

Behind the Scenes with Beth Martin, NDNU President

We are delighted to share this special interview with NDNU President Lizbeth “Beth” Martin, Ph.D. Some of you may know Dr. Martin from her previous roles at NDNU – first as a faculty member and program director in the Graduate Psychology Department (1996) and as founding Dean of the School of Sciences in 2001. Dr. Martin returned to NDNU in September 2021 after serving as Vice President for Academic Affairs and later as Provost for Holy Names University in Oakland, CA for 12 years and a year as Interim Provost and Senior Vice President at Gonzaga University in Spokane, WA. She most recently served as a Senior Consultant with Academic Search, Inc., working with institutions of higher education on executive search processes.

Be sure to check out Dr. Martin’s welcome to “The New NDNU” on our website, <https://www.ndnu.edu/new-ndnu/> as well as her Op Ed piece in the San Mateo Daily Journal, “Changing with the Times: the New NDNU.”

https://www.smdailyjournal.com/opinion/guest_perspectives/changing-with-the-times-the-new-ndnu/article_1d813746-b6ee-11ec-84b0-bb6b4bbd6fb5.html

Why did you return to NDNU? Now that you have been here for nearly eight months, how has it been going?

Honestly, I was surprised to get a phone call asking if I would like to be nominated for the position. I was doing consulting at the time for Academic Search, Inc. and wasn’t looking for another job.

I had been with NDNU earlier in my career, had worked with some of the faculty, and knew some of the challenges first hand. I wasn’t interested in a position as President, but the idea of a start-up and turnaround venture was very exciting to me. Plus, the opportunity to be back with family in California was very appealing.

One of the first challenges I encountered was a lack of infrastructure to support general operations – key positions in Human Resources, Advancement, the Finance Office and Admissions had gone vacant. We didn’t have a full-time Chief Financial Officer, there was no alumni outreach, and we needed – and continue to need – to attract more students. We’re now getting up to speed in these areas, but it’s going to take a while until we are where we want to be, especially in the area of enrollment.

With respect to enrollment, the huge competition for undergraduate students led us to the decision to not continue to offer a residential undergraduate program. We just don’t have the numbers of students to sustain that model. On the other hand, we saw that online classes that were successfully used through COVID distance learning provided a way to reach adult learners who like to have as much flexibility as possible, hybrid courses in particular.

Right now, the public is a bit confused about our identity. One of our main priorities is to re-establish our identity and get past the myth that we have closed our doors. We want to set the story straight, that we are here to stay and poised for growth.

What steps is the university taking to attract more adult and graduate students?

We have six recruiters actively working to attract students, and we're stepping up our marketing and communications efforts to correct public perception that we're closing our doors. The Stanford option to purchase the bulk of the campus by 2025 has definitely contributed to this confusion, but this agreement actually strengthens our position.

Our focus going forward is on adult learners and how we transform the communities we serve by addressing the current teaching shortage, the need for trained mental health counselors, as well as business leaders current with the latest technology and skills. We are accomplishing this by offering adult learners the opportunity to hone their skills through continuing education and graduate programs to attain the credentials and degrees they need to become teachers, therapists and high-tech professionals fluent in STEM principles and other emergent technologies.

The MBA Management Science and MS Technology Management, in particular, afford us the opportunity to reach out to international students, offering them a work experience in the heart of Silicon Valley by allowing students on an F-1 visa to extend their time in Optional Practical Training (OPT). We're also looking at ways to reach out to indigenous communities. It's a very exciting time for NDNU.

What do you like best about your job?

I like how nimble we've become in response to challenges. In that regard, NDNU has really changed. Our faculty and staff are willing to be "quick on their feet" and ready to move if something is not working or there's a better way to move forward. We are making decisions wisely but if it turns out that a decision is the wrong one, we will modify or change it. That's huge in higher education.

The start-up, entrepreneurial nature of NDNU right now is also very appealing. The Sisters traveling to San Jose on a ship aptly named "The Indefatigable" reflects the remarkable grit they had along their journey. The faculty, staff and Board are driven by their example to never give up. One of the hallmarks of a Notre Dame education is to "Teach them what they need to know for life," and we're doing that with our focus on graduate studies, continuing education and starting in the Fall 2022, a baccalaureate degree completion program in business administration.

Any closing remarks?

Yes, I'd like to reiterate that that the NDNU that we all love is not going away. Even with the projected sale of the campus, we will be around for the long haul, renewed and stronger than ever. By offering a first-rate education that is affordable and truly teaches people what they need to know, we serve an important role in the Bay Area and beyond.