



Always gravitating toward students and faculty, here Old Dominion University President John Broderick talks with Christopher Ndiritu, president, Student Government Association.



a transformational **LEADER**

HOW THINKING AHEAD HAS CLARIFIED
A GROWING VISION

BY **Esther Keane**

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John Broderick is in his eighth year as the eighth president of Old Dominion University. He oversees the university's seven colleges, more than 25,000 students, dozens of economic development and research programs, and many partnerships with the military, government and business organizations. He also oversees an operating budget in excess of \$582 million and a staff and faculty of more than 3,000.

"If you would have asked me at 20 where I thought I would be, it certainly wouldn't be here doing this," said Broderick who worked in journalism early on before taking a position at ODU in 1993.

After serving as acting president for almost a year, in May 2009, Broderick received a unanimous vote by the Board of Visitors to become ODU's eighth president. In 2012, the board voted to extend his contract to 2017 and earlier this year it was extended to 2019.

Broderick is enormously popular on campus and beyond.

"How can you work in one institution for such a long time and have virtually no enemies or detractors? This is a John miracle, one that few of us can hope to emulate," said Chandra de Silva,

ODU's interim provost and vice president for academic affairs.

The "John miracle" really isn't a miracle, but rather a consistent adherence to a handful of principles and practices that result in a strong leadership style. Perhaps most significant are Broderick's skills as a listener, a communicator and a relationship-builder.

the communicator

In his office in Koch Hall on the Norfolk campus, Broderick, who is 58, talked about growing up in Bristol, Conn.

"I had the best of both worlds," he said. "We grew up in a community where we were equidistance from Boston and New York City."

Bristol, with a population of around 50,000 at the time, wasn't well known until it became the home of ESPN in the late '70s.

"We lived in a suburban-type place, and I was very fortunate to grow up in the same community as my aunts, uncles and cousins," he said.

This instilled in him an appreciation of community. It was also during these early years that Broderick honed his skills as a communicator. At school and at home, there was an emphasis on writing, grammar and being comfortable talking



Here Broderick walks the talk with Alonzo Brandon, ODU's vice president for university advancement.

to people.

"If I've had any success at all, a large part of it is based on my ability to write and to communicate," he said.

When he was in third grade, a teacher told Broderick he wrote well, and writing became what he loves to do. While in high school and college, he did writing for the Bristol Press, the Hartford Courant, the Associated Press, the Boston Globe and the Boston Celtics. He graduated from Northeastern University in Boston with a degree in journalism and English.

He was a reporter in Springfield, Mass., and then took a position on Martha's Vineyard that had three roles – director of the county information bureau, director of the chamber of commerce and representative on the state tourism bureau.

He gained academic experience as an administrator at St. Bonaventure University in southwestern New York state, where he received his graduate degree in counseling, and as a faculty member at the University of Pittsburgh.

In 1993, Broderick joined ODU as director of public information. From there, he was named assistant vice president. During the next 15 years, he moved up to associate vice president, acting vice president, vice president and acting president until becoming university president.

At various times, he's been involved with admissions, athletics, community relations, governmental relations, licensing, marketing, media relations, military affairs, photography, publications, student financial aid and university events.

"What's happened to me at ODU," he said, "has allowed me to tell people that if you do a good job, you will find plenty of opportunities to grow."

a leader with vision

Under Broderick's leadership, more than \$338 million in capital projects has been authorized or completed, including academic buildings, research centers, residence halls, athletic facilities and arts venues. On his watch in 2009, ODU re-established its football program and the team was acclaimed as the most successful startup team in FCS history.

Financially, endowments have increased by \$50 million, \$138 million has been raised in gifts and commitments, and \$11 million, the second largest gift ever received, was given by alumnus Mark Strome to develop an entrepreneurial curriculum.

Bobby Wilder, head football coach of the ODU Monarchs, said, "In the nine years I've worked at ODU I have had numerous conversations with [Broderick] about building our program, leadership, motivation and community involvement. He is always available for the students and employees of ODU, and he cares about the experience we all have as well as our growth and development."

When Broderick took the job as acting president in 2008 after Roseann Runte stepped down from the post, it was not assumed he would become her long-term successor.

