

College Town Strength

A study finds that Fairfield drives \$1 billion in economic activity.

The New Face of Nursing

Fairfield graduates forge new paths as healthcare evolves.

The Winds of Change

Fairfield University in words and pictures, 1966-1989.

Fairfield UNIVERSITY magazine SUMMER 2017



A New President

Mark R. Nemec, PhD, will be the 9th President of Fairfield.

Celebrating Fairfield University's 75th Anniversary



A New President

MARK R. NEMEC, PhD, a Jesuit-schooled political scientist, rugby player and a dean at the University of Chicago will be the 9th president of Fairfield.

BY ALISTAIR HIGHET

Following a nationwide search, the Board of Trustees has named Mark R. Nemece, PhD, dean of the Graham School of Continuing Liberal and Professional Studies at the University of Chicago as the 9th President of Fairfield University.

A historically minded political scientist, nationally recognized as an expert on trends in higher education, Dr. Nemece attended Loyola High School, Jesuit College Preparatory in Los Angeles before earning a BA at Yale. While at Yale, Dr. Nemece was an All-Ivy rugby player. After Yale, he earned an MA studying higher education and a PhD in political science from the University of Michigan.

Mark R. Nemece, PhD, the 9th President of Fairfield University with his family: his wife Suzie and their four children – (l-r) Kit, Philip, Teddy, and Alex.



Early in his career, he worked in public policy as a staffer to the chair of the Board of Los Angeles County Supervisors and taught American politics as a visiting assistant professor at Davidson College. In addition to serving as President, he will join Fairfield as a professor in the Politics Department.

His passion for education has driven his research on the role of higher education in American political development. He is the author of the book *Ivory Towers and Nationalist Minds* (University of Michigan Press) and a contributor to *The Educational Legacy of Woodrow Wilson* (University of Virginia Press). Additionally, Dr. Nemeč has been a frequent speaker on the current and future state of higher education and has presented to a diverse array of audiences.

He joined the Graham School at the University of Chicago as dean in 2014, where he extended the university's reach to broader student populations – including lifelong learners and professionals seeking emerging certifications and degrees – through the development of new programs and innovations in pedagogy.

Prior to his tenure at the University of Chicago, Dr. Nemeč served as the CEO of Eduventures, a Boston-based research and consulting firm for the higher education community, and as an executive with Forrester Research, a consulting firm to the tech industry.

Joining him on this move to the Fairfield community, and a return to New England, are his wife Suzy and their four children – Alex,

Teddy, Philip and Kit – a young family he describes warmly as “the thing that animates me more than anything.”

Speaking on behalf of the search committee, Board Chairman Frank J. Carroll III '89 said: “As we entered into the search for a University President, we did so with the mutual conviction that whomever we selected for the role must fully understand and embrace the values and traditions of Jesuit education, have the appropriate academic standing and credentials, as well as have an understanding of the complex and rapidly evolving landscape of higher education. Dr. Nemeč has these credentials, values the Jesuit Catholic identity that is at the core of our mission as an institution, and has the necessary skills to propel Fairfield forward for years to come.”



Mark R. Nemeč, PhD, new President of Fairfield University, presents to Fairfield's senior leadership team at a meeting in Bellarmine Hall.

“I see Fairfield as a university in a strong position, with a deep commitment to the core of a liberal arts education, but also one that at this time appreciates the need to educate the whole person...” – MARK R. NEMEČ, PhD, new University president

Fairfield University Magazine caught up with a busy Dr. Nemeč a few days before going to press, as he juggled his ongoing duties as dean in Chicago, the logistics of his family's move to Connecticut, and the already pressing demands of his new role as President of Fairfield.

Fairfield University Magazine: Thanks for speaking with us, I know you've had a busy week with a lot of balls in the air, can you tell us about that?

Dr. Nemeč: Thank you. Before I begin I would be remiss if I did not mention how thrilled we are to be joining such an amazing institution and such a wonderful community with such a strong sense of core values. The welcome we have received has been spectacular.

This last week has been uniquely busy. I started out West at the Global Silicon Valley (GSV) Summit, a major conference on innovation in education, grabbed a red-eye to meet and have lunch with our new College of Arts and Sciences dean Dr. Richard Greenwald in New York, played 80 minutes of rugby for the University of Chicago Booth School of Business Graduate School team against our arch rival from the Kellogg School of Management (Northwestern). We won, for the second year in a row. Sunday was most important, as that was our Mother's Day celebration and brunch. Then on Monday and Tuesday, I was fortunate enough to partake in a symposium along with leading historians, sociologists, political scientists, and legal scholars at UChicago's Neubauer Collegium, which is dedicated to the study of culture of society. Our conference focused on the modern American state and my research discussed the evolving role of higher education in this context. And here we are today.

FUM: Well, welcome to Fairfield, Mark. What attracted you to take on the role? I mean there are a lot of things you could have done – why Fairfield?

Dr. Nemeč: To be asked to lead any institution of higher learning is an amazing responsibility, but to be asked to lead this institution at this time is awesome – keep in mind I use

awesome both in the sense that it's overwhelming, but also in the sense of having grown up in Southern California in the 1980's (laughs).

