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Stony Brook University president begins tenure

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Dr. Samuel L. Stanley Jr. was wandering down a quiet hallway in Stony Brook University's newest research center Wednesday when a man walked by, stopped and did a double take.

"Hey, you're the new president," said 2005 graduate Tal Eidelberg, pumping Stanley's hand as he launched into the story of his start-up software company, Intrigma, which was moving into an office nearby.

"It's a huge day for you, I know, but it's also a big day for us - we just got this incubator space," Eidelberg said. "We've never had such a nice office."

The same could be said for Stanley, who began his tenure as Stony Brook's fifth president yesterday facing high expectations, fiscal challenges and a jumble of half-opened boxes in his office overlooking the academic mall.

"I'm trying to get my hands around the place and that'll take some time," Stanley said during a breakfast with administrative staff. "I don't think things are going to be easy, but I come to this with a tremendous sense of optimism."

Stanley, a medical doctor who was most recently vice chancellor for research at Washington University in St. Louis, comes to Stony Brook with strong academic credentials but less high-level administrative experience.

"I'm here to listen," he told two graduate student leaders in the first of several meetings with key stakeholders, elected officials and university staff yesterday. "I'm going to be doing a lot of listening and maybe less talking than you'd like at first."

Still, the slate of meetings highlighted some of the major issues facing Stony Brook: state budget cuts, financial aid, differential or higher tuition for SUNY's research universities, attracting and retaining graduate students and faculty.

The graduate students, while making a case for higher stipends to compensate for Long Island's high cost of living, told Stanley they longed for more input into decisions that affect them.



"What graduate students want the most is to believe you're working for them, even if you can't get it all done right away because of the budget issues," said Liliana Naydan, 29, a fifth-year graduate student in English and outgoing president of the Graduate Student Organization.

For his part, Stanley said he has identified three key issues he wants to examine early in his tenure: differential tuition, graduate rates and strengthening the school's ties with Brookhaven National Laboratory and Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory.

"This is a high priority," he said. "We need to build those relationships."

Of more immediate concern is a visit Monday by new state university system Chancellor Nancy Zimpher, with Stanley playing host after just a week on the job.

"The tour," he quipped, "will be for the both of us."

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