With no experience as a college president, Broderick wasn't initially included among the candidates considered by the board. But he thought beyond what could have been a short-lived job and began to make plans for the future of the university and its partnership with the community.

While guiding ODU through a series of state funding cuts and

confronting the issue of off-campus crime, he also addressed the rapid growth the university was experiencing. ODU's enrollment had gone from under 20,000 to over 25,000, a number that couldn't be supported by the faculty or campus.

Broderick began asking questions, starting discussions and visiting other colleges in search of ideas and advice. His plan to slow enrollment was intended to help the university become better, not bigger. Many of the developments that ODU benefits from today came from the 2009-2014 strategic plan he drafted during his tenure as acting president.

Broderick said in his 2010 state of the university address:

"We have charted a course not only to survive, but to thrive . . . The bright light in this economic picture is that it forces us to confront the most essential questions about who we are and what we want to be."

His plan depended on the support and engagement of many and his strong relationships with local, state and federal political, business, and community leaders. To this day, Broderick stresses that any plan ultimately belongs to the campus, the students, the faculty, the staff and the community.

"It really has to be a collection of aspirations and desires from the people that are ODU," he said.

"While I am the president, there are a lot of other people that have to support this for it to work."

He added, "I am a firm believer that we here as a campus have an inclusive relationship, so that if you want to be a part of something, the doors are always open."

a good listener

Personable, caring, involved are words that have been used to describe John Broderick. He is visible and accessible, and is on campus often, attending events and engaging with students.

De Silva, the interim provost, said, "It is the mark of a great president to be able to listen to voices in the faculty, and I have seen John listen, time and again, and then engage faculty leaders in productive conversations."

Transparent is another word that describes his leadership brand.

"People want to know the answer, whatever that may be," Broderick said. "I try to tell them what is happening, to the best of my knowledge, at this particular moment."

His positive relationships extend to faculty and staff, students and community.

A leadership principle that works for one person might not necessarily work for someone else, Broderick believes, but one philosophy he has implemented over the years came from Tony Blair, former British prime minister. Blair said that while saying yes is easy, saying no is not. That influences the way Broderick responds to individuals who come to him with ideas.

"How do you incentivize people and make them understand they're valued even if their idea doesn't connect at this particular time?" Broderick asked.

It might be the ninth time they come back with an idea that everything connects. Even if it's not the idea's right time, Broderick wants the conversation to continue, with everyone involved having a sense of ownership.

making education more accessible

"There is an overall philosophy on campus, whether you are faculty or work in housing, advising or parking, that we are going to do everything within our power, other than lowering our academic standard, to ensure that we help students and that students no longer fall through the cracks," Broderick said.

In 2010 Broderick was appointed to the Governor's Commission on Higher Education Reform, Innovation and Investment. The goal of the state initiative was making higher education accessible to qualified students, regardless of their background. Broderick put together a committee and with its advice decided to establish a vice presidential-level position for student engagement and enrollment services. The Student Success Center and Learning Commons was built, and Ellen Neufeldt has been leading the charge in the vice presidential position for the past four years.

With 133,000 alumni, ODU is experiencing its highest graduation and retention rates ever. The first-year retention rate has gone from the mid-70th percentile to 82 percent.

"When you do the math over five years, that 7 percent increase means 1,000 to 1,200 more students are eligible to graduate," Broderick said.

Twenty-six percent of ODU's students are military or affiliated with the military. They might start at ODU but not graduate from there. Broderick doesn't consider this a failure but an investment in a student's life. ODU's Military Connection Center was designed to provide academic and entrepreneurial resources.

"He is a transformational leader," Neufeldt said of Broderick. "He is very strong in the community and sets forth that we are going to be part of the community engagement in bettering our area both regionally and beyond."

The division she leads brings together different areas and offices from around the campus to work with students from first-point-of-contact to graduation. Broderick personally spearheaded LEAD, the Learn and Earn Advantage program, which provides jobs for freshmen who just missed qualifying for federal work study. They remain in the program during their sophomore year, moving to a department in their major, and then by their junior and senior year, they hold internships in the community.

