The State of the CSU… and Us

In his initial State of the CSU address delivered at the Jan. 29 Board of Trustees meeting, Chancellor Timothy White emphasized the critical role that our system plays in meeting the workforce needs of the state and growing its economy. At the cornerstone of his address was the announcement of a commitment of $50 million in new funding to support student achievement and bolster degree completion. This focus recognizes the state’s need to produce 1 million more graduates by 2025 than it is on track to do now in order to sustain California’s economic well-being.

The chancellor identified seven key areas for investment:

- Hiring more tenure-track faculty
- Improving advising and other support services for students
- Reducing curricular bottlenecks and other roadblocks to degree completion
- Improving student preparation for collegiate academic success before they reach us
- Enriching the educational environment through more applied and experiential learning opportunities
- Improving institutional capability to make data-driven decisions
- Strengthening degree completion for transfer students

Everything he said and outlined is music to our ears. In fact, it is familiar music, because everything he said and outlined we have already embraced. And in some areas—such as graduation rates, community college outreach and partnerships, curricular reform in General Education, effective strategies to reduce bottlenecks, and promoting such high impact practices as service learning and study abroad to inspire student achievement and support persistence to degree completion—we are leading the way.

This is particularly the case because we recognize that what we are about is not just a numbers game. Yes, we are aware of the “1 million more jobs” message. And we know the fields where many of these job needs will be: health care, construction and civil engineering, teaching,
computer and mathematics-based occupations, business and financial occupations, and food production, service and safety occupations.

We also know, as history teaches us, that half the jobs for the next half-century haven’t even been invented yet. So, we need now, and we will continue to need, a workforce that is nimble and responsive to an ever-changing social, environmental and economic landscape.

But more: Our mission is not just to prepare students to find a place in our economy. It is to enable them to play a role in our democracy. And we do this, both in and beyond the classroom, by promoting integrative and adaptive learning and cultivating a sense of personal and social responsibility that translates into civic engagement and community service.

As the chancellor emphasized, a key to accomplishing this agenda is appointing more tenure-track faculty. He did not overlook the contributions and role of our staff. But he focused his address on faculty, calling for investments to reverse the long-declining ratio of tenured and tenure-track faculty to lecturers and, as he said, bringing to our campuses “tenure-track faculty in areas that matter most to California’s future.”

We will support this goal in several ways. We are in the process of searching for thirty-five new tenure-track positions for next year. This is the most in almost a decade.

We will make competitive offers to incoming faculty in order to improve the University’s overall profile regarding the salaries of assistant and associate professors. Yet, mindful of salary inversion issues that can be created for our current faculty, we will investigate and support steps that seek to strengthen the compensation and workload situation for all faculty. As this campus was a leading advocate for the Equity II action, we will campaign for an Equity III strategy as well.

As I mentioned in the spring convocation address, I am particularly keen on supporting undergraduate research. This is one of those “high impact practices” which the chancellor also encourages. For the benefits are many: supporting faculty professional growth and development, enhancing student mentoring and learning, and benefiting those who are served through the research of our faculty.

But, most important, we aim to bring to our campus new faculty, who, regardless of disciplines and job market needs, know that what also matters greatly to the future of California are able and learned graduates of our universities who will champion goodness, service, justice, and the promise of a democratic society.

Paul J. Zingg

President