Hart Speaks on Legislature, Employee Issues, 'Go Get 'Em' Attitude

University Communications
February 2012

Ann Weaver Hart, the sole candidate for the presidency of the University of Arizona, spent Tuesday afternoon in question-and-answer sessions with employees and students, during which she shared stories from her career, discussed her plans to make herself known to the Legislature and spoke of the need to get more students to graduate on time.

She also said she is committed to maintaining benefits for same-sex couples at the University regardless of what happens at the state level.

The forums took place in the Kiva room of the Student Union Memorial Center and followed a day of Monday meetings with the Presidential Search Committee and Search Advisory Council, the President's Cabinet, University deans, shared governance groups, the Tucson community and local media.

The Arizona Board of Regents is scheduled to vote Friday morning on her appointment.

Tuesday's faculty session drew about 30 faculty members, but the session for appointed personnel and classified staff was standing room only.

Chair of the Faculty Wanda Howell, University Distinguished Professor of Nutritional Sciences, told faculty the University can be optimistic about Hart's arrival.

"This is a good day," she said.

Hart spoke of her background representing higher education in five states before Arizona, including as president of the University of New Hampshire, which like the UA is a land-grant university, and her current position as president at Temple University, located in an urban area of Philadelphia.

She feels that all her previous experiences in other places have prepared her for the UA, she said.

Speaking to the challenges she faces as she joins the UA, Hart explained that she needs to establish a relationship with the faculty and students so they feel comfortable letting her be the representative of their university.

Hart needs to feel a sense of "go get 'em" from the UA community even when people don't agree with her and wants people to support her and be comfortable communicating with her, she said.

"That shared commitment helps us get over a lot of disagreements," she said.
In both the faculty and the staff sessions, she mentioned "frayed edges" at the University that need attention.

For example, Hart said, "This university has a very poor track record of getting our undergraduate students to graduate on time and in high numbers."

She said she plans to identify areas where the UA has not given sufficient attention and support.

"I came to the University of Arizona because of the institution that it is and can be," Hart said.

She said academic medicine will be a priority, and she later noted that the easiest part of leadership is forming a vision.

"The hard part is the implementation thing," she said, to which the audience responded with laughter.

She said it is "both immediate and urgent" to focus on how to build on the medical school in Phoenix while maintaining the strong, research-based College of Medicine in Tucson.

Appointed Professionals Advisory Council Chairman Ronald Wysocki, assistant staff scientist at the chemical synthesis facility in the College of Science, said he has noticed that other universities tend to have a staff classification and a faculty classification, but the appointed personnel classification, which places a large number of staffers on annual contracts, is rare. He asked whether Hart has any experience with it.

Hart said Temple has a similar classification and that she has pushed to change it so some of the contracts would run three to five years.

It's obvious that some positions will be needed for longer than just a year, she said.

"It's important to analyze how many positions truly need to be year-to-year for flexibility and how many need to be translated into three- to five-year contracts," she said.

Staff Advisory Council President Angie Gomez, grants administrator for engineering proposal services in the College of Engineering, said recruiting faculty has always been extremely important but wanted to know how Hart views recruitment and retention for classified staff and appointed personnel.

Hart said a commitment to professional development is important, and it's critical to make sure jobs are available internally for growth and development for all levels of staff.

"The human resource is the key to this institution," Hart said. "And that resource is critical at all levels."

Regarding state lawmakers, Hart said she plans to establish relationships with them early and maintain those ties so they know her as a person already when bills come through that affect the University.
"It's critical to know people personally," she said. "You can't go advocate two times during a legislative session and testify once at a budget hearing and expect to be known and understood."

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