"Something you immediately notice upon entering ODU as a first-year or transfer student is the amount of support, care and attention given students from members of the administration," Student Body President Christopher Ndiritu said, adding that Broderick is highly involved with the Student Government Association.

Broderick meets with Ndiritu once a month to discuss what the SGA is doing as well as overall student life.

"We are surrounded by individuals who realize how important it is to engage, interact, listen and build relationships with students," Ndiritu said. "This type of community that President Broderick has created and continues to sustain is what has led to so much progress and initiatives from our student body."

a research powerhouse

De Silva, the interim provost, said, "We see John Broderick as the president who not only cares about the institution but also

motivates us to think how we can serve the community.”

The 2014-2019 strategic plan vision statement states, “Old Dominion University will be recognized nationally and internationally as a forward-focused public doctoral research university with a collaborative and innovative approach to education and research that spurs economic growth, focuses on student success, engages civic and community constituents, and utilizes its strong relationships with a variety of state and national partners to provide solutions for real world problems.”

Broderick’s strong leadership is evident in the way he brings the community and university together – through research, entrepreneurship, continuing education and professional development.

“Under his leadership, ODU has really become a research powerhouse,” said Giovanna Genard, acting assistant vice president for strategic communication and marketing. “Our research ties to the region’s strengths.”

By slowing enrollment, Broderick became better able to focus on how ODU would be defined not only as a university but as an asset to the region and beyond.

In 1930, ODU was a branch of the College of William and Mary in engineering, which infused a strong STEM focus that continues to the present. ODU produces the second largest number of STEM graduates in the state, Genard said. Research initiatives now extend to modeling and simulation, bioelectrics and cyber security. ODU’s Center for Cybersecurity Education & Research teaches businesses how to remain up and running in the face of a cyber attack.

There are more than 400 research projects representing \$48 million in annual funding from sources including the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the U.S. departments of Energy and Defense. In addition, research has advanced in disciplines tied to regional strengths such as the federal labs, the port, the military, the Chesapeake Bay and health care. The goal is to come up with answers to current challenges, such as sea level rise in the region.

In 2010, Broderick established the Climate and Sea Level Rise initiative, which brings together some of the world’s leading experts on the topic.

Broderick said, “We know sea level rise on a firsthand basis, and we have all the resources here to take a leadership role.”

In 2013, the Hampton Roads Intergovernmental Pilot, initiated by the White House and convened through ODU by retired Navy meteorologist and captain Ray Toll, launched the nation’s first “whole of government and community” pilot project. With support from faculty, researchers, and government officials, Broderick hopes to establish a national center for sea level rise in Hampton Roads.

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launching entrepreneurs

Research initiatives share the spotlight with entrepreneurship. The Strome Entrepreneurial Center was established in 2014 as a resource for students from any discipline, not just business. Through the center, students are paired with experts in the university to create new businesses.

A group of faculty members, one from each college, went to the Price-Babson Symposium for Entrepreneurship in Boston in 2014 with the goal of incorporating what they learned into their curriculums.

Also, the Center for Enterprise Innovation, formerly called the Business Gateway, focuses on entrepreneurship in the region. Under this umbrella is the Veterans Business Outreach Center, which helps vets transitioning out of military service to develop their business ideas; the Women's Business Center; and the New Gov-2Com program, which helps government contractors transition to the commercial world.

Under development is the Center for Innovation in Norfolk, which will function as an incubator for new business creation.

Also to connect with the community, the College of Continuing Education and Professional Development, housed at the Virginia Beach Higher Education Center, was established in 2014. It provides non-credit workshops, conferences, seminars and certificates, as well as credit-based courses and programs offered in online, face-to-face and hybrid formats.

James Shaeffer, dean of the college, said, "President Broderick has a vision for the university to be an active member in the community, and through his leadership he has thoughtfully put together the right pieces, from business accelerators to providing professional development, both in the public and private sector, to creating flex-

John and Kate have been married for 36 years. He calls her the real hero in his life and for the school.

ible delivery mechanisms to meet the educational needs of those in our community. It's not to the community or for the community, it's with the community."

In his 2010 address, Broderick said, "We must listen to and learn from the community. We must hear its concerns and bring to bear our resources to solve problems."

