

Providing a Quality Education

An Interview with Stuart Rabinowitz, President, Hofstra University

EDITORS' NOTE *Stuart Rabinowitz was chosen by the Hofstra University Board of Trustees to serve as the eighth president of the University on December 20, 2000 and assumed office in June 2001. Prior to his appointment, he served as Dean of Hofstra University School of Law from September 1989 through June 2001. He joined the faculty of the Law School in 1972. President Rabinowitz currently holds the*



Stuart Rabinowitz

Andrew M. Boas and Mark L. Cluster Distinguished Professor of Law. President Rabinowitz has held positions with a number of important government and community organizations, including the Judicial Advisory Council of the State of New York Unified Court System, County of Nassau. He currently serves as a member of the board of directors for the Long Island Association and as co-vice chair of the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council. He is a member of the board of directors of Accelerate Long Island and the Long Island Regional Advisory Council on Higher Education. He served as a trustee of the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities and on the board of directors of the Long Island Technology Network. President Rabinowitz is a former chair of the Nassau County Local Advisory Board. Additionally, he served as a member of the Nassau County Commission on Government Revision. He received a juris doctor, magna cum laude, from Columbia University School of Law and graduated from the City College of New York with honors.

INSTITUTION BRIEF *Hofstra University (hofstra.edu) is a private institution whose primary mission is to provide a quality education to its students in an environment that encourages, nurtures, and supports learning through the free and open exchange of ideas, for the betterment of humankind. Hofstra University is fully committed to academic freedom and to the transmission, advancement, and preservation of knowledge for its own academic community and for the community at large. Hofstra University offers undergraduate and graduate programs taught by a research-active and professionally engaged faculty.*

Will you highlight the history and heritage of Hofstra and how the University has evolved?

We started, like almost all universities, in one room with a few full-time faculty in 1935. We actually began as a suburban extension of New York University. We Long Islanders, and even though I wasn't alive back then, so I'm using the "we" as a general term, are a feisty bunch, and especially the people at Hofstra. We seceded from NYU in 1937.

When that first class graduated, they were given the option of getting a degree from Hofstra College, which was brand new, or from New York University, which was obviously better known than the two-year-old Hofstra College. However, unanimously, they voted for the Hofstra College degree. I think that gives a sense of the pride that imbues the campus, and the little bit of a chip on our shoulders that we have at Hofstra, and as Long Islanders.

Hofstra became a university and developed some great schools. When I became president, my vision for Hofstra was that while it was a good regional school, it needed to be an excellent national and international university. I spent time talking to a lot of people before I became a candidate for president, and after I got the job, I knew that we had long passed the ability to be a small, liberal arts and sciences university of excellence like Amherst or Williams, because we had too much land, too many buildings, and a huge athletic program to support, so we needed a lot of students. We needed to branch out and become a fully-textured university. I looked around at other universities and two came to mind, which were George Washington Washington, D.C. and Boston University in Boston.

One of the things we had to do was build up our science and technology offering. We were fortunate during my presidency to create the first new allopathic medical school in New York in 40 years, and we entered into a unique partnership with Northwell Health to do that. We developed a School of Engineering and Computer Science; a School of Health Professions and Human Services.

Hofstra had a long history of holding unique conferences on various U.S. Presidents. We would hold conferences on every president, from FDR through President Obama's conference which is scheduled for next year. We were fortunate to attract the interest of Peter Kalikow, who funded a professorship in the American Presidency. We thought it would be a great idea if Hofstra became involved in the study of the Presidency before the President was elected.

We saw a Presidential debate that took place at a university and thought we should host one at Hofstra. Many people laughed about Hofstra applying for a Presidential debate, but I said why not? We applied and we talked to the commission and we got one. Not only did we get one, we got it two more times in a row. Hofstra is the only school in history that has hosted a Presidential debate in three consecutive election cycles. This is one of our niches and we now have a School of Public Policy and Government named after Peter Kalikow as well.



President Rabinowitz speaking at Hofstra University



The iconic clock tower at Hofstra University

Is the Hofstra of today well understood and how important is it to build a better awareness for Hofstra?

This is one of our most important jobs. First you need to build it, and then you have to tell people what you built. We have entered into an international recruitment partnership with a company called INTO. They have over 400 agents around the world and one of their jobs with respect to the Hofstra partnership is to get the facts out about Hofstra across the world. I think hosting the Presidential debates made a big difference in shining a light on Hofstra.

How critical is it to attract international students to Hofstra?

It is critical for us to do this. People still view us as mainly a New York Metro university, but 50 percent of our students are from out of the state. The world is so interconnected and is getting smaller, and no matter what the current politics are, our students will graduate in a world that's filled with people with different cultural values than theirs – different colors, different races, different beliefs, different religions – and a successful person has to know how to navigate a world where not everybody looks and thinks like them. The best place to start to

learn that is in college. I view diversity and inclusion in a broader sense, as an essential to a fully textured undergraduate and graduate education.

What has made Hofstra so special for you and a place where you have wanted to spend your career?

When I first came here as a faculty member back in 1972, I planned to come for a year or two. I never went away to college. I went to City College of New York, and I lived with my parents in the Bronx, and then I was lucky enough to get a scholarship to Columbia Law School, and I still lived with my parents in the Bronx. I thought I wanted to go into teaching and my professors at Columbia had urged me to do it. I interviewed all over the country and wound up at this brand-new law school on Long Island that hadn't even been accredited yet.

I fell in love with the people I worked with, and I fell in love with the idea that, even in an institution that was just starting, you could have influence and make a difference. It wasn't like there were generations of senior faculty.

I married and had children and then I became dean of the Law School. I never thought I would become dean and was happy

teaching, but people pushed me to do it. I was a pretty good Law School Dean. I found that I didn't mind asking people for donations and gifts, and as you can see, I'm a talker, so I was pretty successful at raising money.

I was then drafted when the opening for the presidency came about. I didn't think I had a shot in the world to become president, because at that time the idea of a lawyer and a Law School dean becoming president of a whole university of which the law school was only a small part, was shocking. I was selected for the position and this is my 18th year as president.

Are you able to enjoy the process and celebrate the many wins that you have had over these 18 years as president of Hofstra?

I'm saving the celebrations for when I retire. I'm going to take all my plaques with me and my awards and photos. I feel good when something we plan works out, but there's always another challenge to face. I'm very obsessive about Hofstra doing as well as it can do. Being the president of a university with 11,000 students is sort of like being a mayor of a small town. We have over 2500 employees. Something could go wrong at any given point in time so you can't relax. That is why my wife tells me every day that I'm getting too old for this. ●