President Robbins Holds Office Hours to Hear Student Input, Concerns

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University of Arizona President Robert C. Robbins talks to students every chance he gets? whether it's during his morning commute to work in his UA golf cart, while walking through the Student Union Memorial Center at lunchtime, or at a Wildcats basketball game.

"The most fun I have in my whole job is getting to talk to the students," Robbins says. "It also helps me understand what we're doing that works for them and what we could do to better serve them."

In order to reach even more students on campus, Robbins began holding monthly Student Office Hours this fall. Undergraduate and graduate students requested a 15-minute meeting with Robbins on any topic, from getting his professional advice to sharing their suggestions for improving campus.

"I encourage everybody to tell me exactly what's on their mind; don't hold back," Robbins said. "I also hope they realize they can come back. It's not a one-time thing; it's the beginning of a relationship, and my hope is I can be helpful to them."

Robbins has met with nine students in office hours since the program began in September. He's offered career advice, especially for those interested in attending medical school like he did, and he has discussed topics ranging from mental health care on campus to the role of the UA's cultural centers.

Stephen Westby, a senior majoring in criminal justice and public management and policy, attended the president's office hours and said he and Robbins chatted easily about sports and politics before getting to the main purpose of his visit: to discuss the experience of veterans who study and work at the UA.

"I was nervous waiting to get into the office and start chatting, but within five seconds, Dr. Robbins has you on a familiar level. You're laughing and joking and he feels just like any other person you'd interact with on campus," said Westby, who also is director of first-year experiences at the UA VETS Center [1].

Westby, who served in the U.S. Army from 2005 to 2010, talked with Robbins about an effort to identify UA employees who are veterans. While the number of student veterans on campus is readily available, it can be harder to identify faculty and staff who served, Westby said.

"We want students to know that they're not alone," he said. "Sometimes as a student veteran you can feel like there's not a whole lot of people in your corner, outside of the VETS Center."

With the president's encouragement, Westby and his colleagues are organizing a reception on
Feb. 22 to recognize UA employees who are veterans. (Those interested in attending can email Westby at sixstringsen@email.arizona.edu.)

Westby said the experience of meeting with Robbins was overwhelmingly positive.

"As a student, it's really cool because there are 45,000 students here, and he was able to take the time and sit down and genuinely listen," he said. "It's a good chance for students to raise the concerns that they have with somebody who has the power to make changes. Of course, he may not be able to promise anything, but perhaps when he goes to make a decision about a group of students or students in general, he will consider those interactions he's had, and I think that's really powerful."

Due to the success of the program during the fall semester, it will expand in the spring, with additional spots available. Details are still being finalized, but students interested in attending Robbins' office hours can find information and request a spot via the president's website by clicking "Student Office Hours" and logging in with their NetID and password.

Although any student or employee can request a meeting with Robbins, the Student Office Hours ensure there is time designated for sit-down meetings with students every month.

In addition to his scheduled office hours, Robbins continues to have informal chats with students just about everywhere he goes on campus. And he's quick to emphasize that one of the most important pieces of the UA's recently unveiled strategic plan is for the University to be student-centric. With that in mind, he also encourages faculty to take the time to meet with and mentor students throughout their UA journey.

"What makes us special are our students," he said. "If we talk about students first and what we can do to help them become more successful, then we'll get our true north star right."

Source URL: https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/president-robbins-holds-office-hours-hear-student-input-concerns

Links
[1] https://vets.arizona.edu/
[2] mailto:sixstringsen@email.arizona.edu
[3] https://president.arizona.edu/contact-us