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Town hall meeting addresses budget

By Brianna Wallen
News Editor



PHOTO | LILY RAND

Interim President Sandra Bulmer leading the town hall meeting in the Adanti Student Center Ballroom on Friday, Oct. 31.

The Adanti Student Center Ballroom buzzed with conversation on Friday, Oct. 31, as Interim President Sandra Bulmer hosted a campus-wide town hall.

The forum invited open conversation about university priorities, student experience and upcoming initiatives, with a Q&A session giving the audience an opportunity to ask insightful questions.

"It's not going to be the kind of town halls that I've sat through for 26 years," Bulmer said. "I was thinking a little bit about being in your seat and what that's felt like over the years. So, I thought, let me try to give you a sense of what's going on in administration because a lot of what we do every day affects you."

Bulmer opened the discussion by emphasizing openness and transparency, as she reflected on her experiences in her new role while offering insight into the university's budget, current challenges and the work being done to address them.

After sharing an overview of the institution's $217 million operating cost, she broke down the university's expenses and explained that the majority of funds go toward the people who allow the university to operate.

"Seventy-one percent is paying our people," Bulmer said. "Our people are our product. That's what we're selling: the expertise, the services, everything you do."

Bulmer also highlighted the financial aid and operational costs that help to sustain the university.

"We also give out a lot of financial aid," Bulmer said. "We've got facilities, food service contracts, leases and rentals. And when we build those beautiful buildings, we pay debt service on all that money."

Bulmer emphasized that these facilities and services are not free of cost, as they can take about 20 or 30 years to pay off.

On the other hand, Bulmer shared how the university generates income to balance out these expenses.

"Sixty-two million is tuition, another 69 million is fees, and we get a state appropriation based on our enrollment. A few years ago, the state started helping us out with fringe, which offsets pension costs and is really helpful," Bulmer said.

Bulmer also noted that enrollment plays a central role in the university's financial stability.

"The revenue is really all about enrollment," Bulmer said. "We increased our undergraduate enrollment considerably, especially with a robust first-time, full-time freshman class.

A strong freshman turnout reveals a promising sign of growth in the university's future. Bulmer shared that when a large first-year class has a successful year, it benefits the institution.

"You have a good freshman year, and you get to have a lingering benefit of that," Bulmer said. "If you have a really bad freshman year, the lingering sophomore, junior and senior years are smaller."

Subsequently, Bulmer emphasized the importance of sustaining this trend through targeted strategies that meet a variety of different students' needs.

"We've got to be focused on transfer students and other areas where, with fewer high school graduates coming out, we'll need to shift our focus," Bulmer said.

To strengthen enrollment efforts, Bulmer added that teams across campus are working on creative solutions.

"A lot of teams are doing work to identify pilots we can try," Bulmer said. "We're looking at building more relationships with community college partners, offering more evening classes and expanding online programs where they make sense."

Bulmer then shifted the discussion to the university's financial outlook by providing insight on roadblocks ahead.

Bulmer explained that while the current expense model has been balanced for this year, it relies on temporary financial support that will not continue moving forward.

"This year, the system office gave us over eight million to pay our debt relief. They took it out of their reserves. They shared their reserves that you saw. We pay them, so it is our money, but they gave it back to us," Bulmer said. "We're not gonna get it next year, so that's going to be a structural problem we have to deal with."

Bulmer noted that the university also pulled nearly six million from its own reserves, signaling the need for careful financial planning in the months ahead.

"Those are two things — canary in the coal mine," Bulmer said. "We're still dealing with a structural deficit. So, we're going to have to keep looking at that and figure out how we're going to navigate it."

Other challenges that Bulmer highlighted included the food service contract and advertising that goes way over the university's means.

Bulmer emphasized that innovative ideas and teamwork are important tools to overcome these hurdles.

