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New Canisius College president talks leadership style, goals

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Steve Stoute will officially start his role as Canisius College's new president July 1. Born and raised in Trinidad and Tobago, he immigrated to the U.S. in 2000 to attend Seton Hall University in New Jersey. He has a bachelor's degree in business administration from Seton Hall University, a master's degree in exercise and sport science from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and a J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. Stoute is currently vice president for strategic initiatives and chief of staff at DePaul University



COURTESY OF CANISIUS COLLEGE

Steve Stoute has been named the next president of Canisius College

in Chicago and has previously worked in higher education roles at Princeton University and the University of Southern California.

Stoute talked with Business First about his leadership style and his goals for the college. Responses have been edited for length.

What is your leadership style?

I think of myself as a servant leader. For me, leadership is about empowering other people to achieve their fullest potential. As the president of Canisius College, my expectation is to play a leadership role in the city and the community. That means moving all of us forward, not just Canisius. How do we engage more deeply in the Buffalo community to help move Buffalo forward, to help Buffalo be successful?

You are the first person of color and the youngest to lead Canisius College. What does that mean to you, and how you approach the role?

For me, I think it means Canisius is the right place for me, because I grew up understanding that leadership doesn't have one color, there's no right age for leadership. And so for me being first person of color to lead Canisius, what that means is I must ensure that I am not the last. I must do this job and represent our college and our constituents, our faculty, our staff, our alumni, our students, the community in Buffalo and Western New York, I must represent them so well that I am not the last person of color to lead Canisius College.

What are your short- and long-term goals for Canisius?

Get to know the college, get to know its people. In the short-term, it's go wherever I'm invited but to listen. Listen with empathy, listen attentively and understand how Canisius and how me personally as president of Canisius can help craft and create a shared vision for the institution and the impact

we can have in the lives all of those who love the institution.

In the long term, I like to think about it as throwing the gates of the institution wide open. It is making Canisius more accessible to as many people as want to engage with us. The long-term goal is to make us a resource, whether it's tapping our faculty for their expertise or engaging students in service work in the community or using our facilities to serve our community.

Declining enrollment and high financial costs are problems for many higher education institutions, including Canisius College. What are your strategies for tackling those challenges?

Managing and running a sustainable enterprise is critically important. That requires us to think more creatively and innovatively about the students we serve and how they serve them. The data still tells us this generation of students will change careers — not jobs, careers — 10 or more times. How do you prepare a student for a career that may not exist? That's what we do at Canisius. That's why it's so critically important to focus on our liberal arts foundation, on our Catholic Jesuit values.

The second piece to addressing some of the challenges are to think differently about what it means to be a higher education institution. Yes, the core of Canisius College will remain the same, so we need to grow enrollment in that way, but how can we engage with the local community, the business community, to think about what they need to support their workers, their employees to achieve their full potential, their business goals? It may be that Canisius can be a partner to them.

Lian Bunny

Reporter

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