

Keeping the Trains on Time — And Then Some

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In the fall of 2013, UNH President Mark Huddleston asked former football standout and business executive Arnold Garron '84 to serve as the interim dean of the Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics, following the departure of Dan Innis. Garron started on Nov. 1, 2013, and finished his tenure on March 15 with the arrival of new dean Deborah Merrill-Sands.

Was running your own company a consideration in agreeing to step into a role like this, knowing it was only temporary?

It really was a case of perfect timing. I had been working with the NFL and a major hospital on an osteoarthritis study and had just found out that the study was going to be benched in favor of increased research around concussions. It was downright serendipitous. I had about a month to wrap everything up with APG [Organizational Consulting, Garron's company] and get everything lined up at Paul.

But your availability was hardly your only credential for the position, correct?

I'd like to think not! My UNH degree was in hotel and business administration, and I earned a graduate degree in business management and administration from Harvard Extension School. Before I started my own company I held an executive position at John Hancock for more than a decade and also worked for Liberty Mutual and Xerox, so I know a good bit about the practical side of the business world. I've also stayed pretty plugged in to UNH, serving as a mentor for staff and students and sitting on the Foundation board of directors. And I love UNH. I think that counts for a lot.

Knowing your position was temporary, but not knowing for sure how long "temporary" was going to be, must have been its own challenge. Was it possible to set any goals beyond just keeping the proverbial trains running on time?

I really saw my role as getting the college ready for the new dean — but we also managed to get a lot of things done. We created a new minor in entrepreneurship and a new career and development program; we increased enrollments for two straight years; we introduced new tracks in finance and decision science and a new topic course in venture capital. Maybe most importantly, we really got the hospitality program back on track. When I started, there were maybe 20 to 25 students in the program. Today, we are back up around 75, which is great.

So what's the secret?

Communication, for one thing. We are really good at not telling people what's going on here. We worked on increasing our social media presence and revitalizing our newsletter; we created a research report and started a cool new speaker series — thanks in large part to a generous donation from my Foundation board colleague Lynne Dougherty '76. We put in a structure so we can get ranked against our competitors, which is a little nerve-wracking, but it's also really important.

What's next for you?

A little time off! Because of my role with the Foundation board, I thought I had a pretty good sense of what was going on at UNH when I took the job, but there really was a lot for me to learn in a short amount of time. I loved it — I've been in a lot of leadership roles, but this job was the best learning experience I've ever had — but it was exhausting, and I'm going to take my time before I jump into something else. This will be a hard one to top. I couldn't be more grateful to President Huddleston, the faculty and the alums for my time here, or more humbled by the opportunity to serve my university.

You were quite a fixture at football games, even before you took the position. Will we still see you there now that your tenure has ended?

Absolutely! These past two seasons were incredible, and I got to go to a lot of sporting events, not just football. The daily interaction with students I was able to have is one of the things I will miss the most about this job, and you can be sure I'll be back to cheer on our teams every chance I get.

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