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Lewis & Clark President Wim Wiewel on why his 'retirement' from PSU didn't last long

Just five weeks on the job, the former Portland State president discusses his goals for for the private college.

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Wim Wiewel's 2016 retirement, from his president's job at [Portland State University](#), was one of the shortest on the academia record. Indeed, Wiewel was lured out of what would have been a leisurely life to lead [Lewis & Clark College](#).

And while his tenure is barely into the five-week mark, it's, so far, gone extremely well. Last week, for instance, the college revealed it had collected three \$1 million gifts from alumni as part of a "quiet" fundraising campaign that began three weeks ago.

"The college has historically raised \$10 million a year," Wiewel said. "You could say we're on a pretty good pace so far."

We caught up with Wiewel to talk about his new, very different gig at the Southwest Portland campus.

Were you as surprised as everyone else that your "retirement" didn't last that long? I had a bit longer lead time (laughs), but, it wasn't even on the horizon in any shape or form. I'd announced in July 2016 I'd step down and I had a sweet gig coming: I was going on a sabbatical, I was going to go to Spain, I was going to pick up my tennis game again.

So what happened? I was lured by the idea that I could still make a difference. In the end, that seemed more exciting than waking up in the morning and thinking I wouldn't be making a difference.

What were the clinchers in your decision? I really liked the campus, I liked the atmosphere, they sold me on the idea that, yeah, I could make a difference here and it's going to be a great place to work. It has a strong reputation for its environmental and sustainability programs, it has a strong international focus, a lot of students study abroad.

What are the biggest differences between overseeing a public and private college? It might be because it's smaller, but people are nicer to each other here. The place is really clean: I see people picking up the



Wim Wiewel began his new Lewis & Clark College job in October.

occasional piece of litter. The faculty and (the administration) get along with each other. I'm not saying everyone's singing "Kumbaya" every morning, but that's harder to replicate in a larger place.

The other big difference is not having to deal with legislators. While I respect many of them individually, the whole was definitely less than the sum of its parts. When they got together, it didn't always work out so well.

There were some union issues with the PSU administration, as well. PSU has a faculty union, and I think those unions created an atmosphere of distrust between faculty and staff on the one side and administration on the other that's just not helpful. It got in the way of doing things. All faculty have a natural skepticism toward administrators, and that might be healthy, but at PSU, it veered often toward disrespect. Here, I just enjoy the more collegial atmosphere we have here across the institutions.

What are you looking to do in your first year or two? I know the board is looking for me to connect Lewis & Clark more strongly with Portland than it has been, in the '70s and '80s and even the '90s. I think it's important for students to do internships and volunteer projects.

That's a good part of business outreach. I loved working with the business community at PSU. There were issues we disagreed on [a proposed, and jettisoned, \$35 million payroll tax in 2016 earned the school criticism from business lobbyists], but I still have good friends from places like [Bank of America](#), PGE, the Standard and [Intel](#). I intend very much to work with them again.

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