

Chancellor's Office Podcast CCC21040 – Transcript

Eloy: Hi, this is Eloy Ortiz Oakley, Chancellor of the California Community Colleges, and you're listening to another episode of the “California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office” podcast.

Today, I have the great pleasure of being joined by a friend and colleague Dr. Joseph Castro. Dr. Castro is now, as of January, the eighth Chancellor to lead the California State University System. Previously, he was leading California State University Fresno. Go Bulldogs.

And Joe is not only the eighth chancer to lead the CSU, but he is the first native Californian to lead the CSU, and he is the first person of color to serve in this role. He's the grandson of immigrants from Mexico and the son of a single mother, and Dr Castro is the first in his family to graduate from university.

For those of you who don't know much about the CSU, the California State University System is the largest public four-year university system in the country, and it is the most diverse serving nearly half a million students annually so it's a great pleasure to have Joe Castro with me, Joe welcome.

Joseph: Thank you Eloy. It's a pleasure to be with you today, my friend.

Eloy: Alright, so, first of all Happy New Year and congratulations on the new role.

Joseph: Thank you.

Eloy: So, let's start with that. How are you settling into this new role and how's your first month going and what do you think are the greatest opportunities facing you and the Cal State System.

Joseph: Well, thank you it's been quite an adjustment. From Fresno to Long Beach, and you know Long Beach so well, Eloy, I'm hoping I'll get a few restaurant recommendations from you, soon, especially some good Mexican food restaurants.

Eloy: There's a few. There's a few.

Joseph: But it's been, you know it's been a good adjustment we're enjoying the change of scenery being near the water it's been wonderful spending time with my, I have a little guy who's 10 years old and spending a lot of time playing football on

the beach and just enjoying the new surroundings here in the milder weather and a big new job at a consequential time.

So, I am feeling like I'm sure you are, the weight of the moment. I think it's both a challenge and just an incredible opportunity for us to step up and be the inflection point, which is what I shared with the board of trustees yesterday, as the largest public University in in the nation. And you with the largest college system in the nation. There's just so much potential for us to work together with UC and the private colleges and universities and really lift up California and help the whole country.

Eloy: Absolutely, I know you know this because you've been in California and your entire career, but the CSU is just such an important system for Community college students. 51% of graduates from the CSU got their start at a Community college, so you really are the pathway for so many of our students, particularly our low-income students and students of color.

So, let's talk a little bit about that pathway from the community colleges to the CSU. Transfer is getting a lot of attention, these days, you hear from policymakers, you hear from the media, from lots of different organizations, looking at how we better support students of color and low-income students, and in California we've had the associate degree for transfer, which is a pathway for California community college students to get into the CSU, in majors with a guarantee of admission. So, as you think about transfers, you think about the associate degree for transfer, how do you think things are going, and do you have thoughts that you want to share, about how we can continue to improve that transfer pathway?

Joseph: Absolutely. The experience that I have coming from Fresno was so positive in terms of the working relationships that we enjoyed with all the community colleges throughout the central Valley, and I saw rapid increase in transfer students there, and I know that's happened for the most part, across the CSU. I think it's a wonderful thing, and I want to encourage more of our students to see that as a as a pathway to the CSU. You know, every dollar matters to our students and families, so to the extent that that saves them some money to do it that way, and to the extent that we're all working together as one, so that they have the advice, they need the counseling the, the support. I love to see more transfer

students and more ADT students, in particular. You and I are part of the hearing recently.

Eloy: Right.

Joseph: with Assemblyman Berman, and I was able to share that you know almost half of our students are community college transfer students and the number of ADTs has skyrocketed. And I believe that we're just scratching the surface, here. We have a chance to do even more, so I'd like to work with you and others to make it easier for our students to transfer. Remove those barriers and help them to graduate more quickly and we're seeing that happen as well as just the acceleration of time to degree, and that also saves our students and families money so I'd love to focus more attention on that with you and take those equity gaps that we've seen and been too stubborn, we need to, we need to eliminate them, and I think we can.

Eloy: Absolutely. The partnership between the two systems is so important to the future of California and given that two systems are so large and the number of graduates coming out it's also critically important to the rest of the country.

You talked about doing more in and in the recent budget proposal that Governor Gavin Newsome released, he talks about wanting to kickstart a process of dual admission between the community colleges and the CSU and the University of California. For our listeners, what are your thoughts about this proposal, do you think it's doable and how do you think he could benefit students?