ODU initiatives contribute \$2.1 billion annually in gross domestic product to Hampton Roads, and ODU is the third largest employer in the region.

"We have a commitment," Broderick said, "to economic development and not only to job generation but job retention."

The purpose of the entrepreneurial center is not only to grow more entrepreneurs in Hampton Roads but also to keep them here.

"We have a more educated workforce here, and now we have to increase business and industry in the area so that those students will stay," he said. "I think there was a time where ODU maybe didn't see the opportunities right in front it. So we have tried to elevate our focus and our engagement in areas where we have built a niche."

This has resulted in partnerships with Jefferson Lab, the Naval Surface Warfare Center, the Virginia Commercial Space Flight Authority, NASA Langley Research Center and Wallops Island as well as a close connection with Eastern Virginia Medical School.

"We have tried to keep a laser-sharp focus on where we can contribute and those assets are right here in Hampton Roads," Broderick said. "There are problems in our community that need solving and we can do that."

ODU contributes in other ways. Completed in 2014, The Arts in the Village – which includes the Barry Arts Building, James A. Hixton Art Studio Building and outdoor amphitheater Brock Commons – has become an arts destination for the region.

Community engagement also means service. Last year, ODU students provided over 500,000 hours of community service.

learning from diversity

With over 1,000 international students, ODU may be one of the most multicultural campuses in the United States. There are also students from all 50 states and ages ranging from 14 to 80. On any given day, over 50 languages might be spoken across the campus.

While Broderick was teaching a higher education class, something he does every year, he realized the class included students from Vietnam, Venice, Vermont and, of course, Virginia. The class became more than its academic content; it became a place where students could learn from each other.

"How can you possibly partner with a world if you've only been around people who look, dress, pray and talk like you," Broderick said. "I say to students that this is a place that represents the world that, yes, you are going to have to compete in, but more importantly, you are going to have to partner with."

The philosophy has shaped Broderick's leadership style.

"When you are on a college campus, you are around so many people who have incredible expertise," he said. "You would be doing yourself a disservice if every now and then you didn't listen to what other people had to say."

home and family

When he's not doing something related to ODU, Broderick says he's a typical husband and father. He's been married to Kate for 36 years and they have three sons, a granddaughter and a cocker spaniel.

"All three of my sons live around here," he said. "Two of them have ODU degrees that I actually got to sign and a third one is here now as a student, and I hope I get to sign his before I step aside."

Which doesn't seem to be a decision he'll make prematurely.

"The best part of the job is that it allows me to go out and support the students," he said. "When you lose the energy and enthusiasm to be around what is really a remarkable experience, when that doesn't resonate for you anymore, then you should say it's time for someone else to do this."

To stay refreshed, he exercises every day, no matter how busy his schedule. He also reads something for himself, unrelated to higher education, for a half-hour every night. The material varies, and recent subjects have included the Jamestown flooding, the mining industry in West Virginia and the life of Teddy Roosevelt.

For leadership inspiration, Broderick looks to his wife. The real hero, he said, in his life and for the school, is Kate.

"The things she does and the contributions she makes provide a much better leadership story than I do," he said.

Numerous awards attest to Broderick's own inspirational leadership story. He was appointed to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities Council of State Representatives in 2012, and he received the American College Personnel Association's Contribution to Higher Education Award. In 2011 and 2012, the Chronicle for Higher Education acknowledged ODU as one of the best universities to work for in the nation, and under his leadership, ODU has been named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for three consecutive years.

the future

There is a master plan in place that extends at least 20 years and includes a new football stadium, academic and student space, strategies to modernize residence halls, the addition of 3,600 parking spaces, new dining facilities and more safety enhancements. A dining hall on 49th Street in Norfolk is under construction as well as a new education building on the corner of 43rd Street and Hampton Boulevard.

Authorization of a \$71 million Life Sciences Building has been received, and the school is seeking support for a \$74 million Health Sciences Building and a \$62 million Student Services Building.

"ODU has been wonderful to me," Broderick said, "and I believe someday somebody will say that I was equally good for ODU at the time in history that I was here." — **IL**

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