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CSU's fight against budget cuts

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PHOTO | RIYANNA SINGLETON

Student Government Association President, Riyanna Singleton, in the legislative office building in Hartford Connecticut, on Feb. 19, speaking before the Appropriations Committee about the Governor's budget.

Connecticut State Universities, CSU's, faculty members are raising alarm over proposed budget cuts and their potential impact on students and faculty.

On Feb. 19, the CSU-AAUP, CSU students and CSU faculty demanded funding in the legislative office building in Hartford Connecticut.

"Governor Lamont seems to be trying to shrink the system, but we can't quite figure out why, especially when all the data shows that the CSU and community colleges are economic drivers in Connecticut," Vice President of the CSU-AAUP and Department Chair of English at the university, Cynthia Stretch said.

Stretch expressed frustration at the ongoing need to defend the value of state universities year after year.

Stretch criticized Gov. Lamont's budget proposal, noting that the allocation for fiscal year 2025 fell short by approximately $140 million, compared to what is needed to maintain current services.

"We need at least $630 million to maintain services," she said. "The Governor allocated $471.8 million, which is a significant shortfall."

In response to these financial constraints, Stretch highlighted the ongoing efforts by CSU's faculty to secure additional funding.

"We're asking for a real investment in state universities, specifically through expanding the PACT program," Stretch said. "This would make higher education more accessible to thousands of students, particularly those from families who can't afford to take on debt."

The PACT program, recently renamed the Mary Ann Handley Award, currently provides debt-free tuition for community college students.

Faculty members are pushing for its expansion to include CSU students.

"This is a game-changer," Stretch said. "It would give students the opportunity to attend university without the crippling burden of debt. It's not free, but it's an investment in students, not bureaucratic systems."

CSU student testimony included the Student Government Association, SGA, President Riyanna Singleton, who spoke before the Appropriations Committee.

"We are tired of being underestimated. We are tired of being underfunded. Southern students are the future of this state, and we need you to invest in us," Singleton said.

Singleton spoke on behalf of all students who could not attend the protest.

"Believe our presence made a difference. While these decisions are difficult, hearing real stories from real students adds humanity to the issue. Writing letters and calling the Capitol are effective, but it's much harder to ignore people speaking directly to you in person," Singleton said.

This is not the first time students have had to travel to the Capitol to protest budget cuts and tuition hikes.

"The students make powerful cases for the positive role a university education plays in their lives and the negative impacts of budget cuts over the years," Stretch said.

Stretch also expressed disappointment in the ongoing financial struggles faced by public higher education along with being exacerbated by threats of reduced funding from the federal government.

"We're fighting for state funding while being pummeled with executive orders and federal cuts," Stretch said. "It feels like we're being kicked while we're down."

As the budget discussions continue, faculty, students and alumni of the CSU system remain united in their call for a more stable, predictable funding.

Subsquently this can ensure the sustainability and growth of higher education in Connecticut.

La communidad welcomes Latiné and Hispanic students



PHOTO | BRIANNA WALLEN

Stephanie Perez, a Licensed Professional Counselor and assistant counselor in Room B106 in Engleman Hall on Feb. 19.

By Brianna Wallen
News Editor

Students at the university face their own unique set of challenges as they transition into college life, and finding a supportive community can make a world of difference.

Every Wednesday from 1 – 2 p.m. Stephanie Perez, a Licensed Professional Counselor and assistant counselor, hosts "La Communidad."

"It's important to have a place for students who share similar values, beliefs and cultures to connect with each other, as it can allow them to feel seen on campus," Perez said.

Whether students are seeking support or looking to build meaningful connections, the group offers a welcoming and confidential environment.

La Communidad provides a space for Latiné or Hispanic students to come together, discuss their experiences and connect with others who share the same cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

At a diverse university, Perez said that this space can provide that representation for them.

Perez, who attended a predominantly white university in Boston, said that she wishes she had a Latino support group similar to La Communidad.

"It would have helped me to feel accepted," Perez said. "I always felt like I didn't belong and like I wasn't good enough."

The counselor said that La Communidad also offers an environment where students can speak their native language.

"Students can speak their language freely, and they are not always able to do that outside or in the world," Perez said.

Perez also noted that in multiple cultures, especially in Latinos there is a heightened presence of "Machismo."

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University earns R2 recognition



PHOTO | JASON EDWARDS

The photo used for the newly credited research program here on campus.

By Brianna Wallen
News Editor

The university has made shockwaves in the academic world by becoming Connecticut's first and only Research 2 (R2) university.

This is a prestigious recognition from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.

According to the university's website, "Southern is the state's first and only R2-designated university, and one of only 139 in the country which is significant for prospective students interested in research-driven careers."

This landmark achievement places the university among an exclusive group of institutions, by showcasing its commitment to advancing academic excellence and pioneering research.

This milestone reflects the dedication of faculty, staff and students. Connecticut State and College Universities (CSCU), recognized and congratulated the university for reaching this achievement.

Achieving the R2 status requires institutions to meet specific thresholds.

The CSCU said that "In fiscal year 2023, Southern accumulated $8,007,000 in research expenditures and awarded 29 research doctorates."

The university has met and exceeded these requirements, as the R2 category requires universities to award at least 20 research doctorates and spend at least $5 million annually on research.

This paves the way for students to have more access to innovative research opportunities and resources.

Marketing major Juwell Clay, a sophomore, said that she is proud of this achievement and hopes to see it impact her classmates.

"It goes to show that Southern cares about their students and how prepared they are once they graduate," Clay said.

This new status enhances the university's reputation and opens doors for future collaborations and opportunities.

Overall this can benefit students, particularly those interested in research-focused fields

As the university continues to build its research capabilities, the institution is able to make a lasting impact on both academic and professional communities.