

Academic Senate CSU (ASCSU) Chair's Report to the CSU Board of Trustees

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The Academic Senate of the CSU had its most recent meeting at the beginning of November . . . before the election. I thought for several days afterward about how to explain what the Senate discussed at that meeting, but personally I was so distracted by national, regional and local dialogues about the election that it was hard to concentrate on preparing this report. So, I did what I usually do when I'm trying to process something, to make some sense of it, I went to my bookshelves. I *am* an academic, after all, and there's a lot of wisdom on those shelves! As I stood there, looking over the titles, especially those on my political communication shelf, I wasn't feeling it, I wasn't connecting, I wasn't getting the answers I needed.

But then my eye was drawn to another shelf, to a book that stood out because of its size and color. It's small, and bright yellow. You've probably seen it before, it was fairly popular a few years ago. I received it as a birthday present--you know, one of those milestone birthdays with a zero in it? I bet we all have one of *those* friends who gives us a gag gift on a big birthday. So, one of *those* friends gave me "The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook," with a card that said, "if you can survive this birthday, you can survive anything!" It's filled with pearls of wisdom like, how to wrestle an alligator; how to escape from killer bees; and how to deal with a charging bull.

The more I looked over these worst-case scenarios, the more I thought they could help me frame this report. Before the election, no matter which candidate someone supported, people thought if the other candidate won, it would be a worst-case scenario the nation would have to survive. Now that the election is over, that worst-case scenario has come true for roughly half of the electorate. So, now what?

When I was reading about how to survive snakes and sharks and bears and mountain lions, it occurred to me that there was one potentially dangerous animal omitted from this book. No, not Hillary Rodham Clinton or Donald Trump, but the elephant. There are elephants in the room, in our classrooms and meeting rooms. How do we survive them? We talk about them.

The first elephant in our room is a Trump presidency. I've heard some people say they are suffering from what Sarah Jones, a Politicus USA writer, calls 'Trump Traumatic Stress Disorder'. In that context, I think it's vital to acknowledge the tremendous anxiety many students in the CSU are feeling right now. That anxiety was expressed outside the November Board of Trustees meeting, and during public comment at the meeting as well. In addition, I've heard examples of that anxiety from my colleagues, who report that students, particularly our Dreamers, are shaken to their core and fearful for their future and the future of their families.

Do you remember learning about Maslow's hierarchy of needs? In the context of Maslow's hierarchy, some students are reacting to the threats they perceive to their physical and

safety needs, which are the foundational level of the hierarchy. Until they get some reassurance that those physical and safety needs are met, it will be difficult for faculty to help them move up the hierarchy toward the self-actualization that comes from even passing their classes, not to mention earning their degrees.

I was heartened to see a recent joint statement from Chancellor White and CSSA President Lopez committing to support all members of the CSU community. Some presidents and other campus leaders have issued similar statements of support. As I indicated, the last Senate meeting occurred prior to the election so I cannot convey an official position of the Senate, but personally I'd like to align myself with these commitments to promote inclusion and open dialogue. It's the right thing to do.

The second elephant in our room that should be discussed in order to survive is a tuition increase. Even though the prospect wasn't presented to the Board for formal consideration at its most recent meeting, that elephant wandered through the room and made a lot of noise outside the Chancellor's Office building.

The ASCSU has a resolution in first reading calling for increased funding to the CSU to avert a tuition increase. We note in the resolution that there has been a dramatic disinvestment in the CSU by the State of California, and even a small tuition increase can be a significant burden, especially on those students who are most vulnerable. We pledge to work with the California State Student Association, the Chancellor's Office, and the Board of Trustees to avert such a prospect, and we will watch closely as events develop. We hope increased state funding can keep this elephant from charging.

That's why we unanimously approved a resolution supporting the Board's 2017-18 budget request. But we didn't stop there. We made a specific recommendation to earmark half of the monies dedicated to the Graduation Initiative to help address the tenure density problem. In the past, when the State of California targeted eleven million dollars for tenure track hiring, the funds were comingled with student success efforts, and it wasn't clear that the eleven million was used to hire faculty over and above what had already been planned in the hiring cycle. We think specifically earmarking funds from the Graduation Initiative to tenure track hiring will ensure that the goals of the Initiative itself can be met. As Assistant Vice Chancellor Jeff Gold said during the Board of Trustees meeting, "our faculty are at the center of student success." So, no amount of simplifying paperwork for graduation, no microloan for non-payment of tuition, and no data dashboard can substitute for the impact that tenure-track faculty have on student success. We encourage the Chancellor and the Board of Trustees to target part of the funds for the Graduation Initiative toward improving tenure density. Moreover, the ASCSU looks forward to joining in advocacy for the support budget so that the Graduation Initiative can get funded and a tuition increase isn't necessary.

Now, I want to turn away from my pachyderm metaphor and talk about some recommendations the Senate made which we hope will help students not just survive, but thrive. They are intended to move students up Maslow's hierarchy toward self-actualization and degree attainment.

One resolution addresses Assembly Concurrent Resolution 158 sponsored by Assemblymember Holden, and it reaffirms the Senate's perennial commitment to improving student transfer within and among California's three segments of higher education. Another resolution is in response to a Coded Memorandum on C- grades in courses in the Golden Four. We suggest following the rules for general education credit from the institution where the student

completed the course. A third resolution finishes the Senate's review of the work of the Quantitative Reasoning Task Force. We have officially now endorsed all of the recommendations included in the Task Force Report, and we encourage the Chancellor's Office to begin implementing those recommendations.

One key recommendation of the Task Force is that a Center for the Advancement of Instruction in Quantitative Reasoning be established. We think such a Center will be a critical catalyst for engaging in the conversations necessary to achieve the principle that guided the work of the Task Force. That principle was to balance access and opportunity to achieve equity. A Center would allow for sustained, system-level attention to pedagogy, evidence of learning at entry for both freshmen and transfer students, and support for high schools offering courses in quantitative reasoning. We'd like to see the necessary conversations get started, and we always welcome the opportunity to talk about how curricula can better prepare students to succeed in their lives, which in turn serves interests of the State of California.

In that same vein of how curricula serve students throughout their lives and promote the interests of the State, the Senate is also recommending the formation of a task force to examine general education (GE). We are aware of interest from several quarters who have raised questions about, among other things, the clarity of GE requirements. We think there are important issues such a task force can engage, and the resolution articulates the scope of some of that work.

Each of the resolutions referenced above are summarized on the ASCSU webpage, along with those which the Senate will consider again in January. To conclude, in the context of the survival theme mentioned earlier in this report, I'll end with a paraphrase of the immortal words of Gloria Gaynor:

Will we crumble? Will we lay down and die? Oh no, not us.

We will survive. Oh, as long as we know how to teach we know we'll stay alive.

We will survive. And our students will thrive!