

# Thinking big in Delaware



**P**atrick Harker is the 26th president of the University of Delaware. He has been on the job since July with the full support of the Board of Trustees. "They know track my record after eight years at Wharton."

Indeed Harker has quite a track record. The Campaign for Sustained Leadership, which raised more than \$450 million for the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, is to Harker's credit the largest fundraising campaign at any business school in the world. He also created Wharton West, the school's San Francisco-based campus, and its Alfred P. West, Jr. Learning Laboratory. Knowledge@Wharton and Wharton School Publishing were also developed under Dr. Harker, and they enjoy a worldwide audience.

"Here at Delaware I follow a very successful Dave Roselle, long-tenured at 17 years. At Wharton, I followed a successful and long-tenured dean, Tom Garrety. People say 'isn't

“ **Students have to realize they are not customers in the classroom. That is a sacred place.**

it hard to follow in their shoes?' and I reply I need a different set of shoes," Harker says.

#### **Size those shoes for stature**

What does he propose to do differently? He intends to lift the University of Delaware to national and international prominence. "There is a sense of excellence here, and a desire to collaborate and listen to others. The ideas and creativity already exist within the institution."

To that end he assembled a strategic planning committee comprised of senior faculty and staff and tasked them with what he terms the most

important project of the year ahead. By January the committee members, working in pairs, will have spoken with 80 different stakeholder groups, conversing with faculty, students, staff, alumni, community members and state leadership.

The committee has been asked to consider any and all ideas about what the University could become. "What we're looking for is not a thousand things, but a handful of things that will move the university forward," Harker says. A University of Delaware Forum will roll out the plan in early May.

Until then, he won't talk specifics, but he will share some guiding principles. Play to strengths. Reinforce Delaware's tradition in the sciences and the arts. Look for ways to blend them to create new disciplines and programs. Break out of the traditional model. Delaware's longstanding commitment to problem-based and discovery-based learning strongly attracted him to the job.

Combine research and learning. Harker is quick to critique those who just talk the talk, "There's a lot of hype about blending research and academic learning experience, but most universities don't pull it off. This place has a phenomenal undergraduate research experience."

Utilize an interdisciplinary approach. "That's the way I have lived my whole life . . . straddling engineering and economics. I was department head of the engineering school and department head of the business school, then dean of the business school. The challenge is working with others and learning new things in order to have an impact across traditional disciplines. That's the trick. The people who end up succeeding and able to lead an organization have that broader perspective."

#### **The student as customer**

Dr. Harker is committed to treating students as customers outside the classroom by providing responsive student services that free up time for study and extracurricular activities. He objects to

*Continued on page 000000*

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Casey Patriarco, an English major and president of the student government.

that terminology in the academic setting. “Students have to realize they are not customers in the classroom. That is a sacred place. In there, they are co-learners with the faculty.”

So far students have responded well to him. Casey Patriarco, an English major and president of the student government, says Harker is personable and visible around campus. He meets with established student organizations and campus Joes alike. He eats in the dining hall and works out in the gym. Patriarco thinks students will feel a real difference because of the change in leadership. The previous administration worked hard on construction and campus beautification. Harker will emphasize expanding diversity, achieving international prominence and improving alumni relations, she predicts. She also anticipates a new vice president for student life.

Harker is not starry-eyed about technology. “It is not something to brag about. It’s a tool. Sometimes, the best technology for a particular a topic is still a piece of chalk and a blackboard. Sometimes you can be inspired, wowed, energized by a great lecturer. Those days aren’t gone. What’s the most efficient, effective way to learn? It may vary not just by course, but by topic within a course.”

Harker is not likely to let challenges stand in the way. Regarding

prominence, he says “Number one, without a doubt, is attraction and retention of faculty. They are the lifeblood of a university. U.S. institutions have been the magnet for talent from around the world, but as universities in China and Eastern Europe grow in international prominence, the source is starting to dry up. In certain disciplines — the sciences, social sciences, finance — we are not producing enough faculty to replace people as they retire or are lured away to the private sector.”

**The role of the university**

Harker articulates a measured responsibility for workforce preparedness. “We can’t say we are going to prepare you for a specific job, and you may not take any other courses. We want well-educated people. In fact, back at Wharton, over and over again I heard students express regret that they didn’t get a broad enough education. That’s why people come to university.” While he speaks highly of Delaware’s community college and technical college system, he doesn’t want to compete with them. “A university’s niche in the education ecosystem is unique.”

Meanwhile, a large appetite to move onto the national and international stage will require capital. Delaware’s \$1.3 billion endowment aside, the university is a tuition-driven



Mark Barteau, planning committee co-chair and former chair of the chemical engineering department.

institution. “So we have to put a lot of emphasis on alumni relations and fundraising. We have 130,000 living alumni. But you can’t ask people for money unless they are engaged, energized and involved. Alumni relations is key,” Harker says.

He looks for enrollment growth in graduate programs. They will help achieve prominence, and they don’t require capital for dorms, dining halls and other infrastructure. The relationship with the Delaware state legislature is solid. “They are good to work with and they are very supportive, but I don’t expect a large increase,” Harker observes.

As you might expect, marketing is not a dirty word to the former head of one of the world’s most prominent business schools. “We need to build the brand, create pride, and let people know who we are. We are in a bit of a media vacuum between Baltimore and Philadelphia. We have to work doubly hard to get our message out. If we don’t tell them, they’ll never know,” Harker reasons.

Mark Barteau is a planning committee co-chair and former chair of the chemical engineering department. He’s enthusiastic about the new president’s impact. “For the first time in 25 years, I feel that we have leadership at the top whose ambition for the institution matches my own and that of my colleagues.” Chemical engineering has been a top 10 department for decades, hiring tenured faculty away from places like Purdue, Cornell, Northwestern, Exxon-Mobil and DuPont.

“Yet we pay the price for being in a less highly ranked university,” he adds. “We are the only one in the top 35 that is not eligible to nominate faculty members for fellowships from the Packard Foundation. We do not have AAU membership. The need for more prominence is also felt when we compete for multidisciplinary center grants. Through the strategic planning process initiated by President Harker, we are setting our sights on where we want to be as an institution.”

Tom Robinson is an editor of *The Greentree Gazette*.