"We've got these students who need to graduate and get the degree that we're offering, the program or the experience, but we're going to have to challenge ourselves to think about how we deliver that in the most cost-effective way," Bulmer said.

Before the town hall closed its curtains, Bulmer restated the importance of communication and staying connected with the campus community.

"I'm sitting in the office and just hearing from a few people. That's not the full picture," Bulmer said. "We want to commit ourselves fully to understanding the needs, and those needs change. What they were six months or a year ago are different. Things are changing every day around here."

Lastly, Bulmer encouraged a sense of collaboration and grace as the university navigates financial and structural challenges.

"I really appreciate your commitment to that work," Bulmer said.

Cross country team turns miles into gold medals

By Draven Dabrowski
Sports Writer



PHOTO | SAM TRUMBLET/SCSU ATHLETICS

The men and women's cross country teams celebrating their win in the NE10 Championship in Manchester, New Hampshire on Oct. 26.

At this point, the Owls' cross country program has made winning look like a routine — but there is nothing routine about the work that goes into it.

Women's Head Coach Mellisa Stoll Funaro and Assistant Coach for both men and women's teams Brian Nill emphasized that the culture, which is built on routine, belief and accountability, is what keeps both programs at the top of the conference.

"Just having the ability to click it off year after year with a different group really kind of speaks to the group as a whole and how they progressed over time," Nill said. "The biggest thing in our culture is the younger kids come in, and they buy in from day one."

The Owls men's team claimed its fourth straight NE10 Championship, while the women's team earned its second in program history.

This is a testament not only to talent that each member possseses but to a winning culture years in the making.

For Jonathan Volpe, a senior who has been part of the men's four straight conference title run, that culture is more than a mindset — it is a responsibility.

"I knew people were going to want to go after me. I had the most experience on the field, but I also had to watch out for everyone wanting to go for my spot," Volpe said.

Volpe won his second individual title, crossing the finish line at 25:46.8. His first came in 2022.

It was Volpe's third NE10 First Team honor and fourth all-conference nod.

Volpe's journey has not always been easy. After breaking his foot last year, he battled through pain to regain his form and help lead his team to another title.

"At the start of the season, I was dealing with a little bit of foot and ankle pain," Volpe said. "Overcoming that just helped strengthen everything."

Nill credits Volpe's determination as the standard that defines not only him, but the entire team.

"Probably the most stubborn kid I've ever coached — doesn't take no for an answer," Nill said. "The fact that he's able to just keep pressing, keep showing up every single day, speaks volumes."

That persistence paid off not only in championships but in personal growth.

Volpe has cut his 8K time from 28:04 as a freshman to 24:25.

On the women's side, Courtney Henchcliffe, a senior, returned after missing last season with a collarbone fracture determined to leave her mark.

"My mindset was that I was very determined to win because I wasn't there last year, and I wasn't the best my first year here," Henchcliffe said. "I wanted to claim that spot."

Henchcliffe crossed at 22:49.3 and finished 00:49.1 ahead of the second-place finisher. She is the first individual champion since Laura Brustolon won it for the Owls in 2009.

For Henchcliffe, that collective spirit is what truly separates this team from the rest.

"Everything we do is for each other," Henchcliffe said. "Everyone wants it just as bad as the next person, and we all make it happen for each other."

The unity is what fuels their toughest days — the early mornings, the long runs and the double training sessions that put them past comfort.

"Distance running really is group suffering," Nill said. "It's not very enjoyable for a lot of moments, but when everyone can recognize, 'Okay, this is going to be tough, but I'll pull you through, you pull me through,' You work together."

Next to come is the NCAA East Regional on Saturday, Nov. 8, where the Owls will look to keep their momentum rolling.

For both cross country programs, greatness is not just measured in titles.

It is found in the miles, the mornings and the teammates who make it all worth it.

"Honestly, I just love being here," Henchcliffe said. "I love waking up every day and coming here. Sometimes, I literally can't sleep the night before because I am so excited to come."