

Where to, BU? | Talking with Trustee Chair Robert Knox

Robert A. Knox, who in ten years of Boston University leadership has overseen the establishment of new governance policies and was vice chair of the search committee that selected President Robert A. Brown, is the new chair of the University's Board of Trustees. Knox (CAS'74, GSM'75) joined the board in 1997 and was elected vice chair in 2004; he succeeds Alan M. Leventhal, who served as chair for four years. *Bostonia* spoke with Knox about where BU has been, where it is now, and where it is going.

How has BU changed since you graduated?

It's changed dramatically, from being a high-quality school in Boston, with a large component of students from Massachusetts, to being a first-class research university. There has also been a transformation of the campus and a dramatic increase in the quality of the student body. The progress is evident in our consistently being awarded ever-larger research grants.

How did all that happen?

A lot of the credit goes to President Emeritus John Silber (HON.'95), but more recently we were extraordinarily fortunate to have recruited Bob Brown. The work that led to recruiting someone of Bob's caliber began in 2004, when the

board leadership changed and we implemented governance reform. That put Boston University at the forefront of not-for-profit transparency procedures.

How does transparency translate into action?

Before we made changes, I don't know how compensation was set, but now the way it's done is the compensation committee reviews something like thirty-two executives at the University, including all the senior administrative people, the deans, and a handful of other highly compensated people, just like in a real corporation. And this is not only about compensation. Those reviews are preceded by actual performance reviews.

Another thing that changed is the dialogue we have at trustee meetings, where every trustee is urged to speak out on any and every topic.

What are the big challenges ahead?

I would put this in the context of the ten-year strategic plan, which is a breath of fresh air. We need to continue to build the quality of the faculty. We are very focused on continuing to build the quality of the student body, and, as important, the quality of the experience that the students have on our campus.

One thing I'm proud of is our strength in recruiting such a diverse student body. It's a main strength of the University, and it's going to be a very big part of what distinguishes Boston University as a great global university.

Do you have a plan to attract the highest caliber of students?

I really believe that the fact that we are a university with a huge group of students from around the world is something that will appeal to more and more high school seniors. It's a global world, and that's a big plus for BU. I think we are attracting, and are going to be more successful in attracting, that kind of curious intellectual student who in prior years may have gone off to Middlebury or Antioch.

What are your plans for involving alumni in the growth of the University?

We have something on the order of 270,000-plus living alumni, and our rate of annual giving is around 10 percent. We are trying to be much more creative and provocative in getting alumni to start giving. The good news is, with so many alumni, if we can take the 10 percent rate and double it, it would be spectacular.

You graduated three decades ago. Do you recall a favorite professor?

Yes. That would probably be Jack Aber. When I was an economics major in the College of Arts and Sciences, I took his course in the School of Management. I think extraordinarily highly of him.

ART JAHNKE



Robert Knox says BU's diversity is a point of pride.

KALMAN ZABARSKY