

Staben urges UI to be 'purpose-driven'

The University of Idaho president delivered 2nd state of the university address, says students are 'lifeblood'

Elizabeth Rudd/Lewiston Tribune

MOSCOW - University of Idaho President Chuck Staben wants the institution to be "purpose-driven," and he's focusing on ways to make that happen in the next 10 years.

Staben, who delivered his second state of the university address Monday, said there are purposes and distractions in every organization, and the purposes should sit clearly above the distractions. But, he said, the two have melded together in the past couple years at UI.

To overcome that, Staben said he has tasked Provost and Executive Vice President John Wiencek with creating a 10-year strategic plan to outline UI's purpose and establish a common goal the UI community can support.

Staben, the school's 18th president, told about 300 people Monday that he intends to see UI through this 10-year plan while at the helm of the university.

Recent "high-profile instances" within the athletics department - like anonymous allegations against football coach Paul Petrino that have prompted an internal investigation into the team - have distracted from the overall purpose of the athletic department, and UI as a whole, Staben said.

A "purpose-driven institution" can be attained when everyone is united by the same goal, Staben said. The main mission of UI involves its students, and Staben said the strategic plan is intended to achieve a vision for the "transformative power of education." The president said education at UI should not simply be a transfer of knowledge, but should change a student's life.

"We have many, many missions, but students are our lifeblood," he said.

Staben said the challenge for him - and every other member of the UI community, including students - during the next 10 years will be to change Idaho's "college-going culture" in order to get more high school students into college. There are about 5,000 high school graduates who could attend UI, but don't go to college at all.

"Their lives are not wasted, but they could be better," he said. "We could make them better."

He thinks it's a tragedy when high school students who would succeed in college do not attend, and said it does not help the state as a whole. He does not think that 100 percent of all Idaho high school graduates should go to college, but he said more should go than are attending now.

"We have one of the lowest rates and we just need to change that," he said.

The Idaho State Board of Education will implement a new direct admissions initiative this fall to notify students that they qualify for Idaho's four-year universities and college or two-year community colleges. Students will receive letters at the end of this month, and UI is planning an Enroll Idaho event for Nov. 10.

"We're going to go out to those extension centers, all 42, and promote ourselves there," Staben said.

The direct admissions initiative sends high school seniors the message that they can go to college, Staben said. He thinks the conversation among them needs to change from "should I go" to "where should I go."

"We're changing the game here," he said.

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