The Daily Collegian
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Dean Rifkin steps down after academic year

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After seven years of leading the University of Massachusetts' largest college, Janet Rifkin said she will step down as dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the end of the academic year.

"I feel like I'm leaving the college in a good place," said Rifkin. "It's healthy for a college to have a change in leadership, and I think it's time for me to go in a new direction."

SBS teaches about one in every four undergraduates in a given year and is home to anthropology, communication, economics, journalism, legal studies, political science, psychology, social thought and political economy and sociology majors.

"One of the challenges and pleasures is that it is the biggest college on campus," Rifkin said.

Beyond current undergraduate students, Rifkin also works with graduate students and the college's 44,000 alumni.

"People feel really good about their experiences and are eager to find ways to reconnect, and that has been really interesting," she said.

Establishing connections to alumni and donors is one her major focuses as dean. Rifkin said there is a greater expectation for deans to look for support outside of state funding than there was a decade ago.

As dean, she said she has focused on enhancing the student experience, including trying to offer smaller classes and more scholarship opportunities.

Rifkin said she has tried to improve conditions for the faculty by hiring more professors and providing more resources for faculty research.

Though there is no news on a replacement, Rifkin said she expects to hear soon. It is undecided whether an interim dean will fill in for next year while they do a national search, she said.

Rifkin said she hopes her successor focuses on things like improving the first-year experience, strengthening the advising program and giving undergraduates more opportunities to do research.

One of the biggest challenges, said Rifkin, has been realizing it is hard to please everyone.

Continued...

POLL

This month, UMass Chaplain Kent Higgins was reprimanded by the University for offering credits to students for their participation in the Obama campaign. Should a state university offer credits to students for partisan campaigning?

- Yes -- it encourages educated citizenship.
- No -- it compromises the University's ethic.
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