A Tremendous Run

University of Dayton

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Recommended Citation
https://www.udayton.edu/news/articles/2014/12/president_curran_announces_plans_to_step_down_as_president.php

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A Tremendous Run

Daniel J. Curran, the first lay president in University history, announced plans to step down in June 2016 after presiding over an era of unprecedented growth.

Known as a bold, forward-thinking leader, Curran strategically positioned the Catholic, Marianist university nationally and globally, enrolled some of the largest, most academically talented classes in school history and dramatically expanded the University of Dayton's footprint from the Great Miami
River to China during the last 12 years.

A sociologist by training, Curran will take a one-year sabbatical, then join the faculty as a professor. As president emeritus, he will teach and conduct research on campus and serve as executive-in-residence for Asian affairs in the University of Dayton China Institute in Suzhou, China.

The University of Dayton's board of trustees will conduct a national search for his successor.

See video of Dr. Curran announcing plans to step down as president in 2016.

"I would call him a thoughtful and innovative visionary in higher education. That's the best way I can describe his mark," said Steve Cobb, chairman of Henny Penny and a 1986 alumnus who serves as chair of the University's board of trustees. "He has these natural intuitive skills that allow him to navigate the complexities of a university — through his demeanor, his knowledge, his social interactions. It's been a pleasure watching him lead our university with a certain finesse that has combined the science and art to decision making and risk taking.

"If I used just one word to describe Dan, it would be 'transformational.' It's been an unbelievable run."
View highlights of Dr. Curran's tenure at the University plus comments from Steve Cobb, chair of the University's board of trustees.

When Curran became president in 2002, he said he saw "a well managed university poised for greatness." Since then, the University has nearly doubled its footprint with two major acquisitions from NCR Corp. while changing its enrollment strategy to become a more selective university that attracts most of its students from outside Ohio — and many from around the world.

The University's endowment, first-year applications, number of endowed faculty positions and the value of its land and buildings have doubled. Student retention and entering test scores stand at all-time highs. Dayton Flyer student-athletes continue to boast graduation rates consistently among the highest in the country, and the overall winning percentage in all sports is better than any other time in school history.

"The University of Dayton is academically strong. It's financially strong. We weathered the rough economic period much better than other institutions and hired excellent faculty," said Curran, who plans to stay in Dayton. "I think this will be one of the top jobs in higher education. It's the right time to step down while the University is so well positioned to continue the momentum.

"As I reflect on my presidency, I am most proud of the cumulative successes of our students, alumni, faculty and staff. They have spread the University of Dayton's excellence and reputation around the world."

In an age when a college president serves an average of seven years, according to the American Council on Education, Curran continues a tradition of leadership stability at the University of Dayton. Almost a third of all alumni graduated during his tenure.

Approachable and unpretentious, Curran enjoys a warm relationship with students, who call him "Dr. Dan." In the Dayton region, he's widely respected as a catalyst for the renaissance of the southern edge of the city. And faculty say they appreciate the way he's boosted the faculty ranks by nearly 20 percent and increased the University's national stature in research. During the wake of the recession,
the University continued to hire and give salary increases to faculty and staff when many peer institutions across the country imposed hiring and salary freezes.

"Through his leadership, the University continues to recruit and retain a world-class faculty dedicated to achieving excellence in scholarship, teaching and service," said Carissa Krane, an associate professor of biology who serves as president of the Academic Senate, the representative body of the faculty. "Dr. Curran has demonstrated a deep commitment to enriching the student experience and student success through his support of faculty efforts to intentionally integrate academic knowledge with experiential learning within and beyond the curriculum."

Curran, 64, is the first president who’s not a Marianist priest or brother, and "I don't think we could have gotten a better person," said the Rev. Martin Solma, S.M., vice chair of the board of trustees and provincial for the Marianist Province of the United States.

"His respect and regard for the Marianist tradition and spirit at the University have been exemplary," he said. "For the Marianists, community is about building relationships, and Dan has done this very well. He has strengthened the University of Dayton as a regional and global leader in Catholic education. We're very grateful for his leadership."

Solma expressed appreciation for the partnership Curran established with Holy Angels parish and the $12 million renovation of the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception, funded through private support, that will be completed in August 2015.

Michael Galligan-Stierle, president and CEO of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, describes Curran as "a model" for contemporary leadership at Catholic universities, where more than 60 percent are now led by lay leaders.

"When Dan took office, lay presidents were still in the minority in Catholic higher education," he said. "Through his example, he helped demonstrate that individuals who answer the calling to lead a Catholic college or university — religious or lay — bring with them unique gifts that equip them to lead and to celebrate the Catholic mission of the institution. And over the last 12 years, Dan has continued to exude that leadership."

Curran has served on the ACCU board of directors since 2012, and he currently chairs the budget committee.

"Our board will miss Dan's insights and wisdom, not just in financial management, but also his ability to give practical voice to the distinctive values of our sector. For instance, the University's commitment to sustainability reflects his commitment to social justice," Galligan-Stierle said.
During Curran's presidency, the University launched the nation's first accelerated law curriculum; branched into high-demand health fields with doctor of physical therapy and master of physician assistant practice programs; introduced one of the nation's first bachelor's degrees in human rights studies; and offered the state's first master's program in clean and renewable energy. In addition, the University redesigned its undergraduate general education curriculum — what's called the Common Academic Program — and launched the Dayton Early College Academy, a charter school that prepares first-generation college students to earn a high school diploma and college credits at the same time.

The University earned national recognition for its transparent tuition plan that eliminates student fees and promises families that scholarships and grants will increase in value to cover any tuition increases during a student's four years to a degree.

Construction boomed with an investment of hundreds of millions of dollars of private funds into new and renovated residential and academic facilities, including the transformation of NCR's former corporate headquarters into a home for the nationally renowned University of Dayton Research Institute. Donors committed more than $300 million in private support, which includes the largest single gift in school history — $12.5 million from George and Amanda Hanley's Chicago foundation to fund curricular initiatives through the Hanley Sustainability Institute.

The University emerged as a national leader in partnering with high-tech companies that are locating laboratories and offices on campus and providing an invaluable training ground for students. In 2013, GE Aviation opened a $53 million research center — an extraordinary move for a Fortune 100 company — and Midmark Corp. moved its corporate headquarters to the 1700 South Patterson Building. In 2014, Emerson Climate Technologies broke ground on a $35 million global innovation center.

During the next 18 months, Curran said he wants to work with the faculty on academic initiatives, visit alumni communities and raise funds to renovate Chaminade Hall as a home for the Human Rights Center and the Hanley Sustainability Institute.

"I've been humbled and privileged to lead the University of Dayton during such a transformative time in our history," Curran said.

Click on the photo at the top of the page for a gallery of photos from Curran's tenure.

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