Dean highlights growth, new building in homecoming talk

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Dean Ira Solomon discussed the Freeman School's dramatic growth as part of his "State of the School" homecoming address for alumni and parents.

Growth. Growth. Growth.

Paraphrasing the old quote about real estate, Dean Ira Solomon told a Freeman School homecoming audience that explosive growth continues to be the big story at the B-school.

“We have been the fastest growing business school in the United States over the last several years,” Solomon told alumni and parents at his annual “State of the School” address on Oct. 28. “We are now the largest undergraduate school on the Tulane campus, and we’re nearly one-third of the entire undergraduate population.”

Overall Freeman School enrollments, including both undergraduate and graduate, have climbed from 1,950 to 3,000 in the last five years, an increase of nearly 55 percent. While rising student numbers and increasing student quality are significant, Solomon told attendees that enrollments are just one part of the school's dramatic growth. Freeman is also growing in terms of faculty and staff, with dozens of professors, academic advisers and career counselors added to the school in recent years to accommodate the surge in enrollments. The faculty additions comprise both traditional research faculty and professors of practice with extensive industry experience. Solomon announced that one of the school's latest additions is Mark Powers, the recently retired chief financial officer of JetBlue, who will be joining the faculty this spring as a visiting faculty member in finance and whom Solomon hopes to hire as a professor of practice thereafter.

"He's been a real strategy leader for JetBlue," Solomon said. "He straddles accounting, finance and strategy, which is exactly what we're looking for. We're trying to break down the walls that have separated various disciplines because that's not the way the world works, and Mark is a great example of that."

The third component of growth was obvious to everyone in attendance. Just outside the room where Dean Solomon spoke, work continues on the $35 million expansion and renovation of Goldring/Woldenberg Hall, which will add about 45,000 square feet of new space to the business school and "gut renovate" another 40,000 or so square feet of existing space. Solomon shared architectural renderings of the building, to be called the Goldring/Woldenberg Business Complex, giving homecoming guests a preview of the building's new classrooms, central commons, breakout spaces and student gateway.

"This is going to be very different from what a business school looked like when I went to the university," Solomon said. "The new model is coaching and students learning within teams, often from each other. What you have to do is provide spaces to facilitate that kind of learning, and that's just what we're doing."

Solomon closed out his presentation with a Q&A session, fielding questions from alumni and parents on admissions, exchange programs, internships, analytics and faculty makeup.

In addition to Dean Solomon's homecoming address, the Freeman School hosted a faculty research showcase featuring Assistant Professor of Accounting Serena Loftus

and Assistant Professor of Management Science Claire Senot, a Reunion Welcome Party at the Chicory and an alumni tailgating tent on the Newcomb Quad prior to the Tulane-SMU game. In all, nearly 400 Freeman School alumni, parents and friends registered for homecoming weekend events, making it one of the biggest in school history.

To see photos from the Reunion Welcome Party at the Chicory, visit the Freeman School's Flickr page.