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Lawrence University

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## Long-Serving Admissions Dean Looks Forward to Life without Student Applications

*Posted on: June 27th, 2011 by Rick Peterson*

Having overseen the enrollment of more than 10,300 Lawrence University students — nearly 40 percent of all Lawrence alumni alive today — Steve Syverson is looking forward to reading something other than high school transcripts and lists of extracurricular activities.

After 28 years of shaping Lawrence’s student body as head of the college’s admission office, Syverson will retire at the end of June. He is the longest serving dean of admissions in the college’s history.

“When my wife Diana and I arrived at Lawrence in 1983, I envisioned a career in which I would move to a new college every five or six years,” said Syverson, vice president of enrollment and dean of admissions and financial aid. “Obviously, 28 years later, it’s clear that our love for Lawrence and the Fox Cities changed those plans dramatically.”



**Steve Syverson, vice president of enrollment and dean of admissions and financial aid, is retiring June 30 after 28 years at Lawrence.**

Not only did Syverson's career plans change, but the college underwent its own transformation, physically and demographically. Seven new buildings have been built since he joined the college. Applications during his tenure soared from 879 his first year to 2,800 this year. Lawrence's enrollment in the fall of 1983 was 1,028 and 50 percent of the students were from Wisconsin. By 2010, enrollment had increased 48 percent to 1,520 degree-seeking students, with more than 70 percent of the freshmen coming from out-of-state.

"Steve has done exceptional work for our college and conservatory over the years, strengthening the student applicant pool and building a first-rate team of admissions staff," said Lawrence President Jill Beck. "His financial management has been crucial to the well-functioning of the university. We have all depended upon him to help sustain a vibrant academic and artistic core at Lawrence. Steve's sense of how to achieve balance in our entering classes, including athletes, scientists, humanists, musicians and artists, students of diverse backgrounds, social scientists and geographic diversity, has been masterful."

The goal of attracting bright, diverse and engaged students has remained constant the past two-plus decades, but the means of attracting them has undergone radical change since Syverson started.

"When I first arrived, my correspondence was typed by a secretary on a typewriter and re-typed from scratch if I made any edits," said Syverson, a native of California. "In the late 1980's, I recall getting talked into purchasing a contraption called a fax machine. Today we read our applications electronically on laptops and I haven't

sent a paper version of a memo in years.”

An outspoken critic of college rankings, Syverson has established himself as a nationally respected voice on the ethical treatment of students in the admissions process and has been interviewed numerous times for stories by The New York Times, Washington Post, PBS and others on the subject. He served as vice president of the National Association for College Admissions Counseling’s (NACAC) for admissions practices from 1988-91 and is a former president of the Wisconsin ACAC.

In 2005, Lawrence joined a growing movement of selective colleges to adopt a “test optional” admissions policy and Syverson subsequently served on the national Commission on the Use of Standardized Tests in Undergraduate Admissions.

“We need to challenge the perceived importance of the SAT and ACT,” Syverson said of the decision to go test-optional. “A student’s high school record is the best predictor of success in college, so if that student has done well in high school but has weaker test scores, they can ask that we not consider their scores.”

A past president of the Fox Cities chapter of Habitat for Humanity, Syverson plans to remain involved with the organization in retirement, as well as committing serious energy toward promoting the Certified Educational Planner, a national credential for college counselors.

“I believe strongly that every student should have access to good advice as they explore their post-secondary school options and the CEP will help families identify strong college counselors,” he said.

Ken Anselment, director of admissions at Lawrence since 2004, succeeds Syverson as dean of admissions and financial aid on July 1.