a whole. And there have been a lot of books since then.

Q: Well, of course, F.I.T. has also developed this whole resource structure. It's a resource center. So that there is an enormous amount of
material now in the library, as, for example, the vertical file section...

A: I want you to know the vertical file section was started on merchandising.

Q: Was it?
A: It certainly was.

Q: See, that's where you have been very interesting; to see how all these things evolved and developed...
A: In other words...

Q: Let's go back chronologically. When you came in '56, there was not yet a fashion buying/merchandising department. It's what you started...?
A: That's right.
Q: Okay. After that, what came... What are some of the other things that evolved? As you were just saying now, the vertical file...
A: Well, the vertical files evolved.... It goes back to the same thing I said when I said there were no books. We were developing instructional materials which turned into books. And they have eventually been published and used by other schools. Since much of the information about this industry is very current (and that's what vertical files are all about), what we were doing was collecting and clipping articles...

Q: By the faculty?
A: There was some part-time faculty, yes. We were all doing this.
Q: When did the library start?
A: The vertical files?
Q: No. The library.
A: Well.... There was a one room library in the old building. But there was very little in it that we could use. Mostly it was a design resource.
I don't even remember... I'm not sure when those vertical files started...

Q: It was 1965.
A: But it had to be in the middle '60s, because we started it. In other words, as we were all collecting materials and putting them in our files, in our office, by categories. Retailing was one category, to start with. It was very simple. Textiles was another. Manufacturing was another. And we were clipping articles and getting photostatic copies for our files for the use of the teachers. What we did was we heard about vertical files and we had no vertical files in our library. I remember going down, appointing a teacher—her name was Miller; she's still with us. She would investigate this so-called thing called vertical files. I remember finding.... We were looking for current information, and we were told we could find them in something called vertical files. But we didn't know where there were vertical files. I remember seeing.... going down to Dun & Bradstreet, I think it was, and they had a wonderful setup on vertical files; and we decided that would be a great resource for us, to collect current information and have the library do it. I'm not even sure who was the head of the library, but we went to them and asked them to set up vertical files. And for a while what we were doing was supplying them with the articles from Women's Wear Daily, from the Times, from the magazines, that we felt should be in the vertical files, and that's how the vertical files got started. We investigated schools, saw what some libraries had—not on this field. Nobody had it. We didn't even have.... I didn't know what a vertical file was. We were sort of setting it up without knowing what we were doing. Eventually the library did it, and we would keep duplicates in our own departments, because what we were really doing was supplying them material, until we got somebody to do it. I don't even know when we started it...
Q: In 1965.
A: But we must have started exploring the whole idea of having current information available to students and faculty a couple of years before then. So that was something that we, you know, definitely instigated.

Q: You're talking about the mid-'60s.... Apparently F.I.T. was not really affected at all, or almost not at all, by the student unrest of the late '60s?
A: None at all
Q: Why do you think that was?
A: Remind me later to go back to industry seminars, which is another thing we initiated.

I'm trying to think why....
Q: Perhaps it's just because they were very career oriented...
A: Well.... I would say that our students were really... I think all that student unrest in the '60s was really started by young people who were more intellectual than our students. I don't think our students were as intellectually...as intellectual as the liberal arts students, for example, at Columbia. I don't even know if NYU was involved in this. I know how deeply the students in the Ivy League schools were, certainly in Columbia, and those students were maybe very...

You know, my feeling is (and you may or may not agree with me) that a lot of that student unrest came out of..... First of all, they were below draft age, so they really weren't involved in the draft in Vietnam. Remember, we were taking... I don't really remember what the draft was. Twenty-one? Well, I guess most of our students were only 18 when they came in. So maybe they were... Second of all, we had very few boys.

Q: I was about to say, you didn't have a very high male population?
A: You see, we have a very low male population. So I would guess that, outside of the production department, which was 100% male, and a very small department, it really wasn't affecting the women in the school. And I believe a lot of this was as a protest against the draft, and our students weren't worrying about the draft. I mean, maybe they were for their boyfriends, but they themselves weren't. As I said, most of our students, the majority of our students, except for the apparel production department—which was very small and 100% male—the rest of the students in the school were mostly women. And since women were not subject to the draft or involved that much in the draft, they really were not protesting the draft except perhaps they were concerned about their boyfriends but it didn't involve them.

Furthermore, I believe that the majority of our students were from a lower income class, and I think they were more concerned with getting a job and making a living and just really maybe weren't worrying about the world in general and what was going on. They weren't even that much involved in politics, because I remember, even where we would try to get them to vote for officers in the school, there was a great deal of apathy in terms of anything political.

Q: No. As we go into the '70s, what were some of the interesting things that happened in the school then. Now, we're coming up to the present... Well, for example, you did mention the industry seminars...?

A: We did that in the '60s.

Q: But the seminars continue to this day?

A: Yes, but not in merchandising. Not really.

Q: Because weren't there times when you were even training groups of people from stores like Sears?

