Professor to Provost: UA Honors Jeff Goldberg

College of Engineering
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A delayed flight and some lost luggage landed Jeffrey Goldberg at his 1985 interview for assistant professor of systems and industrial engineering wearing a flannel shirt and jeans, wrinkled from being worn on a plane overnight.

That getup took him far.

Not only did he get the job, but he's been with the University of Arizona ever since, in positions ranging from professor to dean of the College of Engineering to the University's interim senior vice president for academic affairs and provost. At a reception honoring his service as interim provost, held earlier this month, Goldberg was named a dean emeritus, an honor reserved for a select few.

"I've had the opportunity to do all sorts of great stuff. I've never been bored, and I enjoy the people I work with," he said. "I've been well paid, I've raised a wonderful family with the help of my wife and a whole host of other people. A lot of that success is due to the University of Arizona."

A Valued Colleague

Goldberg's colleagues speak highly of his problem-solving abilities and communication skills.

"Jeff is a real people person," said Jim Field, assistant dean for graduate education in the College of Engineering and professor of chemical and environmental engineering. "He has a unique way of connecting with everyone."

Goldberg said his foundation in engineering ? he holds bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in industrial engineering and operations research ? prepared him for every position he's held. When he moved into the provost's office in 2018, he asked systems and industrial engineering professor Larry Head to step in as interim dean for the college.

"Jeff is the type of leader who places people at the highest priority level of the organization," Head said. "He is supportive, encouraging and loyal to every member of the faculty, staff and student body. His integrity is unquestioned. You always know he will support the right and fair action ? and this approach has made the college and the University better."

Some of Goldberg's favorite memories through the years involve seeing people he placed in new roles be successful, attending his first Engineering Design Day and, he jokes, experiencing the University's vendor switch from Pepsi to Coca-Cola. When he was appointed dean of the College of Engineering in 2009, he got a license plate that reads "AZENGR" with a Wildcat logo to show off his UA pride.

"Jeff is an outstanding leader who has helped put us on a path for a very bright future at the
University," said UA President Robert C. Robbins. "His vision, determination and commitment to serving others while he was in the College of Engineering and in his role as interim senior vice president and provost is exactly the kind of energy I want in all areas of the University of Arizona. As an engineer, he is always focused on understanding the challenges we face as a University and what we want our outcomes to be, and then creating solutions to reach those outcomes. With this pragmatism, he is a caring, thoughtful colleague, mentor and teacher, and I have benefited greatly from his partnership over the past two years. I am grateful for the foundation Jeff has built and for everything he has done for the UA and our students."

Wildcat for Life

As the University prepares to welcome Liesl Folks as the new senior vice president for academic affairs and provost, what's next for Goldberg?

Because he loves the UA too much to leave, he is going to stay on half time as an adviser to the president, working on the campus master plan, supporting development and mentoring strategies, and helping with Folks' transition. But he'll also be spending plenty of time relaxing with his wife, children and grandchildren; honing his golf game; and working on a book he has in mind about higher education administration.

"I feel like everyone should have the opportunity to have a supervisor that has the strengths that Jeff does. He's probably the best example of a values-driven leader that I've ever met," said Lisa Rulney, who worked with Goldberg when she was assistant dean for finance and administration in the College of Engineering and then when she assumed her current role, senior vice president for business affairs and chief financial officer. "Jeff will rarely say 'I.' You'll hear him say 'we' or 'the team.'"

As he heads into his 35th year with the University, Goldberg reflected on how an affinity for long-term positions seems to run in his family. His father worked for the post office for 35 years, and his mother worked for the city of Pittsburgh for 30. His brother and sister have been in their careers as a volleyball coach and a respiratory therapist for more than 30 years as well.

"People in my family just don't move much," he said. "There's something to be said about loyalty."

A version of this article originally appeared on the College of Engineering website.

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