

Fiorentino to Become Interim President April 1

Chris Fiorentino started teaching at West Chester University while working on his doctoral degree in economics. That was in 1983. He has chosen to work at WCU ever since because “I’ve never had a day when I wasn’t excited to come to work,” he says.

“My role has evolved over time,” says Fiorentino. “I started as an assistant professor, was the dean of the College of Business of Public Affairs for more than 20 years, and most recently, in 2013, became the vice president for External Operations. I have been given the chance to do a lot of different things.”

Fiorentino will take on his most diverse role yet when he becomes the interim president of West Chester University on April 1. President Greg R. Weisenstein is scheduled to retire March 31.

“I am honored to be named to this position,” says Fiorentino. “President Weisenstein did much to advance this university during his seven years as president. Enrollments are robust; our academic programs are recognized as top-notch; relationships with our unions and our workforce, in general, are good. This institution is, quite frankly, the finest it has ever been.”

Fiorentino also recognizes the challenges that he and other University leaders will face in the months ahead. “This interim period will not be a time of standing still,” he says. “We will build on the foundation of excellence laid by President Weisenstein and his predecessors to fulfill our mission to provide the best educational opportunities possible.”

The University’s workforce is turning over; in the last year alone, several cabinet-level University leaders have left the University. On the plus side, succession planning has been underway for the last several years, notes Fiorentino, and there is a strong group of emerging leaders across the institution. He also points to WCU’s excellent faculty and staff as a strength moving forward.

“I participated in the hiring of at least 100 faculty members over the years and I always gauge the interviewee’s level of interest and aptitude for teaching. Scholarship is important but excellence in teaching is what distinguishes West Chester University,” he says.

Fiorentino says that challenges include implementing a major reorganization of Academic Affairs, the first since 1987; negotiating the faculty collective bargaining agreement, which expired June 30, 2015; and furthering the strategic plan, *Building on Excellence*, which is now in its third year.

A safe and welcoming campus also is a high priority, says Fiorentino. A Campus Climate survey was conducted in fall 2015 and results will be available by the middle of spring semester. This information will provide guidance to Fiorentino and other University leaders as they work to promote an environment in which every member of the University community feels fully welcome and has the ability to achieve their goals.

Given his background and institutional knowledge, Fiorentino is confident that he will be able to hit the ground running on April 1.

“The president has been most gracious in helping me to acquire the knowledge and skills I need for this position,” he notes. But while his interim presidency will be a time of action, the first thing that Fiorentino will do is sit back and listen to many different stakeholders. “I will be connecting with the Council of Trustees and with individuals on and off campus to get their thoughts on the most effective ways to move forward during this time of transition,” he says.

In Fiorentino’s current role as vice president for External Operations, he is helping WCU fulfill its mission to serve local communities and the Commonwealth as a source of knowledge and skill development, a research center, and a service provider. He spearheaded the development of the Center for Community Solutions, which links business and civic leaders who have research needs with University faculty and staff who can address those needs. He also oversees University operations at the State System’s Center City Philadelphia site. Enrollment in WCU programs in Philadelphia increased more than 80 percent in fall 2015 compared to enrollments in fall 2014. External Operations also encompasses distance education, which makes a WCU education available to students throughout Pennsylvania as well as worldwide. There are currently more than 8,000 seats in distance education, a 455% increase in capacity from three years ago.

Given the scope of his work responsibilities, it’s no surprise that when Fiorentino is asked what he does in his off hours, he pauses. Off hours are few. But he tries to find the time to run on the weekends. Fiorentino views it as a great way to blow off steam and spend time with his wife, Sue.

“Sue and I are dedicated runners,” he says. “WCU organizations that are sponsoring 5K races for charitable causes should let us know. We will try to be there.”

Sue Fiorentino is an attorney who teaches classes at WCU in labor and employment law and human resources and also maintains a small consulting practice in these areas. Fiorentino smiles when the conversation turns to Sue and to their children. “I have always focused on being an involved father,” he notes.

The Fiorentinos have three children: Greg, a software engineer and WCU alum; Diana Marlin, a WCU grad and registered dietitian; and Jeff, a junior finance major at Penn State. The Fiorentinos also recently became grandparents.

“Having two of my three kids go here was very instructive,” notes Fiorentino. “They were always quick to tell me what was working and what needed improvement. The student experience is paramount; after all, that’s why we are here, to support an academic, cultural and social environment that ensures the success of every WCU student.”