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AHED DISPATCH

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Thank you for joining us for another edition of AHED Dispatch.

This edition contains interviews with the new Chancellor of the California State University as well as the new Chancellor of the California Community Colleges.

Please enjoy reading and learning about their unique perspectives adapting into their new roles, as well as some fun facts.

We wanted to take a moment to remind you that you are a valuable resource to the Committee of Higher Education. We encourage you to reach out to us with any questions, concerns and ideas that you may have.

“There is no such thing as a silly question”



California
Community
Colleges



The California
State University

* **Prior to becoming the Chancellor of the California State University (CSU), you were the President of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU).**

What were some skills that you learned during your time with AASCU that seamlessly transferred to your new role as Chancellor of the CSU?

That’s a great question.

I served as AASCU’s president for almost six years, working to advance higher education policy and practice on behalf of almost 400 member colleges and universities. It was an extremely rewarding and deeply meaningful experience for me, and excellent preparation for my current role because it afforded me a comprehensive, detailed, 360-degree perspective of America’s higher education landscape – a view not many have had the good fortune to command.

As AASCU’s president, I was able to gain knowledge and experience about institutions of all sizes; those that serve an array of student populations; rural, urban and suburban institutions; and those located in conservative, liberal and more moderate populations. This helped me learn about promising practices in academic programming and student-support services that have enhanced student success across all of these settings.

This was invaluable and highly transferable experience for me in taking on the role as chancellor, because the CSU has all of these types of institutions in one university system within our very populous and dynamically diverse state.

* **You’ve written and spoken about issues related to student success, leadership, diversity, equity and inclusion. What is something that the Legislature should specifically focus on in regard to those issues?**

I only ask for your continued support and partnership. It’s because of this support – and thanks to our flagship student success effort Graduation Initiative 2025 – that the CSU’s graduation rates are at all-time highs, and for students from all backgrounds. And we are doubling down to close equity gaps by drilling down into and disaggregating our data to identify those students who are on the cusp of completion and who – with the right engagement and support – will be able to graduate sooner. Our efforts to elevate Black excellence throughout the CSU show great promise, too, and we are currently implementing action items across all our campuses – initiatives that are aligned with the recommendations in our Black Student Success Report.

None of this work would be possible without the ongoing support and partnership of the Legislature. I also ask that you continue to hold us accountable. Of course we love to hear about what we’re doing right. But we gain more value in learning where we can improve, and we invite your candid input. As the great author and civil rights activist James Baldwin famously wrote, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”



“I was able to gain knowledge and experience about institutions of all sizes...”

California State University, Dominguez Hills



*** What is something that you would want more people to know about the CSU?**

I would want people to consider the impact our students’ success has – not just on the students and their families – but on California’s communities and the State more broadly.

We are the largest, most diverse public four-year university system in the nation, educating America’s new majority. Our students are role models for how to live, work and learn in a global society. Approximately 125,000 students earn CSU degrees each year. That degree carries with it remarkable economic benefits. According to Georgetown’s Center on Education and the Workforce, college degrees have an average lifetime value of 2.8 million dollars. Degree holders face lower rates of unemployment and are more likely to enjoy the security and stability provided by retirement plans and health insurance.

There are often-overlooked personal benefits, as well. College graduates smoke less, exercise more, have lower rates of obesity and have better overall health outcomes. They report higher levels of happiness.

And there are societal benefits, too. Degree holders volunteer more, vote more, are more likely to assume leadership roles in their community and donate more to charity. According to the Lumina Foundation, they rely far less on public services and pay, on average, \$381,000 in lifetime taxes, net of public services, as compared to just \$26,000 for high school grads. And the CSU, more specifically, is the driver of California’s diverse and highly educated workforce – our business community’s greatest competitive advantage. In fact, one out of every 10 California employees is a CSU alum.

Make no mistake, higher education is a public good every bit as much as a private one. And the CSU is unique in that so many of our graduates are place-committed, with almost 80% living and working within a 50-mile radius of their alma mater, enriching their regional society and economy in immeasurable ways.



University of California, Berkeley

*** On a personal note, as someone who spent her formative years growing up in New York City and surrounding areas, how does California pizza compare?**

Uh-oh. I feel the need to apologize in advance for this response.

I absolutely love California, my adopted home. Since my return in October to begin my work as chancellor, everyone has been gracious, warm, welcoming and supportive.

One of the great aspects of living in California is the food. There is such a wide variety of cuisine, with regional and global influences and with incredible locally sourced produce and other ingredients.

But I have to be real with you. New York pizza is New York pizza. California pizza does not compare. No other pizza compares. You know what they say – it’s the water!

“None of this would be possible without the ongoing support and partnership of the Legislature.”

MEET CHANCELLOR SONJA CHRISTIAN

- * **Your first experience in the California Community College (CCC) system began in 1991 at Bakersfield College where you started as a professor of mathematics eventually ending your 12 year term as Dean. As the first permanent female Chancellor of the CCC, what has been one of the biggest changes to the CCC system from your perspective of faculty to now Chancellor?**

One of the big shifts was moving from just a focus on *access* to community college, to making a commitment to getting students to complete a college credential, *success*. And as a part of that, to looking at disaggregated data to understand and take action on equity issues.

