

# Petillo becomes dean at Sacred Heart at tough time

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It was March and well past ugly for the business community when Sacred Heart University tapped John Petillo to be the new dean of John F. Welch College of Business.

It was ugly for graduates looking for jobs in corporate America. And ugly for the schools that teach business, because the crashing stock market has damaged many endowments, and diminished household incomes are making it difficult for students to pay for private education.

"They wouldn't have admitted you to business school if you said this would happen," Petillo said Wednesday. The idea of General Motors Corp. and Chrysler LLC in bankruptcy and the country's biggest banks needing handouts from the federal government to survive, he said, no one could see it coming.

Before Sacred Heart, Petillo was chancellor and chief executive officer of Seton Hall University and president of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. He holds degrees in several disciplines and also was president of First Union Insurance Services.

"I think it's a good time to be the head of a business school," said Paul Timpanelli, president and chief executive officer of the Bridgeport Regional Business Council. "A lot of people are looking to go back to school for business. There's a lot of opportunity for a (business school)."

Timpanelli, a Sacred Heart graduate, said Petillo will have his work cut out for him because there's a lot of competition in the area, including Fairfield University and the University of New Haven. The University of Bridgeport has an expanding program and there's the University of Connecticut and Yale University.

Like Timpanelli, Petillo sees opportunity in this era, especially for teaching business ethics.

"We need to have a watchful eye on ethics," he said, adding that it will be incorporated into every lesson. Petillo said Jack Welch, former General Electric Co. chairman, recently told him the best textbooks for business these days are the Wall Street Journal and New York Times. So it's more important than ever for students to keep abreast of current events, Petillo said.

When he was selected in February, Thomas Forget, provost and vice president for academic affairs at the school, said one of Petillo's jobs will be to improve the curriculum.

So what Petillo and the Welch School are offering is a curriculum that includes some core philosophies of Welch himself. On Thursday, Sacred Heart announced it will inaugurate the Welch Master of Business Administration program this fall. The program is for working professionals.

Welch turned GE around from near bankruptcy in the 1980s to one of the most admired companies in the world. Although a legend in the business world, he is not without controversy and has been referred to as "Neutron Jack" for slashing jobs. Welch has spoken at Sacred Heart and said he believed that people who didn't like a job should leave because they were depriving themselves and the business of their best efforts.

Although the school plans to pursue new directions for its curriculum, Petillo said, it still will teach the basics. "The herd does not determine morality," he said, noting that's a key lesson from this current economic crisis. The new dean also said they're not going to let the world slip away at Sacred Heart because of this downturn. "It's a global community we're part of," he said. The faculty is diverse and the school's undergraduate curriculum emphasizes learning about other cultures, which he said will be useful for business professionals.

Petillo said he realizes students and the school are financially affected by today's crisis. Schools across the country have been trimming staffs, and Fairfield University cut 31 positions this week. Sacred Heart has offered retirement packages to some workers.

There could be changes in enrollment numbers, with differences between income levels.

"State community colleges are bursting at the seams because it's cheaper," he said. "Then they transfer."

Petillo said he expects fundraising will be a key element of his job. He said many donors that the college depends on have been hurt in this economy, but they must remember "education is the instrument to break down barriers."

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