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Alumni panel offers "Bytes of Wisdom"

By Brianna Wallen
News Editor

As the spring semester nears its end, many seniors are preparing to make the transition from university life to the professional world, while other students are just beginning their journey and seeking direction for their academic and career paths.

For computer science majors, the "Bytes of Wisdom: An SCSU Alumni Panel" offered an opportunity to gain advice from recent graduates who were once in their shoes.

"There's only so much you can learn from classes," Eric Miguel, a data engineer said. "We're pretty new, so there's a lot that we can share."

Miguel along with Mason Ginter, a legacy software developer, were the panelists at the event hosted by the Computer Science Club on March 5. Students had the chance to hear firsthand about the challenges of entering the workforce and get insight from those who recently navigated the transition from college to a career.

Many students expressed their anxiety about the workload they will face once they land a job. Miguel helped ease that, by expressing that it is all about balance.



PHOTO | BRIANNA WALLEN

Data engineer Eric Miguel and legacy software developer Mason Ginter in Morrill Hall on March 5.

"There have been days where I just go in and do screen docking station setups and a lot of communication with different stakeholders," Miguel said. "So, it's not all coding. There's a lot of coordination, emails, messaging."

Panelists also shared advice on things they wish they had done while in college. Both Miguel and Ginter highlighted the value of internships and said that they would have benefited from gaining more hands-on experience.

"An internship or two would have helped me so well when I was applying for jobs just because I had no real prior work experience in tech," Miguel said.

Ginter, who transferred to the university from Gateway Community College with only three semesters left before graduation, said applying for internships crossed his mind far too late.

"I definitely would have and should have done that before, to get more experience, to be more marketable and kind of get a better idea of things," Ginter said.

Ginter also said that internships are another pathway to getting a job once students turn their tassels.

"Internships help with networking in general," Ginter said. "If you've interned at a company, it's a lot easier to get hired back at that company full-time."

Once in the workforce, panelists said factors such as AI, artificial intelligence and programming languages come into effect.

Miguel said that he advises students to utilize AI as an additional tool rather than a clutch.

"If you can only ride a bike with training wheels, can you ride a bike?" Miguel said. "If you can only code with ChatGPT over your shoulder, can you code?"

He emphasized that while AI is a valuable tool, it is crucial to maintain foundational coding skills. This is especially important when learning or rewriting code, as new programming languages like Python, JavaScript and Go continue to evolve.

Miguel said that even though an open-source software library, known as Pandas, is considered to be outdated, it is still utilized.

"I will say on that, like a lot of when you are a new developer, you may think, oh, this system is really old, like, let me just rewrite this newer. Don't do that," Miguel said. "It causes problems for a lot of people, because anything you rewrite, someone has to review, someone has to test."

Both Miguel and Ginter hope that each attendee walks away with knowledge to help jumpstart their careers and gain a competitive edge.

"We felt like it was a good idea to share some insight," Miguel said. "It's a lot more real when advice comes from someone in your position not so long ago."

Sociology department "food table" combats student hunger



PHOTO | VICTORIA CRUZ

Food table provided by the Sociology department at the university in Engleman Hall on March 5.

By Victoria Cruz
Contributor

Students cannot learn when they are hungry. The Sociology department here at the university has recognized these barriers and in response created a 'food table' in their department office.

This program was spearheaded by associate professor of sociology and criminology Venezia Michalsen and department secretary Kathryn Willette.

"I have students coming into my class and they are hungry, you can't learn when you are hungry," Michaelsen said. "You can't learn when you are wondering when you are going to eat next."

Together they started this initiative using excess department funds this past fall.

Since then, they applied for a DEI Social Justice Grant and received an external partnership to expand and continue the program.

The table includes snacks, quick meals and personal care items available to all students with no restrictions.

Food insecurity continues to be a critical issue for college students.

According to data collected through the optional QR code survey available at the table, 66% of students who visited reported eating less than they felt they should have in the past month due to financial limitations.

"Food insecurity is a real thing; people are scared and tired and hungry. All I care about is learning in the classroom and you can't do that without basic needs being met," Michalsen said.

The food table offers a different experience to the food pantry on campus. The food table offers convenience as any student can come when needed and many come every day.

"I think the experience for students is different. I think it is a different mental experience, there is intention with the food pantry, here students can just come in and grab something," Willette said.

Beyond just providing food, the department is creating a welcoming environment for students to gather, study and recharge in the space. Redesigning their office to be an accessible place where students feel at home.

"We have this comfortable space and we make an effort to curate it so students feel they have a home to go to," Michalsen said.

Faculty has seen improvements in student well-being after creating this third space.

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Interim President speaks out

By Solé Scott
Editor-in-Chief



PHOTO | ISABEL CHENOWETH

Interim President Dwayne Smith outside of Morrill Hall.

Interim President Dwayne Smith breaks his silence to students about his name being involved in the state's Comptroller report to the governor late last fall.

On March 4, Interim President Smith agreed to a sit-down interview to discuss the recent suspension of the purchasing card system.

"As of February 28, we went to U.S. Bank and it was done in a kind of rapid pace, so I think we're having a kind of transitional page," Smith said.

Originally, the university was with J.P. Morgan before the current transition.

"As part of the new p-card policy, you have to go through training," Smith said. "The do's and the don'ts of it if you will."

When the university did their own review of their p-card system, they found out just how much cards were being used and not used.

"We found that there are inactive p-cards, and some people had five p-cards for five different accounts, so what we are doing is we are streamlining that," Smith said.

Once faculty members finish their training, they will get approved by their respective dean and or vice president of their department.

When the Comptroller's report came out, Smith sent out an email only to his colleagues.

When I asked why students were not included as well, this is what he had to say.

"What I did was sent out a campus wide message and probably the reason why the students didn't receive it is because it was the 19 of December so students were not here," Smith said.

"So, the goal is to unpack it, allow people to understand all the nuances of the audit findings and then answer any questions."

Students will have the opportunity to speak to Smith in a forum on March 24.

Smith had an explanation for some of the data collected on his misuse of the p-card as well.

"In the audit there was a discussion about dry cleaning and the dry cleaning was actually not personal," Smith said.

He offered even more clarification on the expenses not being used personally.

"We used my p-card as the president's office charge account," Smith said. "So, things such as name badges, supplies were used and we won't do that any longer."

Smith discussed more categories that were present in the investigation report.

"The other items that were cited such as dry cleaning wasn't personal dry cleaning, it was me pressing and cleaning the previous president's regalia," Smith said. "I did not buy a new regalia because I did not think it was necessary being the Interim President."

Also, he touched upon the car washes that were mentioned in the report.

"Those were car washes for the university owned vehicle," Smith said.

He stressed again that the p-card was used for necessities for the office only.

"None of the charges on my p-card account was personal," Smith said.

By the end of the interview, he wanted to leave with this comment.

"I am proud of what I do here, and my efforts and the payoff is great," Smith said.