

Expanding higher ed: Carlos Flynn

Carlos Flynn is university dean for institutional advancement at CUNY.

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University dean for institutional advancement

In 2000, the City University of New York, an institution with 1 million alumni, managed to raise \$50 million from private sources, a piddling amount in a world where \$4 billion campaigns are now the norm. But not unusual for an institution supported by public funds and unaccustomed to reaching out for private philanthropy.

In 2004, Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, who took CUNY's helm in 1999, set out to change that mind-set and launched the system's first-ever capital campaign, a \$1.2 billion effort that exceeded its goal in 2009, three years early. The new target is \$3 billion by 2015.

CUNY is already two-thirds of the way there, thanks to major gifts from alumni—such as Intel founder Andrew Grove, who gave \$25 million to CUNY's engineering school, and developer Bernard Spitzer, who donated \$25 million for the school of architecture. A full 76% of the money raised has come from private donors, 95% of whom are alumni. Some \$800 million of the school's \$3 billion campaign came from just 400 alumni.

Carlos Flynn, 60, university dean for institutional advancement, has been a key part of the turnaround. Responsible for raising money for the institution as a whole, he is also the support for the system's 24 presidents, who have been tasked by Mr. Goldstein with finding funds for their colleges.

A seasoned development guru, Mr. Flynn has spent 30 years in the fundraising world—much of it internationally as a consultant with CCS Fundraising. There, he helped organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and the Rotary Club bring in millions of dollars.

At CUNY, in addition to developing strategy and soliciting funds, he runs a fundraising academy for the system's 150 development people as well as others involved in raising money for the university. Last year, he started the CUNY Philanthropic Forum, a meeting with donors to help development people find out what they can do better.

Mr. Flynn emigrated with his family from Argentina when he was 10 years old and grew up in Queens. He joined CUNY in 2003 to assist in overhauling the university's development effort and going after private donors. Until then, said Mr. Flynn, alumni had never been asked to support their alma mater in any substantial way.

“Alumni would say, 'I got a great education, but I support the university through my taxes,'” recalled Mr. Flynn. “We changed that conversation.”

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