

Finding a Leader Close to Home

Long-time Administrator Sheldon Drucker
Named Seventh President in University History

By Angelo Carfagna

After conducting a national search, FDU found its president close to home. On April 23, the Board of Trustees named Sheldon Drucker the seventh president in the history of the University. ■ Drucker, FDU's chief operating officer, was serving as interim president following the death of former President J. Michael Adams in 2012.

FDU President Sheldon Drucker, center, speaking with Metropolitan Campus sophomore nursing major Amanda Salazar, left, and Tayora Brown, a junior majoring in communication, along the Hackensack River Pathway.



“W

hile we were honored to meet and learn about many fine candidates, Sheldon Drucker was daily proving himself to be the best fit at the helm,” said Patrick Zenner, chair, FDU Board of Trustees, upon announcing the appointment. “He is a tremendous strategist, an individual with impeccable judgment, someone not afraid to make difficult decisions and, most of all, a truly honorable man who will always represent FDU with the utmost dignity and distinction.”

Drucker joined the University in 1996. First, as vice president for finance and treasurer and later as senior vice president and chief operating officer, he was part of a team that engineered a strong financial turnaround and developed more than a decade of consecutive balanced budgets. He further played a major role in numerous initiatives that forwarded the University’s global mission, including the establishment of FDU’s campus in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, which opened in 2007, and FDU’s School of Pharmacy, which welcomed its inaugural class in 2012.

“Most recently, in the last two years serving first as acting president and then as interim president, Shelley has demonstrated exceptional leadership qualities and proven himself an influential and inspirational president who can build on the foundation set by University founder Peter Sammartino, extend the vision of Michael Adams and carve his own legacy in the remarkable history of Fairleigh Dickinson University,” Zenner continued.

“I am incredibly grateful for the confidence the Board of Trustees and the community has shown in me,” said Drucker. “It is an honor and privilege to serve such a devoted and caring community. FDU has enjoyed a rich history of innovation and achievement, and I look forward to strengthening that legacy and doing everything possible to help our students transform their lives.”

Interim No More

As interim president, Drucker didn’t present himself as a candidate for the permanent position. “I didn’t think of myself as becoming president,” he says. “My entire focus was on moving the institution forward and preparing FDU for the future.”

Drucker says that he saw opportunities and challenges that he was well qualified to address. “I was proud to be part of a team that was making such a significant difference in our students’ lives.”

So when the trustees approached him about the possibility of taking the position permanently, Drucker, after discussing the prospect with his wife, Sandi, welcomed the opportunity. That decision surprised many people, including Drucker’s two adult sons, Matthew and Eric, his grandchildren and his friends and colleagues, who all thought he was considering retirement. Drucker explains, “I love being here, and I felt that I needed to do this. I felt a strong sense of responsibility to the institution, and I felt that I could make a real positive contribution and help continue the progress we’ve been making.”

Drucker’s experience and knowledge of FDU’s past and present gives him a strong sense of what will and what won’t work. A key member of Adams’ leadership team, he knows well the strategic initiatives taken and planned, and the challenges remaining.

Building Adams’ Legacy

As one of the leaders of Adams’ administration, Drucker provides continuity with the past, stability for the present and strategic insights that could well shape the future.

“Michael Adams was a visionary with many great ideas, and serving him filled all of us with great pride,” he says. “From the creation of the global-education mission to the many global- and local-related initiatives, Michael raised the stature of FDU. We owe it to him and the University to do all we can to build on this impressive foundation and extend his legacy.”

Adams had equally high regard for Drucker and often introduced him as the man who deserved most of the credit for FDU’s success. “He was his right-hand man, providing wise counsel, operational execution and fiscal integrity,” remembers Zenner.

Metropolitan Campus Provost Joseph Kiernan says Drucker was responsible for more than a decade of positive operating surpluses and significant investments in FDU’s learning-and-living en-



vironment. He also played a key role in securing FDU’s first investment-grade bond rating, which has been continually reaffirmed.

“I believe you must be conservative and prudent fiscally,” Drucker says. “You should not be afraid to take risks, but you must first carefully assess those risks.”

Kiernan added that Drucker has helped significantly boost financial-aid allocations for students and, this year, helped produce the lowest tuition increase in more than three decades.

Drucker’s business insights and fiscal expertise further helped bring some of Adams’ visions to life, such as FDU-Vancouver and the School of Pharmacy.

Drucker says his proudest moment at FDU was producing the tribute event in Michael Adams’ honor following the announcement of his retirement and just a few weeks before he passed away.

“It was so gratifying to have the opportunity to give something back to this person who had meant so much to all of us and who did so much for the University,” Drucker says. “I knew we did something very special when Michael walked in and received

President Drucker, clockwise from top, with students in the Dickinson Hall lobby on the Metropolitan Campus, working in his College at Florham office and preparing to speak at the College at Florham picnic in May.

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— Sheldon Drucker

a heartwarming and very prolonged standing ovation. Michael called me later and said it was one of the best days of his life.”

Drucker adds that he learned many lessons from Adams and intends to use those lessons well. “He was a great leader, and he will be missed; but I believe I can carry on his vision while adding my own important pieces.”

The Challenges Ahead

To build on this legacy won’t be easy. “While we’ve come a long way, we are facing serious challenges,” says Drucker. The biggest one for FDU, and indeed for all of higher education, he says, is affordability — with so many students and their families increasingly struggling to fund a college education.