A: Well, I can't really talk about what the seminar department did. We trained... I'm just trying to think whether it was Allied that sent in people
for a merchandising seminar - no - what happened..... We got the idea...

F.I.T. has two purposes. One is to recruit and prepare people for the industry, and the second is to be of service to the industry. And I'm not quite sure whose idea it was to begin with, but we maybe collectively... When I say "we," I'm talking about my faculty and me, got the idea that a merchandising seminar for the industry would be performing a service for the industry. I believe there may have been one previous industry seminar, per se, that involved the textile industry. But we planned and programmed a merchandising seminar designed for junior executives in the retail stores in which we covered what our merchandise program really was covering. In other words, we did it with guest speakers as well as our faculty. We were giving them product information in terms of textile and costing apparel procedures, merchandising techniques for planning and control; creative merchandising, in which we brought in merchandising executives for the guest speakers, and it was a three day seminar and one of our faculty members in merchandising coordinated it, Al Sloane. And every store, every major store sent in (because we limited the number of people from any one store to two), and we would have an audience of about thirty, and they paid pretty well for the seminars. The faculty got paid moderately well...

Q: And this was in the '60s you said?

A: The '60s. Certainly I remember Lord & Taylor sent in people. I remember Andrew Goodman sent his son, and his son-in-law into that. I can't remember the name of the store from Canada that sent people in... And we repeated this.

One of the things we kept talking to them about (since these were store people, traditional store people), we were very concerned or were very aware of what was going on with chain stores that were going into the fashion business, who had never really been in it. We were even concerned with....
even at that time...the discounters, who were going into the fashion business. I remember that when I was a buyer, for a traditional department store, the only competition that I ever worried about was another department store or another specialty store. I really didn't have to worry too much about the Loehmann's, the Sears, because they really weren't in it. And it was during the '60s that.... I think it was then called a revolution in retailing. At that point, everybody and their brother was going into the fashion apparel business, and we felt that the stores were completely ignoring this kind of situation and I remember we talked about that in the store. We also talked about what was beginning with imports there, because I remember at that time, the blouse industry decided they would run a "buy America" campaign. In other words, completely ignoring the fact that they were getting real competition. The way they were going to meet it was to proselytize customers to buy American.

So I remember, I think we covered subjects that were very important in those seminars and we got pretty good attendance. The problem with the seminars at that time... Why we ourselves were a little upset about doing it was that we didn't feel it was up to us, that it was our responsibility to recruit people, so we were not only doing the planning of the programs, the teaching of the programs, and we were probably willing to invite all the guest speakers in, but we didn't think it was our responsibility to have to go out and recruit an audience. And our seminar department was really not well organized and they were not supplying the audience. I think all they were doing was scheduling the logistics of it, but they really weren't involved. And I guess as retailers got more... I mean, we still do merchandising seminars at F.I.T., but none that are strictly run by the merchandising department. So the seminar department has really enlarged, and I think on the whole that retailers have set up their own more sophisticated training programs, and they're not
Q: What has happened over the years is that as conditions in the outside world have changed, apparently the major departments have rethought their course of study and changed their course of study to conform to the needs. Would that be a fair statement? For instance, you now have a course on imports and export buying...?

A: Oh, yes. One of the things we have tried to do all along is, first of all, keep our program updated to what's going on in the outside world. Now, how do you keep au courant with what's going on? Well, several different ways. Number one, as you keep adding faculty, you have people with more recent experience. Number two, we set up advisory committees. We set up advisory committees of our alumni, who would come into a faculty meeting and evaluate what they had studied here in terms of what they were able to apply when they got out, in terms of suggesting new areas of study. So we have been getting our advice and keeping au courant with people right on the job.

Q: Is there an advisory board structure that involves many departments? Or, for example, I recently met a young woman who was a student here for advertising and public relations, and she talked about the board that Professor Winters set up. Does that same kind of advisory board mechanism work in other departments?

A: I really can't say. I would imagine that, doing it either formally or informally... Now another thing we have done and keep doing in the merchandising department is invite in people, top executives in the industry, to attend our faculty meetings, one at a time, and keep us updated. For example, we have had Marvin Traub in, the Chairman of Bloomingdale's. We have had George Greenberg who runs Loehmann's. He's been at a faculty meeting. We had a very interesting man come in and that was Eugene Ferkauf who certainly is almost
a legend in this industry.

Q: He, of course, started Korvette?

A: Right. We had the President of Burdine's come in, and these people have come in and spent two hours with our faculty. These people have been most cooperative about giving information. And, as a matter of fact, currently we're very much in the process of updating. We have a grant from the State Department of Education -- it's under the Vocational Education Act, I think, of the federal government -- in which we selected five major topics where we think broad changes are taking place. What we're doing now is having one a month, beginning last October, where they will come in an evening meeting with the faculty for 2-3 hours and update us on what's going on in their field, and allow us to ask questions. These are then followed up with faculty meetings in which they are evaluating what they've learned--what have they learned perhaps that is new, that should be incorporated into our curriculum? For example, should we be putting in new courses? Should we be integrating the subject into other existing courses. When we get through with the five of them, (we'll be through with them in April of '85) we will then sit down with an ad hoc committee and revise our curriculum where necessary, accordingly.

