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Get Ready to Fly : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Monday May 20, 2019

Get Ready to Fly

By Eric F. Spina

“Is this the first time on campus for anyone?” Lizzy Craft, admission and financial aid counselor, asked a roomful of trustees and administrators.

We all laughed, but, because we were being treated like visitors, it *felt* like the first time.

As part of the board of trustees’ meetings last week, trustees hopped in golf carts to tour campus with student tour guides and participated in the same high-tech, high-touch interactive presentation prospective students and their families experience when they visit.

The University of Dayton’s trademark hospitality starts the moment a family pulls up to the visitor’s center. It’s not unusual to overhear parking attendant Todd Sanders ask, “How was your trip from Chicago?” Or Buffalo? Or Washington, D.C.?

As prospective students walk into the softly lit Albert Emanuel Hall, they're introduced to student life with a floor-to-ceiling video wall that welcomes them to "the neighborhood." On another wall, they're invited to see themselves as Flyers: "Here is where you'll take the course that will change the course of your life. Here is where you'll find a community that is always in your corner. Here is where you'll reflect on the why in what you want to do. It all starts here."

We've taken a page from Disney in creating a high-quality, feel-good experience for first-time visitors — and future graduates — largely through the eyes of current students. With every fact and figure at their fingertips — and a deep love for UD — our student tour guides demonstrate first-hand the campus experience to prospective students and their families like no one else can.

"This is my victory lap," Hannah Gahimer '19, of Indianapolis, told trustees during a late-afternoon tour around the historic core of campus bursting with spring bloom. As Hannah prepares to enter Indiana University Bloomington's law school, she cheerfully estimates she has given 215 two-mile walking tours over the past four years.

"That's 430 miles walking backwards," she said as her group laughed.

Hannah is one of 49 "student ambassadors," and they're all loaded with easily digestible facts like the price of doing laundry (free) to the average class size (26 students). Over the last 10 months, they've given approximately 2,100 tours to 8,265 families.

Beyond statistics, they're the face of UD, and tell personal stories of their experiences here in an authentic way that resonates with students searching for the right fit. Without a doubt, I think that they are the biggest reason why UD will welcome another one of the largest, most talented, and most diverse undergraduate classes in our history this fall.

Jason Reinoehl, vice president for strategic enrollment management, shared this behind-the-scenes look with trustees to show them how we shine in a hypercompetitive student recruitment marketplace.

"Can we exude a sense of welcome, a family spirit, a warmth while at the same time exude a sense of excellence and cutting-edge educational experience?" asked Jason at the end of Lizzy's presentation.

It didn't take long to hear the answer: "Where do I sign up?" asked longtime trustee Marge Cavanaugh.