At the same time as family dollars are stretched thin, many sources of funding for colleges and students — including government and corporate support — are declining, and the costs of operating a college, particularly the cost of health care benefits, are rapidly rising. These added costs, says Drucker, are placing pressure on colleges to raise tuition.

“We need to ensure that students who want and deserve an FDU education have that opportunity; therefore, one of my primary goals is to raise more funds for FDU, particularly money for scholarships,” Drucker says. “We also need to increase the endowment, because that will have benefits across the University.”

While FDU’s endowment has more than quadrupled since Drucker arrived in 1997 (from \$9 million to more than \$42 million), he notes that there is great potential — and great need — to strengthen it further.

Drucker adds that the University must continue to assess and ensure the highest quality of academic programs, continue to introduce new and innovative programs and continue to provide strong support services and invest in its facilities.

Such goals require a team approach, Drucker says, and he is looking forward to working closely with University Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Christopher Capuano, other senior leaders and “our outstanding faculty, staff and alumni.” Drucker adds that FDU’s greatest accomplishments have been the result of many people working together as one united team. “We are in this together, and we are all here for the same purpose,” he says. “I need your ideas. I need your enthusiasm and I need your help. Together, we will chart a path that will lead to greater prosperity for the University and its students.”

The Value of Hard Work

Drucker will tackle the challenges ahead with the same determination he has brought to the University for nearly two decades and with one prevailing philosophy: “Hard work pays off.” He says, “I believe firmly in the value of hard work. If you work hard, you have a better chance for success.”

Drucker often tells students that with hard work and passion they can make their dreams come true. While everyone makes mistakes, he adds, “we should not be solely measured by our mistakes, but we should be measured by how much we learn from them and how we respond to them and work to overcome them.”

He also often advises students to take advantage of college not just for the education it can provide, but also for the connections and relationships that can provide direction, support and inspiration throughout their lives.

Drucker’s belief in hard work and his belief in the power of education were both nurtured early in life. Born in New York City, he was raised in Brooklyn and Queens. The son of a bagel



maker, Drucker says his father only reached the eighth grade, but he and his older brother were expected to do well in school.

“There was no question about going to college,” he recalls. “My parents always stressed the importance of getting a degree.”

Drucker says he was heavily influenced by his older brother, Ron, who was a “self-starter.” Ron studied law and is still practicing today. Drucker went to Pace University to study accounting and graduated in 1966. He worked throughout college, and before commencement he had secured a position with Lybrand, Ross Bros. & Montgomery (now PricewaterhouseCoopers).

Drucker eventually became a partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers from 1979 to 1993, heading up its higher-education practice in New Jersey, and then chief financial officer of IVC Industries, Inc., before joining FDU.

The Joy of Learning

Higher education was a natural destination for this numbers man. Drucker is passionate about learning, devoted to research and fact-finding and consumed by a thirst for knowledge. Those who know him well say he doesn’t rest until he finds the answer he seeks, and he’s particularly skilled at bringing disparate bits of information together to solve problems and make decisions.

His favorite subjects are science and history, and he enjoys books on these topics as well as good fiction (that includes listening to audio books on his long commutes to and from

his Princeton Junction, N.J., home). A big fan of PBS, Drucker says he relishes programs like “Nova,” “Nature,” “Independent Lens,” “Masterpiece Theatre” and “Frontline.”

Drucker is also a huge trivia buff. In fact, he’s able to take on 10–15 people at a time in Trivial Pursuit and still emerge victorious.

FDU’s new president is aligned with the global mission perfectly, as he loves learning about different cultures and enjoys traveling whenever possible. Among his favorite places to visit have been China as it was emerging in the early 1990s and the beautiful fjords of Scandinavia.

While retirement may have provided time for leisure reading and traveling, Drucker is now more eager to learn how to best serve FDU. “I am excited to help our students, and I am excited to support our faculty,” he says. “And, I am very excited to share our story with others and raise awareness and support for our University.”

Kiernan remarks, “Perhaps the greatest asset Sheldon Drucker brings to the presidency is his undeniable care and love for FDU.”

Drucker says his only regret is that he didn’t find FDU a little sooner in his career. “This is a University I dearly love. It’s a great place with many special people, and I know together we will continue to do what’s best and what’s right for our students.”

President Drucker with College at Florham students Jenna Cowie, left, a junior majoring in English language and literature and planning to complete the five-year QUEST teacher-preparation program, and Zane Decker, right, a junior majoring in film and animation.

A Few of His Favorite Things

- ▶▶ **FAVORITE MOVIE:** “Dances with Wolves”
- ▶▶ **FAVORITE ACTOR:** Tom Hanks
- ▶▶ **FAVORITE AUTHOR:** James A. Michener
- ▶▶ **FAVORITE BOOK:** *The Source*, by Michener
- ▶▶ **FAVORITE SPORT:** Football
- ▶▶ **FAVORITE TEAM:** New York Giants
- ▶▶ **FAVORITE TYPE OF FOOD:** Italian
- ▶▶ **FAVORITE MUSICAL ARTIST:** Harry Chapin
- ▶▶ **FAVORITE SONG:** “A Better Place to Be,” by Chapin
- ▶▶ **PET PEEVE:** Rubbernecking