At the core of it, I really think it is something that I am called to do, and I mean that in the truest sense of the word. At least since my college days – even when I was in high school I grew up in the shadow of UCLA – I had respect for higher education and while it may sound odd to say that being a college president was a career goal, in a way it was. I always thought that higher education was noble and important and a career worth pursuing.

When I think about Fairfield specifically, I start with the fundamental purpose of education and especially higher education; and that is to transform lives. With this in mind, Fairfield has so much to build upon: Our core values and the fact that those values are at the heart of everything that we do; the quality of the faculty, the quality of the students, the alumni, the Jesuit community – you have all of those advantages and then you think about Fairfield's location between Boston and New York, along the Acela corridor, which at this time is home to – one could argue – one of the greatest collections of capital, financial, cultural, intellectual, and social establishments ever assembled! When you combine those together – Fairfield's incredible story, the commitment of our partners, – the location, and where we will go, when you bring all these together – Fairfield just has tremendous potential.

So I see Fairfield as a university in a strong position, with a deep commitment to the core of a liberal arts education, but also one that at this time appreciates the need to educate the whole person – and to serve the community as well through graduate and professional education, as well as, through the traditional residential bachelor's degree.

FUM: You went to a Jesuit high school, Loyola High School in Los Angeles....

Dr. Nemeč: Yes, I was fortunate to go to Loyola of Los Angeles for high school, and it was formative for me. I greatly enjoyed the teachers and my fellow students and learned so much there in the classroom. I also ran

track and cross-country and was part of a few California Interscholastic Federation championship teams, and was very involved in speech and debate. Thinking back, one of the beauties of the Loyola education, which is one of the beauties of the Jesuit education is that students are encouraged to pursue their passions rather than being led down a forced path.

I think the other really transformative experience at Loyola was in our senior year when we all had a community service experience. I worked for a month at a woman's shelter in Los Angeles that supported women and their children. I sort of helped with just about everything. I was jack-of-all-trades.

I vividly remember one Friday taking one of the kids who was living there and who I had spent the week tutoring, playing games with et cetera out to shoot baskets one day, and afterwards one of the social workers saying to me, “You may have been one of the first positive male role models that kid has ever been around.” As we seek to embody the charism of “men and women for others,” it shows you how important it is to be available to people, and how just a little bit of kindness can make such a difference.

FUM: You will be a layperson in the Office of the President at Fairfield. Does the job change because you aren't a Jesuit? I'm sure there are people who wonder how we will continue to sustain our Jesuit identity, that this is a major shift....

Dr. Nemeč: Yes, but I think in some ways it is also counterintuitive, perhaps Fairfield not having a Jesuit President at this time is less dramatic on its own than people anticipate, in the sense that all of higher education is shifting – regardless of whether you appointed a layperson or Jesuit – higher education is going under a massive transformation, and I would argue that this is the right time to do it, because the institution itself will be going through significant change as we seek to continue to serve our community.

When I say I feel called to do it, I say that with humility. I understand that it is a tremendous challenge, translating how to be a Jesuit

“That is what I aspire for all of us at Fairfield. Everything that we do should be of the highest quality — beginning in the classroom and then beyond: athletics, theater, the arts, all our extracurricular programs. We should be committed to an environment where we are always pursuing excellence and where we can thrive.” — MARK R. NEMEC, PhD, *new University president*

and Catholic institution in the 21st century is an opportunity that really invigorates me. I wanted to come to Fairfield because it is a Jesuit institution. I thought at length about my experience at Loyola and how that changed me and how it shaped me, and I came to Fairfield because I think faith is an important part of life.

One of the first things that Suzy and I did when we came to Fairfield was to attend Mass and dinner with the Jesuit community, and at dinner, Fr. Tom Fitzpatrick, S.J., (Fairfield’s staff and faculty chaplain) said something to me: He said that having a lay President at this time was something that intrigued him in the sense that now we will have to become more deliberate and intentional about our mission and identity. I think that’s true.

In the end, it gets back to this idea of stewardship. As the institutional leader I’m part of a broader leadership team and community, and my style of leadership is that we as a team will continue to embody and be mindful of our Jesuit traditions and our Jesuit roots and foundation. We’ll have to be mindful and intentional about how we remain faithful to those traditions, and of course continue to work in collaboration with the Society of Jesus. I do believe as someone who benefited from a Jesuit education that I have some good thoughts on how one might lead a Jesuit institution so that it is a model with a broader impact on higher education.

Lastly, I should mention my family has relatively deep ties to Jesuit education. My mother graduated from Loyola Chicago (she was a junior the year they won the NCAA basketball championship), and my grandmother — my father’s mother — got her nursing diploma from what is now Creighton University in Omaha, so I am third generation Jesuit educated — albeit, the first male.

FUM: You will also bring with you a family, your wife Suzy and your four children, Alex, Teddy, Philip and Kit. Having a President with a family will be new for Fairfield. How has your family taken the news?

