

# Mercy Welcomes New Deans

Peter West, Ph.D. and Stuart Sidle, Ph.D.

Mercy College welcomed two new deans during the summer of 2020. Peter West, Ph.D., joined Mercy College on June 1 as the dean of the School of Liberal Arts, and Stuart Sidle, Ph.D., joined Mercy College on July 1 as the dean of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Both bring deep commitment and years of expertise to their leadership roles at Mercy.

West comes to Mercy from Adelphi University where he spent the past 12 years. “I am very drawn to Mercy’s mission,” West said. “And I feel that the School of Liberal Arts is really well-positioned to give students the skills they need to succeed — not only the skills to get their first jobs but the skills to help them succeed throughout their lives.”

Ever since his first visit to the Dobbs Ferry Campus, West has been captivated by the mix of programs in the School of Liberal Arts — the more traditional programs such as English and history alongside the applied programs such as cybersecurity and music production: “This provides such a great opportunity for students to recognize how those two areas are connected: the skills of critical thinking, understanding and navigating difference, being literate people and citizens of the world — and the hands-on skills taught in our more applied programs.”

As he determines his initial priorities at Mercy, West notes that the first challenge everyone is tackling is making sure that the

College can launch in the fall with dynamic, meaningful experiences for students. Beyond that, he has spent his first several months “learning about our programs from the inside, learning about the work our faculty does, learning about our students and what they find most valuable in the programs, figuring out how best to support our



Peter West, Ph.D.

Photo provided by Peter West

programs and finding opportunities to partner with the other deans.” He is excited to find ways for the School of Liberal Arts to work with the other Mercy schools to create new minors, certificates or programs that would help all kinds of Mercy students experience the liberal arts in a hands-on way and get a leg up in their careers.

Most recently, West served as the associate provost for student success at Adelphi University, and he looks forward to continuing similar work in his new role at Mercy. “In addition to the mission, I was really drawn to the fact that the deans at Mercy play a role in improving student success metrics,” he explained. “Part of a dean’s work here is helping faculty design interventions and supporting

academic structures that give every single student the maximum opportunity to succeed. That’s really important and directly connects with Mercy’s mission of making higher education more accessible.”

West joined Adelphi in 2008 as an assistant professor of English, and later served as chair of the English Department, and then associate dean for general education and academic services for the College of Arts and Sciences.

Throughout his career, West has been deeply involved with community outreach. “I’ve always tried to find partners off-campus where students can apply the learning that they’re doing in the classroom to the world outside,” he explained. “Internships are terrific and an integral part of this, but I want to get students those kinds of experiences earlier in their education as well so that they can see the value of the work they do.”

West sees the liberal arts — and by extension, Mercy’s School of Liberal Arts — as absolutely essential in higher education: “I’m a big believer that the liberal arts have incredible value in the very challenges that we’re facing right now in society — being literate about information, understanding the experiences of other people and navigating difference, and being responsible and reflective citizens. One of the great things about teaching the liberal arts is that you constantly have opportunities to connect the learning that takes place in the classroom with the world outside because these skills are ultimately transferable to any challenge. So the School of Liberal Arts is really at the center of how

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we achieve Mercy’s mission and also of how we solve the challenges of today’s society.”

West holds a doctorate in English from Emory University and a bachelor’s degree with honors in English from Wesleyan University. He has published two major works and several scholarly articles on 19th-century literature and culture.

Like West, Sidle was also drawn to Mercy’s mission: “I believe that education is one of the most powerful tools to impact social mobility. And Mercy’s desire to have an impact is extremely inspiring to me. I wanted to be in a place where I could make a difference, and Mercy is that place.”

Since stepping into his new role as dean of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, he has seen first-hand that people at Mercy live and breathe its mission: “At some organizations, the mission is just something posted on the wall. But at Mercy, everyone wants to talk about it. That’s such a pleasant surprise. We’re not just thinking about enrollment, COVID-19 or the budget. We’re really focusing on improving students’ lives and giving them new opportunities. We’re talking about improving diversity, addressing social inequality and using inclusive pedagogy.”

People are at the heart of what excites him and drives him: “For me, it’s all about the relationships. So far, everybody I’ve met is really fantastic. I’m excited to spend more time with them and collaborate with them. It’s clear already that SSBS has a very dedicated, very strong

faculty. I need to make sure that I foster an environment where they can really focus their time on their teaching and their scholarship. I want to help the faculty, staff and students thrive. I want to help everybody be their best.” He is also excited to find opportunities for curricular innovation, incorporate more community-based learning projects and collaborate with other Mercy schools through interdisciplinary research and grants.

Most recently, Sidle served as the Executive Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of New Haven. Passionate about excellence in higher education, he takes great pride in the teaching



Stuart Sidle, Ph.D.

Photo provided by Stuart Sidle

awards he received at Saint Xavier University, DePaul University and the University of New Haven. Given this deep focus on instruction, student and faculty engagement and student outcomes are on his mind as he thinks about how to define success for the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences: “Regarding engagement, I would want to know answers to questions such as, What type of learning is taking place outside the classroom? Are students working on research projects with faculty or service-learning projects in the community? For me, a sign of engagement is when people go beyond the assigned hours to do deep learning with people different from themselves outside the classroom. Regarding outcomes, I would want to know the answers

to questions such as: “Are alumni working in their field of study or a related field? Are they happy and fulfilled in their careers?”

In his 17 years at the University of New Haven, he held several roles, including the associate provost for strategic initiatives and faculty development, interim dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, chair of the Department of Psychology and Sociology and director of the industrial/organizational psychology program. Before joining the University of New Haven, he held faculty positions at DePaul University and Saint Xavier University.

He sees the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences as playing a critical role in making much-needed change in the world: “Our current issues — the COVID-19 pandemic, social inequality, economic concerns, international concerns — are all things that are going to be addressed by people working in the fields supported by SSBS. How will the students in our public administration and health services management programs help transform our hospitals and healthcare systems? How will the students in our counseling programs help people cope with the stress of these times? How will the students in our international relations program use their global mindset to help solve the pandemic and other world problems? It’s really exciting to see how people use their education to help address societal problems.”

Beyond teaching, Sidle is actively involved in scholarly research and consults with companies and nonprofit organizations. He earned his master’s degree and doctorate in industrial/organizational psychology from DePaul University and his bachelor’s degree from American University.

Mercy College is delighted to welcome these two deans to the Mercy family and looks forward to seeing the School of Liberal Arts and the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences flourish under their leadership.