Dean shares details on downtown expansion and more at homecoming talk

November 12, 2018



Dean Ira Solomon discussed plans for the Freeman School's new space in the New Orleans Culinary and Hospitality Institute building during his annual "State of the School" homecoming talk.

During his annual “State of the School” homecoming address, Dean Ira Solomon discussed growing enrollments, new programs and plans for the Freeman School’s expansion into downtown New Orleans.

“The Brennan family led the establishment of the New Orleans Culinary and Hospitality Institute,” Solomon said. “We are subleasing one third of their physical plant, and we are going to be offering new programming in that space.”

The talk, which drew an overflow crowd on a rainy homecoming afternoon, took place on Friday, Nov. 9, in the Goldring/Woldenberg Business Complex.

The downtown facility, to be called Stewart Center CBD, will be the new home of Freeman School executive education, including the Executive MBA program and new short-term non-degree executive and professional education offerings for organizations and businesses.

“We’ve never done that before,” Solomon said. “You have to go to Houston or St. Louis or Atlanta in order to find a school with our reputational capital that plays in the non-degree space, so we think there are great opportunities to serve professionals from across the region with both open enrollment and custom programs.”

Stewart Center CBD will also be the home of programs that leverage the connection with NOCHI.

“What’s New Orleans known for? Hospitality and entrepreneurship,” Solomon said. “We are marrying the two strengths of this community.”

By expanding the definition of hospitality to include any business that requires a world-class customer experience, Solomon said the Freeman School can offer programming relevant not only to traditional hospitality companies such as restaurants, hotels, cruise ships and casinos, but also to other customer-focused organizations such as hospitals, airlines and even retail.

“How’s retail going to compete against the Alibabas and Amazons of the world?” Solomon said. “It’s going to take a top-notch customer experience.”

Plans call for the Freeman School to begin moving into the space in November with classes beginning in January 2019.

Solomon saved the end of his talk for questions from alumni and parents, who queried the dean about career services, interdisciplinary offerings and study abroad opportunities.

“We’ve adopted a strategy that every one of our undergraduates should have a meaningful study-abroad experience,” Solomon said. “That could be two weeks in Beijing, it could be a semester in Bogota, Colombia, or it could be an entire year in Paris, and increasingly we’re looking to find ways to help subsidize the cost of those opportunities. We don’t want anybody who is part of our community to not be able to take advantage of this opportunity because of money.

“Of course, some students feel like they’re already abroad when they come to New Orleans,” Solomon quipped. “It’s hard to get them to leave.”