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New interim director at Hughes Center sees expansion in future

ERIN SERPICO Staff Writer 14 hrs ago

Michael Klein, Interim Executive Director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy, at Stockton University, during a Press of Atlantic City editorial board meeting.

VERNON OGRODNEK / Multimedia Editor

About a month into the job, the new interim executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy says he wants to expand and preserve the center's programming and bridge the gap between education and policy.

Stockton University at the end of 2017 named Dr. Michael W. Klein, a higher education policy expert, the director of the center. He took over the role on Jan. 8 after former director and center founder Sharon Schulman retired on Jan. 1.

“I certainly want to look at statewide issues,” Klein said Wednesday during an editorial board with The Press of Atlantic City. “The work itself of the Hughes Center, I think, can incorporate a lot of the academic expertise that already exists across all the different academic disciplines within the university.”

The mission of the Hughes Center focuses largely on researching public policy issues that affect South Jersey, something that Klein said should continue given the importance of Stockton to the region and to students there.

He hopes to bring students and the community more involved in the mission of the center, he said.

“To come to the Hughes Center, whose mission is to help promote and inspire students to work on public policy issues, is a great interest to me,” Klein said.

Klein said he wants to get more students involved to inspire them to take part in this field of work, whether it’s through policy or polling. He said he wants to bring additional programming and speakers to the campus to speak on specific issues, and to open it more to community members.

Klein also said he wants to continue to support, utilize and expand the Stockton Polling Institute, perhaps to have a larger presence around the nation.

The institute can serve more heavily as a tool for faculty to help get polls out that can help inform their academic work. With a South Jersey focus, Klein said he hopes to gauge public opinion on issues that newly inaugurated Gov. Phil Murphy has been touting.

Klein's interest in working with the Hughes Center stems from his higher education background, he said. He spent 19 years as the executive director of the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities in Trenton before starting at the center.

His interest in Stockton, now having a focus at one institution, allows for the incorporates laws, kindergarten through 12th grade policy and environmental policy.

“Higher ed policy cuts across so many areas,” Klein said. "There’s a lot of moving parts that make up higher ed that fits into a bigger public policy environment."

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Stockton names interim director of Hughes Center