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President of Highline College Announces Retirement

Nearly 40 Years in Higher Education, 22 Years at Highline for Bermingham

DES MOINES, Wash. — In a letter to the college’s Board of Trustees, Dr. Jack Bermingham announced his retirement as president of Highline College, effective next week. The board accepted the letter earlier today during a special meeting held on campus.

For the past several months, Bermingham, 68, has been on leave from the college to recuperate from open-heart surgery, which he underwent in December 2016.

In an email to campus faculty and staff today, Bermingham said, “My recovery has taken longer than anticipated. Returning to my responsibilities as president of the college would necessarily be gradual, and I am already nearing the end of my career. Under these circumstances and after a great deal of reflection, I am announcing my retirement from Highline College.”

Dr. Jeff Wagnitz, Highline’s Vice President for Academic Affairs, who has been acting in Bermingham’s absence, will continue as acting president.

Bermingham was only the sixth president in the college’s 55-year history.

His passion for promoting access, diversity, social justice and student achievement brought him to the community college system. He came to Highline in 1994 as academic vice president, a post he would hold until being appointed president in 2006.

His distinguished academic career began in 1979 when he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of California at Santa Barbara. He went on to a faculty appointment at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. He came to Washington as a faculty member at Pacific Lutheran University, where he earned tenure and later became dean of social sciences.

His commitment to serve all students effectively has led to national and regional recognition for him personally and for Highline College in a number of areas, including diversity, inclusion, basic skills and international education.

Since taking over leadership at Highline more than a decade ago, Bermingham strengthened collaborations with business, industry, K-12 and baccalaureate institutions, and community-based organizations, resulting in successful partnerships and expanded economic development efforts.

He served on several regional and national boards and committees where he was especially active in advancing international initiatives and education, believing in the importance of preparing students to live in a multicultural world and global economy.

In the near future, the college will provide details on opportunities for celebrating Dr. Bermingham's achievements.

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Attachment: Photo of Dr. Jack Bermingham

Highline College was founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County. With nearly 17,000 annual students and 350,000 alumni, it is one of the state's largest institutions of higher education. The college offers a wide range of academic transfer, professional-technical education and applied bachelor's degree programs. Alumni include former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, entrepreneur Junki Yoshida and former Washington state poet laureate Sam Green.