Joseph: Well, in my personal opinion, it's the right direction to go in. You know, again my experience in the central Valley, where we were one of the projects of the Governor's post-secondary education council which you've been part of. We were working in that direction and I'd like to see us do more of that, breaking down the silos that exist and identifying creative ways to help our students to succeed, so I'm very open minded about this Eloy, and definitely want to make sure that we avoid any unintended negative consequences, but I do think that we all have the same intentions, the Governor and all of us, to do the best we can, for our students and help them, you know find the path that's best for them make it clear and ensure that they have the support at each step of the way.

Eloy: Well, I know so many students want to get into the Cal State University System. It is a huge system, but there is a lot of demand and I know that many of your campuses sometimes struggle to meet all that demand, which is you know a good problem to have?

Joseph: Yes.

Eloy: Particularly, you know, with regard to low-income students and students of color. I know so many of our students see Cal State as a great place to go because it's near, then it's in their community, they're familiar with it, so certainly anything we can do to provide a path for our students, I know how much they benefit from your system.

Joseph: Appreciate that Eloy. I mean, as you know that there are some differences by campus and region in terms of demand and fortunately, you know, we have the system now where if you're not admitted to the exact program, exact campus of your first choice, if you're eligible we'll offer alternatives and that's been helpful, but I think over time, as we inspire more students to go into higher education, we need to invest more in enrollment growth and you've been a great ally in that direction and I think that's going to be very important, especially in those areas, those majors that the State really needs for the future, to strengthen our economy.

Eloy: Right and it's great to have a new administration, the Biden administration was also looking to see how we can open up more access to our public colleges and universities, so that's certainly a brush breath of fresh air. So, given the diversity of the CSU and the community colleges as well, I know, there was a lot of discussion in 2020 about that diversity and in how we better support that diversity. And new legislation was introduced and signed into law last year that requires the Cal State University system to offer students who enter as freshmen in 2021-22, to take ethnic studies courses in order to graduate. Why do you think this is important and what do you see the challenges and the opportunities as you move forward?

Joseph: Well, I view this as a positive development for our students and for our faculty and staff, and you know, we need to make sure that our next generation of leaders has a deeper understanding of the rich differences in culture and people that embrace that and know how to lead in a multicultural society and, I don't know you lawyer about you, but I took many courses in ethnic studies as a student and I really benefited from that, so I think it's a good thing, I think the way we got there, it was unfortunately bumpy. And we learned some lessons and you know I've said to the Governor and also assemblywoman Weber, that I wish that they had needed to do what they did. I wish that we could have figured out a way to do that, within the CSU. And so that's the lesson for me as Chancellor is to try to avoid that happening again, but having said that it's the law, we need to implement it, I know that some of our faculty are concerned about the way that we might

implement it, but I think assemblywoman Weber has been pretty clear about how we need to implement it, so you know Fresno I signed off on the plan to do that right before I became Chancellor, and it was a negotiation between faculty and deans and the provost and we figured it out, so you know I've said to the other campuses. There is a way to do this, and again we want to avoid any unintended negative consequences, but I think we need to make sure that we implement it properly, according to the law and it's going to be great for our students.

Eloy: Absolutely, and you know, while it's the law, and you know we certainly appreciate that. The important thing here is that we're talking about how to have the curriculum better reflect the experiences, the history, the rich history of our diverse students, and how they need to better see themselves in their curriculum. So, we certainly embrace that point of view, our diversity equity and inclusion initiative, is a critical priority for our Board of Governors as I'm sure it is for you in the CSU Board of Trustees.

Joseph: Yes.

Eloy: So, we will work with you to implement this requirement. We're also concerned we don't want to increase unit accumulation, but at the same time, we want to make sure that our diverse students see themselves in their curriculum, so we look forward to working with you on that.

Joseph: I appreciate that Eloy and I think it does raise the question I've had this conversation already in my early days with our academic leaders, we need to accelerate our efforts to diversify our faculty. And I think that's going to be a really important thing for us to work together on because some of our future faculty are going to be coming in, as transfer students, right?

Eloy: Right.

Joseph: And I'm excited about that possibility, because I think the ethnic studies requirement is going to make a positive difference and then, if we can start to find new ways to, you know, we have such diverse transfer students, diverse bachelor's degree recipients, and we just need to make some more progress in the masters and PhD and also be aggressive in our hiring in this area so that's definitely another one of my priorities, working with the campuses to do that, and I hope we can work together on that.

