Meet Marvin: University welcomes new president

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"These are not easy times. Our social and political climate can have a profound effect on higher education and what we do. It's no secret that there are deep political, social, and economic divisions in this country. Many of us are concerned about the future of our democracy and a pervasive sense of discontent seems to cut across all perspectives. Our society is facing transformations in the economy, in culture, in politics, and technology, in demographics, and in world affairs. Yet despite the divisions and uncertainty, this remains a land of breathtaking opportunity which also makes this an extraordinary time to become part of Pace University." - Marvin Krislov

These opening remarks, delivered by soon-to-be eighth president of the University, Marvin Krislov, carry a certain weight of proficiency with them as they echo through the Schimmel Theatre on Thursday, Feb. 16. Krislov, for his first term as President-elect, addresses the New York City campus auditorium full of eager students, academics, and administrators alike with the intention of reassuring his audience that he understands full well the importance of decisive, prudent leadership in such a crucial time in society. In a sense, it could not have gone unsaid. Krislov, as evident in his rhetoric and past history, radiates a sense of mental clarity and optimism needed, but all too frequently absent, in leadership amidst today's geopolitical tumult and ideological uncertainty.

Former Law School dean and current University President Stephen J. Friedman will officially retire from his position, which he has held for 10 years, starting in the summer of 2017, at which point Krislov will step in. Krislov has had a long career as a lawyer, educator, and college administrator. He was most recently president of Oberlin College, a liberal arts institution located in rural Ohio, for over 10 years. Before his work at Oberlin, Krislov was a teacher and administrator at the University of Michigan. Krislov has two degrees from Yale, one undergrad and one from the Law School, as well as a Bachelor Associates degree in history from Oxford University. Krislov has additional experience outside of education working as a lawyer and in the public sector; working in numerous senior positions in the U.S. Department of Labor under the Clinton administration. Additionally, during his time at the University of Michigan, Krislov was heavily involved in getting the landmark case Grutter v. Bollinger to the Supreme Court, a case which was won in an effort to uphold the affirmative action admissions policy of the University of Michigan Law School.

Given his wide range of work in the past, and broad-scooped understanding of the present, President-elect Krislov, in an exclusive interview with the Pace Press, provides insight into how his experience, particularly as a teacher, can influence his leadership. Krislov explains, "I find that by teaching and knowing students in the classroom, and outside, too, it helps me understand what's going on, what their concerns are, things we can do to help them, things that are beneficial, and so forth." Given this knowledge, Krislov, in focusing his attention towards the enormity of today's student debt crisis, continues, the short version is, I really need to learn more. One of the things I asked the students I met with is what they are concerned about.

"Institutions are doing a lot of things to try and minimize the amount of debt burdens. What Pace does which, I think, is very valuable is provide its students with internships and opportunities that will launch them and give them a leg up in the job process." Krislov remains hopeful about the future for University students. He explains, "One of the things that I plan on doing is trying to raise money for scholarships to help relieve that burden on students." At Oberlin, Krislov and administrators worked hard to launch the Oberlin Initiative which was started to help Pell Grant students, those particularly in need, gain access to higher education by fund-raising the scholarships necessary to cover the costs of education. The initiative, according to Krislov, began before the recession and petered out after the crash due to economic constraints, though it still exists today. Despite these challenges, Krislov was able to fundraise for his institution's endowment tremendously, successfully garnering over $800 million. The president-elect expressed his belief that, when it comes to University alumni, given the recent statistics of upward mobility in general and specific cases of success in particular, the prospect of fundraising endowments for the University is an enormous and, as of yet an only partially sought after possibility.

Along with his ambition and vision, Krislov appears to carry with him a certain humility, specifically one characteristic of responsive leadership. Krislov says, "The short version is, I guess, I really need to learn a lot more. One of the things I asked the students I met with is what are the things that they're concerned about." Students expressed interest in fostering a greater sense of community throughout the University as a whole, one which encompasses both the Westchester and NYC campuses. Given that Oberlin only had one campus, Krislov recognized this as a potential challenge, but one which could be overcome with effort.

Transportation concerns were prominent among students on both campuses, particularly among those who choose not to drive. Another frequent concern involved diversity and acceptance within the University, an issue to which Krislov is no stranger. "I do think diversity is critical in terms of making sure that students can find housing, students find community, and students find support," Krislov concludes.

Krislov's parents were both first generation immigrants and were both the first of their families to graduate college, despite growing up during the Great Depression. Krislov's father's work as an academic in their field of Labor Economics may have played a role in both his perspective and his pursuit of academics as he grew up. From the very beginning, the path traveled by Krislov which has brought him to the position of University president has been paved with hard work and a passion for justice. In times as uncertain as our own in each and every dimension imaginable, the leadership of Krislov may be exactly what this University needs going forward.