Strategic Planning Process Will Be Broad and Inclusive, Robbins Says

University Communications
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UA President Robert C. Robbins [1] had a good reason for being a few minutes late to the Appointed Professionals Advisory Council meeting held in the Fred Fox School of Music on Monday.

He was getting longevity tips from the building’s 103-year-old namesake.

"I just got to meet him," Robbins told members of APAC [2] and others who had gathered in Crowder Hall. "It's very rare you get a chance to meet someone who has their name on a building."

Back when Fox was only 100, Alan and Daveen Fox - his son and daughter-in-law - donated $20 million [3] to the School of Music in honor of Fox. Their connection to the UA was through one of Fred Fox's former students, music professor Daniel Katzen [4].

On Monday, Fox was visiting the school to give a master class and hear a performance by the Fred Fox Graduate Wind Quintet.

Robbins, who rarely passes up an opportunity to meet someone new, chatted with Fox and then asked to have the legendary horn player join him on the Crowder stage. With encouragement from Robbins, Fox shared his secret to long life: Don't get stressed out.

Following that cue, Robbins spent almost an hour answering questions from UA employees while also sharing his own excitement about leading a "student-centric" research university with a land-grant mission.

He kept his opening remarks brief in order to leave more time for questions.

"It seems that I always run out of time - probably because the answers I give are too long," he joked.

As he did during a Q&A at a Faculty Senate meeting [5] last month, Robbins gave an overview of the strategic planning process he has begun, saying that it will look "broadly and deeply" at every aspect of the UA.

Some of its goals will be to break down silos, increase efficiency, identify diversified revenue streams, and position the UA to lead in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

He envisions a strategic plan that serves as a "road map that will excite people."
The strategic planning process will span about a year or so, and all employees will have an opportunity to participate, Robbins said.

"This will very much be a bottom-up plan," he said.

The questions posed to Robbins during the Q&A touched on a wide range of topics, including student retention, K-12 education and the need to better communicate about the work happening at the UA.

In his responses, Robbins emphasized that the University has an obligation to help the Tucson and Southern Arizona communities and ensure that students are academically prepared when they arrive at the UA.

Robbins said he will continue to make the case for the state Legislature to fund 50 percent of the cost to educate Arizona students, and is committed to working with the business community, schools and elected officials.

"I think so much of it is just showing up," he said.

Robbins shared his early impression of the UA's culture, characterizing faculty and staff as fiercely independent self-starters. He described his own style as leading through inspiration rather than intimidation.

The former cardiothoracic surgeon said being a university president is "a thousand times harder" than being a heart surgeon, and offered his own prescription for staying healthy: exercise, good nutrition, stress management and plenty of sleep, which Robbins called "the best performance-enhancing drug."

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