Now, for example, we had last... The topics we picked (and I can tell you the three that - the four that we've already - I happen to be the project director of this). We picked off-price merchandising. We had Monroe Milstein, who's President of Burlington Coat Factory come in on that one. We picked another topic that we just did October 30th evening on what's going on with private labeling. Why and how, and what's being done and who's doing it? And we brought in Mary Ellen Bernard who is Senior Vice President and General Merchandise Manager of Frederick Atkins, who are doing... making tremendous strides with their private label program. And she brought in or came in with
the man who is President of the Frederick Atkins Wholesale Corporation. Coming
in December is a man by the name of Mr. Jack Schultz, who is Sr. Vice
President and GMM of Sanger Harris, Dallas, because they are leading the pack in
restructuring the merchandising organization, and buyer's jobs. Federated
Department Stores is doing a lot of this, but we understand that Sanger Harris
is kind of the prototype for everything they're doing and he's coming in in
December. Another topic we feel we would like to learn more about and update
ourselves, and then update the curriculum, is electronic retailing. And in
February (I don't know whether it will be February or March yet, because our
school's closed in February), we're planning to have in two or three people;
certainly one will be Compucard, who are doing a great deal of retailing
electronically. We haven't quite decided on the fifth topic yet. It may be more
in the operations field - purchase order management; changing methods of
distribution. So we're very active in trying to keep au courant by means of
our advisory committees, alumni, by means of the industry speakers who come in
and talk to the faculty, and certainly this is an organized thing that's going
on right now, with this grant, (it's called an in-service grant) to update
faculty and update curriculum.

Q: Before I lose it -- because we're almost finished -- how many
people are there now in the Fashion Buying and Merchandising department?
Approximately?

A: Well, we have a very large part-time evening staff. I would
estimate that our full-time day faculty must be about 25 full-time faculty.

Q: In this department?

A: In the Merchandising department. However, we have many part-time
faculty. In the evening, I think between our part-timers, day and evening, in
addition to our full-timers - we have over 100 faculty. The evening people
are mostly professionals who are active in the field and who come in and do the evening courses once a week. The day faculty members include some who are also active as consultants. They've certainly all had a lot of background experience. Some are only interested in part-time. So we have enormous faculty.

Q: Enormous? Yes?
A: Well, we have a big student population. And the interesting thing is that our placement record is pretty good. And considering that they're all women, I find it quite surprising that they stay on their jobs as long as they do. I don't think any of the faculty can walk through a retail store -- any one of them, and I don't care whether it's in New York or out of town -- without meeting an F.I.T. graduate. I know a couple of years ago I was in London, and I was walking along Oxford Street, and I heard somebody saying, "Professor Jarnow, Professor Jarnow," and it turned out to be one of our graduates who is in the handbag business. She has been a buyer of handbags for Ohrbach's; she now owns her own handbag company. And, you know, she was in London on her way, possibly to Italy. And as I say, no matter where you go, you meet F.I.T. graduates. They're all over the world, and they're certainly all over this country. I know I go to California once a year, and sort of have a reunion with graduates who are out in California who have been students of mine...

In addition to having students all over, we have some of our graduates teaching for us in the evenings. They're on... Many of them are on jobs. For example, a fellow by the name of Don Ziccardi, he's a Vice President at Macy's.

Q: How do you spell the name?
A: Z-i-c-c-a-r-d-i. He's a Vice President at Macy's, and he teaches here at night. A fellow by the name of Jack Rosenthal is the Vice President of Operations at Alexander's. He teaches for us at night.
Q: And he's an ex-student?
A: Yes, these are all former students. A woman who is in the middle of having her babies, but was a fashion director at Fieldcrest and Montedison, I believe, teaches here.

We have other graduates - I can't think of them - who are back here, who, along with their professional experience, are back here teaching. I believe... Yes, there's another one. We have.... J.C. Penney seems to love our graduates for their fashion office. And there's a gal, Susan Piazza, who's one of their fashion directors, who's teaching here in the evenings. And that's kind of fun, when you have graduates who have gone into the field, made good, and are back here to give a little, possibly, of what they got. And we recently had a very funny incident. We made the headlines of the Post, the News... I understand there's a story coming out in People...about a lady called The Mayflower Madam. Her name was Sidney Biddle Barrow. Sidney Biddle Barrow was a student of ours; Fashion Buying and Merchandising, one of our outstanding students. She won a Bergdorf award. When she left us - I think she graduated in '76 - went into Abraham & Straus and did extremely well, and left there, and we just kind of found out who she is. She's running the most expensive call girl operation in New York - $1,000 a job. And I said, "She's doing $1 million worth of business, we hear, or we read. So we feel we really taught her how to run a business.

Q: I think that's marvelous. There's nothing like merchandising to touch on all fields.

Thank you very much. I appreciate it.