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SOUTHERN NEWS

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Interim Chancellor Braswell visits campus

By Noah Nunez
Contributor

Interim Chancellor Natalie Braswell made her first visit to the university on Thursday, Oct. 1, to discuss issues faculty and students have been facing, hoping to provide clearer transparency into the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system.

Braswell's meetings were split into group discussions with staff and students, hoping to address their individual concerns and how best to tackle them as the semester continues.

"The things that you guys are doing are so awesome, and the mission gets lost in all the chaos and the noise from the outside; I just want to bring that back," Braswell said.

Braswell spent the majority of her discussion with faculty discussing budgetary concerns and how her time at CSCU has been spent addressing issues with contracts regarding student internships and trips.

Braswell acknowledged that these issues are systemic and not quickly solvable, offering faculty the ability to email her in case of any stalled issues.



PHOTO | WILLIAM GAGNÉ

Interim Chancellor Natalie Braswell in Room 208A of Englemen Hall on Thursday, Oct. 1.

"There's just not a system in place to adequately address the timeliness of getting these contracts done," Braswell said. "I mean, we're not fixing this budget in a year; we're not fixing this budget in a biennium. Anyone who thinks that is just being naive. Can we fix it in two biennia? I think so."

Concerns over the vetting process that failed to stop the previous chancellor from being put into the role were brought up as well, with Braswell introducing a new accountability website to provide clearer requirements.

"Within the next couple of weeks, maybe we'll be putting up a website. It's basically going to be an accountability website that's going to have all of those types of issues, so you know exactly sort of what it is we're trying to do," Braswell said.

In her meeting with students, Braswell discussed issues regarding financial aid with certain majors and plans to help students who may not be eligible.

"Obviously something's happening on the national level that trickles down and has an effect, especially when it comes to federal financial aid," Braswell said. "And so the question is, sort of, unfortunately, playing a waiting game to wait and see what's going to happen versus what's not going to happen."

Issues arose during her discussions with students as acronyms and terms used at the university were put into question, making students struggle to see what she could address directly.

Communication major Luke Famel, a junior, joined the conversation but found difficulty discussing more nuanced issues.

"I feel like part of the issue was some of these questions were more locally and she acts on a larger level," Famel said. "And I feel that was also some of the difficulties answering them because a lot of them she's hearing for the first time and is also learning about."

Even with these difficulties, some students found the chancellor's appearance today helpful and important to see.

Psychology major Ariana LeCates, a senior, was very appreciative of the chancellor's time.

"I am very honored to be in that room with the conversation. She was very attentive, listened to everything that we were kinda throwing at her, and had an answer for everything, especially when conversations got difficult," LeCates said.

Braswell's first visit to campus turned out to be an informative moment for everyone involved.

Even with a few bumps throughout, she provided clear answers to students and faculty voicing their concerns.

Town Hall addresses budget issues

By Valentina Toro
Managing Editor

The university faculty and staff gathered for the "Fall University Town Hall," where Interim President Sandra Bulmer discussed campus accomplishments, administrative concerns, leadership changes and the university's growing budget deficit.

Bulmer began by recognizing the university's 80.4% first-to-second-year retention rate before addressing concerns she has heard from the campus community about communication, administrative processes and campus climate.

"I hear loud and clear how frustrated the campus community is with our administrative processes," Bulmer said. "Specifically, we still have challenges with our accounts payable. We still have challenges with contracting. We still have challenges with reimbursements."

Bulmer said finance and administration will provide more information about those issues in a separate presentation. She also acknowledged calls for more communication from university leadership and said she plans to send regular newsletters and hold virtual town halls.

"I'm hearing a fair amount that people need more communication from me and from our leadership about what is happening, decisions that are being made, how those decisions are being made," Bulmer said.

Campus climate was another concern addressed during the Town Hall. The university has reached the enrollment threshold for designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, with Hispanic students making up at least 25% of enrollment. Bulmer said the university is considering what that means for how it serves students and plans to launch its first campus climate survey since 2017.



PHOTO | LILY RAND

Interim President Sandra Bulmer speaking to students and staff at the "Fall University Town Hall" on Sept. 29 in the Adanti Student Center Ballroom.

Bulmer also outlined a two-year plan to fill interim leadership positions. The university is continuing its search for a permanent provost, with searches for other administrative positions expected to follow.

The largest portion of the Town Hall focused on the finances. The university projects approximately $221.1 million in revenue and nearly $249.6 million in expenses for fiscal year 2027, leaving a $28.5 million deficit.

"That's a lot," Bulmer said. "That's a very, very, very big number to get your head around."

Personnel represents approximately 71% of projected expenses. Bulmer said university expenses have increased by about $60 million since fiscal year 2019, while revenues have increased by approximately $33 million.

The university has responded by leaving 28 positions unfilled last year and plans to leave another 20 unfilled this year. Bulmer said the university is also using zero-based budgeting, reviewing operations and looking for opportunities to consolidate.

Rather than relying on significant tuition increases or widespread cuts, Bulmer said the university will focus on advocating for greater state appropriations.

"We need to go right to the legislature and tell the Southern story," Bulmer said. "What does Southern mean? What is Southern doing with your money?"

Faculty members raised questions following Bulmer's presentation about communication, shared governance and what would happen if additional state funding does not materialize. One faculty member asked whether the university had a "Plan B" for addressing the deficit.

Bulmer said decisions on that scale could require involvement from the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system, Board of Regents and collective bargaining units.

"This is a moment for us to come together, to come up with a strategy, to do a full-court press before the election, before the governor's budget and then throughout the legislative session," Bulmer said.

School of Nursing launches Peru aid

By Elena Panora- Jara
Contributor

The School of Nursing is collecting donations to support healthcare efforts in Peru during an upcoming service-learning trip.

The donation drive is seeking items such as eye drops, reading glasses, lotions, oral hygiene products, vitamins and over-the-counter medications- all based on the needs of the community's students will serve in Cusco.

"We do what they need, not what we think that they need," Maria D. Krol, interim executive director of healthcare programs and organizer of the donation drive and trip said. "It's about what the area needs and wants."

Those who are interested in donating health and personal-care items or making monetary contributions can drop off donations in Room 311 located in the Human and Health Services building by Oct. 13.

By working with the communities, the service-learning nursing group is able to identify what they are in need of.

This way, monetary contributions directly fund the purchase of needed supplies, along with helping rebuild clinics in Cusco, Peru.

The trip is an opportunity for senior nursing students to experience what providing healthcare is like in Cusco and actively participate in it.

Though the nursing program only allows senior nursing students to attend, anyone in the university donate to their cause.

Over the course of 10 days, from Oct. 14 to Oct. 24, students will work with a team of medical professionals to assist underserved communities, help provide care and supplies and gain hands-on clinical experience.

The nursing group's goal is to provide patients with a one-stop shop for their medical needs while using donations to cover any necessary medical expenses.

"They come in, they get evaluated, they see the doctor, and they get their medication," Krol said. "If they need a referral, they have a referral and they know where to go to be seen."

After learning about the service-learning trip, nursing major Maddelin Olivares, a freshman, agreed with its cause.

"South American countries usually don't have a lot of access to healthcare," Olivares said.

"It'd be very nice for them to have that accessibility."

Nursing major Simon Salsato, a sophomore, said that he believes this experience would likely enhance their learning and sharpen their skills for senior nursing majors interested in attending.

"You'd probably be helping someone, if not many people, and have an impact on their life that they can remember," Salsato said.