Dr. Nemeć: One of the things that animates me more than anything is my family, and they

are really looking forward to joining the Fairfield community. Families are a critical part of what Fairfield is all about, and so being part of the Fairfield University and town community as a family — we are looking forward to that.

It is hard to move a family. We have made very good friends in Chicago. But our roots as a family are in the Northeast. My wife is from Concord, Massachusetts and Suzy and I met and lived in New York. Our first son was born in Washington, D.C., but we moved to Concord when he was one and our three remaining children were born there, so it will be a bit like coming home.

Then there is just being in this northeast corridor — you know that’s exciting! When we came to visit Fairfield we took the whole family down to New York and walked up from Grand Central to Central Park. Being part of that whole tri-state, New England area is great for all of us.

Oh! On the train from Fairfield to New York when we were visiting I said to Suzy: “Did you ever imagine when we met we would have tri-state children?” And she said: “We have New Englanders (laughs).” She’s from Massachusetts. So that’s all by way of saying that we are excited to be coming and eager to be part of the life of the school.

FUM: Your area of academic research is the history of higher education in America. Your book, *Ivory Towers and Nationalist Minds: Universities, Leadership and the Development of the American State*, explores how universities in the 19th and early 20th centuries were key institutions in building the United States as we know it. I know we are in a different era, but I wonder how you see the role of a university like Fairfield in today’s very different national context.

Dr. Nemeć: I still believe that higher education institutions in this country are the most important institutions we have. In the United States we do not have a national church, we have a very fragmented state, but what we do have is the greatest system of higher education the world has ever seen, and central to that is the diversity

of our institutions — including our Jesuit institutions. It is this broad network that has helped drive the success of our country for the last 225 plus years and will continue to drive it forward.

FUM: Prior to joining the University of Chicago you were president and CEO of Eduventures, a research and consulting firm that studies higher-education trends. How does that shape your view of where Fairfield is headed? People talk a lot about more hybrid and online learning, is that part of the future?

Dr. Nemeć: Yes of course, what we have seen across the spectrum of higher education is that students are looking for quality, and they want education delivered across multiple platforms. And people are looking for educational opportunities not just at 18 years old, but also throughout their lives. So lifelong learning and hybrid models of delivering that education in a way that is true to our values will be part of the future and we will adapt and find our place in that landscape.

But I think the important point to make is that it is critical for higher education institutions to be *relevant* to their times while maintaining their core values. Colleges and universities in our society occupy a privileged position we sometimes take for granted. We have to keep and preserve our commitment to be men and women for others and to *cura personalis*, while also understanding that lifelong learning is now also something we need to embrace if we are going to remain relevant to what people need from us.

We have to ask ourselves: Are we reaching everyone who could benefit from a Fairfield education? I would hazard a guess that we are not reaching everyone that we could.

But it is important — I think Fairfield is very well positioned for these changes, providing the kind of hybrid learning models, because the very nature of Fairfield is to be student-centered — our faculty and the quality of instruction and *cura personalis*, these are our strengths and that is what people are looking for. So I think Fairfield is very well positioned to succeed in this changing landscape.

FUM: I know it is too early to get into specific program areas, but I wonder about your thoughts on two broad areas of University life — academics and athletics.

Dr. Nemeć: Well, first I’m excited to be joining the Department of Politics as a professor, and I’m excited to be engaged with students in the classroom, as an advisor and beyond. Fairfield’s academic rigor is of the highest standard, the outcomes are strong, and we have to continue to advance in this area. I think — and I thought this before I was approached about this opportunity, from my observation at Eduventures and elsewhere — that Fairfield’s academics and faculty are excellent and we need to ensure we are known for that.

FUM: As for Athletics? I know you are a keen rugby player....

Dr. Nemeć: Having played rugby at Yale and played quite seriously in the U.S. Rugby Super League set up, I do believe that athletics are an important part of campus life and spirit. I think athletics can be significant both internally and externally, and as in everything that we do, we should commit to doing it at the highest level.

FUM: You are going to want us to compete...

Dr. Nemeć: Yes! (Laughs). And in whatever we do, and not in the sense of winning but in being our best. Growing up when I did and where I did, John Wooden, the basketball coach at UCLA, was rightfully a legend. He was a great coach but also an educator. Wooden won 10 NCAA titles in 12 years and

88 straight games and yet he never, ever exhorted his teams to win. Instead he always insisted they do their best.

That is what I aspire for all of us at Fairfield. Everything that we do should be of the highest quality — beginning in the classroom and then beyond: athletics, theater, the arts, all our extracurricular programs. We should be committed to an environment where we are always pursuing excellence and where we can thrive.

As a Jesuit institution we have a particular obligation to be in balance in this way. It is a commitment to the mind, body, and spirit. It’s about helping our students bring these dimensions of life into balance so that they support and enhance one another — I think that’s the core challenge and that is what I am looking forward to. 🙏



Mark R. Nemeć, PhD, new President of Fairfield University, tours campus with his family. Dr. Nemeć will take office on July 1, 2017.