For the better part of the last ten years, CA Community Colleges have seen significant policy reforms and initiatives - Guided Pathways, the Community College Baccalaureate program, dual and concurrent enrollment, expanded financial aid opportunities such as the California College Promise, Student Centered Funding Formula, Remedial Education Reform (AB 705). Transfer Reform (SB 1440 and AB 928), Vision for Success, and, most recently, Vision 2030.

The current Vision 2030 preserves our system's commitment to success and goes beyond that – it adds the following elements (1) economic mobility (2) access with equity (3) climate action and (4) generative AI and its implications for higher education. It provides a roadmap aimed at creating multiple access points and tailored support, ensuring that our students can complete a four-year community college or transfer degree, or can find employment in a field of their choice with family-sustaining wages. It creates innovative opportunities such as offering credit for prior learning to veterans and working adults, reimagining instruction through flexible modalities, and expanding outreach and support for justice-impacted Californians and former foster youth.

- * **As the previous chair of the California Community College Women's Caucus and an overall advocate for [women's equality in education](#), what do you believe that the Legislature should focus on in attaining some forward movement in that area specifically?**

Vision 2030 outlines three central equity goals – Equity in Success, Equity in Access, and Equity in Support – as driving forces behind transformational change. Nothing less than dismantling any and all barriers preventing women from attaining equality in education is acceptable.

Our budget priorities align with advancing opportunities for women, priorities such as devoting greater resources for financial aid, increasing support for student parents, and remaining committed to flexible course scheduling. Our focus in developing these budget priorities has always been on listening to and acting on the student voice, including the voice of women. Data shows the California Community Colleges serves more than 110,000 student parents every year, and, by far, most of those student parents are women. This is a population that often needs more financial aid and support. And while they often have higher GPAs than non-student parents, they are less likely to enroll full-time, to stay enrolled from year to year, or to earn a degree or certificate. The state of California must recognize these challenges and provide the resources to support these students across our system and continue to create an environment of inclusion, access and support.

Vision 2030 also calls our attention to the 6.8 million Californians identified in a California Competes report as having a high school diploma but no college credential. This population is often stuck in low-income jobs without a hope of economic mobility. A segment of this population, predominantly women, are domestic workers that provide home health care and childcare. We have launched a low-income pathways demonstration project with a goal of getting these individuals to the next college credential and then the next with the hope of economic mobility for them and their families.



“Data shows the California Community Colleges serves more than 110,000 student parents every year...”



Bakersfield College

* **What is something that you would want more people to know about the California Community Colleges?**

The California Community Colleges serves more than 2 million students annually, making us the largest provider of workforce training and higher education in the nation. In fact, California's community colleges generate more than \$128 billion in economic activity annually, and every \$1 invested in the education of community college students creates a return of \$5 in earnings.

Community colleges offer baccalaureate programs that are designed to address equity gaps, to be affordable and help keep students out of debt. According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, community college baccalaureate programs boost our graduates' earnings by an average of \$28,000 annually.

Our Associate Degree for Transfer program is a thriving pipeline for our students to transfer to the University of California and California State University systems, HBCUs, and a number of private colleges and universities. By offering a mix of baccalaureate programs, associate degrees, certificates and transfer programs, as well as more than 200 career technical programs, our community colleges make it possible for anyone in California to get a high-quality education and pursue their dreams.

Community Colleges are starting to play an important role in the state's climate action agenda. There are 116 colleges and 80 centers that cover the state, from heavily populated urban centers to vast regions of rural counties. As green technologies roll out, I see community colleges as conduits to ensure that technology development happens in collaboration with community and deployed with equity. Whether developing curriculum to train workers, or serving directly as a community resource, Community colleges are vital partners. Tapping into this resource will serve California well in the buildout of its climate agenda - for example - its clean transportation plan or grid resilience plan.

CA Community Colleges, we take care of our students, our communities, and our planet.



University of California, Los Angeles

“Community Colleges are starting to play an important role in the state’s climate action agenda.”

* **On your blog, <https://sonyachristianblog.com/> there appears to be a four-legged friend, we would love to know more?**

Neo turned seven on St. Patrick's Day.

In 2017 as a colleague and I were headed to a conference she showed me pictures of golden puppies in Tehachapi that she was considering, but then changed her mind at the last minute. I fell in love with the pictures. Made a trip that weekend to see the litter of puppies and Neo walked right up to me. When I lifted him, he started nibbling on my braid. He came home the day after the 2017 Bakersfield College graduation.

Neo loves his morning and evening walks, a 1.2-mile loop, and keeps an eye out for cats. He enjoys the backyard, the birds and the squirrels, and looks at the pool cleaner with suspicion, probably imagining that it is a water dragon. His favorite treats include peanut butter, carrots, and chips. He loves cuddling and is highly communicative.



Neo!

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT (ICYMI)...

February 1, 2024

The Committee on Higher Education released its report, “A Call To Action Report 2024: How postsecondary education institutions can address sex discrimination and provide educational justice on campus.

Please follow the link to the released report:

<https://ahed.assembly.ca.gov/publications/reports>

February 7, 2024

A Joint Informational Hearing was held along with the Senate Education Committee titled, *The State of Public Higher Education Coordination and Collaboration*.

Please follow the link to the learn more about the hearing:

<https://ahed.assembly.ca.gov/hearings/oversight-hearing-agendas-2023-24>