

Q&A

PRESIDENT JOEL S. BLOOM



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Named president of NJIT in January, Dr. Joel S. Bloom recently shared thoughts about his new post and the university's direction with Jean Llewellyn, executive director of NJIT's Strategic Communications Office. Previously, Dr. Bloom served as vice president for academic and student services and was the founding dean of Albert Dorman Honors College.

As a member of the university community for many years, how has becoming president influenced your perspective?

It's a very different perspective. As president, it's much broader with respect to stakeholders. In my previous position, even with the additional responsibilities I had as dean of the Honors College, the stakeholders were a considerably smaller group.

First, there are the trustees. As a vice president, you work with the university's trustees to some extent, but not to the much greater degree that you do as president. That's a very significant change.

Another change involves the external government relationships that are within the purview of the president. While you would occasionally read a newspaper article or online blog for news about the governor, the state legislature, the state budget and quarterly income from corporate revenue, you pay much more attention to such news because it involves funding for our university. You have to be very aware of how the governor and legislature, and their senior

staff, can influence what we can achieve as a public institution in higher ed.

Also, while I did work with a portion of the faculty in the past, as president you must invite input from the entire faculty and consider all of their concerns. The concerns of our students have always been of the utmost importance for me, so that's not new.

Students are still first and foremost when it comes to making decisions about the university.

How would you describe your style as a university administrator?

I truly appreciate everyone's input and advice, although I am more dependent on some people, among them senior staff and the deans. I am very willing to have conversations, to listen to people and take what they say into account.

However, at the end of the day, there is one person making decisions with the consent of the board of trustees, and that is the president. But, again, my style is open. It's inclusive and accountable. I try to keep that in mind on a daily basis.

Does leading a technological research university present special challenges?

Yes, there are several challenges.

One is to ensure that our students can succeed at a school with a very rigorous curriculum.

Then there's the cost of maintaining a world-class technological research university, and that requires having the resources to recruit outstanding faculty and provide the best equipment and facilities. The reality is that resources for supporting research are shrinking. Helping everyone understand the special challenges we face as a research university is a challenge in itself.

Therefore, we must consider other funding opportunities, including individual, corporate and foundation fundraising as well as opportunities to expand corporate training, global online education, corporate R&D relationships and commercialization of NJIT's intellectual property.

“GREAT INSTITUTIONS CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE TO BE CREATIVE, TO BE INNOVATIVE. TO DO THAT THEY NEED RESOURCES, AND ONE OF THE MOST VALUABLE RESOURCES IS TIME.”

The opportunity to build relationships with business and industry is critically important. We're preparing professionals who can leave our school and go right into the workplace. We need to make sure that we're doing it well, and industry has to be assured that we're meeting their human capital needs.

What do you find most satisfying about your new position?

It's very satisfying to have the opportunity to promote NJIT's shared-governance initiative. Today, our success requires input from as many people as possible, involving administrators, faculty, staff, students and alumni as stakeholders in shaping the future of our school.

Another point of satisfaction is being able to focus on what we've been calling the university's thematic areas – digital “everyware,” sustainable systems, life and healthcare science and engineering – and helping to bring more talent and faculty to the university in these fields.

I'm also enjoying some of the external relationships that come with being a university president, especially greater interaction with alumni. I'm much more engaged with the Alumni Association as president, and working with alums is both important and enjoyable. You get a lot of feedback about the quality of this institution from alumni. They say we're an outstanding school, and many want to continue providing the feedback and support that can help us become even better.

What are NJIT's greatest strengths?

The students, faculty and staff are our greatest strengths. Our diversity and location in Newark are seen as additional strengths. This is based on feedback across stakeholder groups as we engage them in the effort to grow and develop the university.

What is NJIT's greatest institutional challenge?

A long-term financial plan that will support the continuous improvement of NJIT.

What must be done to meet this challenge?

The simple answer is we need to rethink how we do business. How we recruit and retain our students, how we deliver our curriculum with faculty and staff, how we conduct our research, and how we can develop new partnerships and resources. That's what must be done.

Perhaps we need to look at how to get a better return on our investment, our ROI. Based on national rankings we're doing well with ROI for our students and alums. But why not also ask about the ROI for the institution and its long-term economic viability?

How is NJIT's role in Newark evolving?

Our involvement in the city has really changed and grown over the past dozen years or so, and with the right planning Newark could be recognized as a major center for higher education. As the home of colleges and universities with some 47,000 students, faculty and staff, Newark ranks fifth among cities along the East Coast when it comes to the density of its higher-ed population, along with Boston, New York, Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia.

Our university and neighboring higher-education institutions have a major role in Newark. We're adding to the city's residential student population via new housing facilities, such as NJIT's Warren Street Village. The Village consists of six buildings, the residential Albert Dorman Honors College and five duplex Greek houses.

We continue to drive economic development, which includes the contributions of 90 startup companies based at our Enterprise Development Center. We continue to partner with UMDNJ, Rutgers-Newark, Essex County College, and with business and community partners through Science Park and the Council for Higher Education in Newark – CHEN.

The City of Newark's new master plan is very, very attractive. A Panasonic headquarters, a major new building, is coming to the city. We have a 20-year history of partnering with Panasonic.

The kind of growth we're seeing in the city, and our participation in that growth, has

moved beyond evolutionary. It's revolutionary. We bring talent – including planning talent and volunteer talent – to this exciting, positive development.

And what about NJIT's role on the national and international levels?

NJIT is working to become a preeminent national name through our research efforts, through all of our well-established academic programs and the growing Dorman Honors College, through our athletics programs, and the diversity of our student population. We want to achieve this not only within the United States. Opportunities in India, China, the Middle East and Africa must be on our agenda, too.

But we don't need to do this solo.

We should find appropriate partners, particularly in the STEM disciplines of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China – are leapfrogging past us in STEM. We need to both work with them as equals and learn from them. We definitely want to be engaged in Latin America and Asia. Eventually, we must also become more involved in Africa.

What would you like to see take place at NJIT in the years ahead?

Where to begin?

I'd say continuing to attract hard-working, high-achieving students, more scholarships, and outstanding faculty. Offering world-class facilities and broader educational opportunities for students and faculty, such as study abroad, interdisciplinary research and partnering with industry. Giving people more time to hone their intellectual and educational skills.

Great institutions create opportunities for people to be creative, to be innovative. To do that they need resources, and one of the most valuable resources is time. It's all about creating opportunities that attract the best students, faculty and staff, and giving them the time to make the most of those opportunities. ■