Eloy: That's great and we're fortunate that we have another partner who is very open to this well, and President Michael Drake from the University California, who we will have on this podcast soon.

Joseph: Good, good.

Eloy: But it's wonderful to see discussions about having more graduate students, more students in general from the CSU go to the UC and become graduate students, get their PhDs and move on to become faculty in the CSU and the California Community Colleges.

Joseph: Absolutely. One of the things I learned as a father, you know my son, my oldest son Isaac, received his bachelor's at Berkeley, his masters at Fresno state and then he started applying to graduate programs and he's at Santa Barbara now getting his PhD. But what I learned through that experience is there were very few CSU graduates getting into programs like that around the country, and he felt it, even though that he's a great student, he felt it. It's kind of like well, we want these fancier degrees from other places. So, you know somehow we need to break through that and I think we have such talented students in the CSU who can do it and, as I said, many of them will be coming from you first. So, I'm glad Michael's open to it, I think we can really make some progress there.

Eloy: Well, I'm looking forward to that. So, let's talk about something that's near and dear to my heart and also impacts the University of California: standardized testing.

Joseph: Yes.

Eloy: Now, you know there's been a lot of questions about the accuracy and the equity issues surrounding high stakes standardized tests, like the SAT and the ACT. You know, the University of California recently has had several conversations and the board of regents has been moving away from it, I know the CSU has had this issue on the table, how are you thinking about standardized testing and where do you see the CSU going with this.

Joseph: It's a great question, and I had the opportunity to serve on the CSU admissions advisory committee, while I was President at Fresno State so that group has been discussing this topic, and you know, I think, in general, people believe we ought to be moving away from it and being more comprehensive and holistic in our approach and I'm comfortable with that. I think the data is pretty clear in terms of the bias that exists there so, you know I'll be working with my

colleagues here to navigate this path carefully. Want to make sure again no unintended negative consequences come about, but I'm very open minded in terms of looking at other ways in which we would assess our students and we've done that now, in the short term with Covid, but even post Covid.

Eloy: Well, one thing I can bet that you look forward to is having this topic come up at your board meetings, because it makes for exciting discussions.

Joseph: Yeah, I heard you had a pretty lively one of the Regent's meeting.

Eloy: Oh, yes. So, let's start to wrap up. I want to bring up one more issue and get your thoughts.

Joseph: Sure.

Eloy: There's been so much going on in the press about our democracy and, of course, we had the racial reckoning of 2020 and in January this month we saw the attack on our democracy, the insurrection at the Capitol. What can we as educators - educators that serve such huge populations of states like California and, more broadly the country - what can we do to strengthen civic engagement and reinforce our communities knowledge and appreciation for our Constitution?

Joseph: It's a great question. Actually, our friend Michael Crow and I were on a Zocalo Square panel talking about this as well, and you know, how it could be that educated people would be calling for these sorts of actions.

Eloy: Well, Michael's already been on the show, so we can't talk about him.

Joseph: Okay we'll stop. Anyway. You know my view is that we prepare the leaders of California in this Country and it's vitally important that they be ethical, compassionate, understanding of different cultures and embrace the Constitution and our democracy, so. I think that we play a pivotal role in doing that, and I know our faculty have been discussing ways at each campus we can strengthen our work in this area, and perhaps even with some, you know, foundation interest out there, wanting to support us in that way, I'm excited about the possibilities here, but we play such an important role in making sure that this next generation of leaders learns from what happened the other day and never repeats that mistake.

Eloy: Well, let's hope that that happens, I certainly look forward to working with you on that.

Joseph: Yeah.

Eloy: Well, Joe I really appreciate you being on the show, I know you know this is your first few weeks, you've got a million things going on, but I really look forward to working with you and I know I speak for the entire California Community Colleges, we're thrilled to see you leading the nation's largest and most diverse public university system. So, thanks for being with us.

Joseph: Thank you Eloy. I look forward to continuing our work together. We're going to do some great things I know.

Eloy: Yes, we are. Alright well, thank you, everybody for listening in, you've been listening to another episode of the "California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office" podcast, and I've had the pleasure of talking to Dr Joseph Castro, the eighth Chancellor to lead the California state university system thanks for tuning in, and we will be back with you soon.

Announcer: Be sure to join us for the next "California Community Colleges" podcast. This has been a California Community Colleges presentation.