



Chancellor's Office Podcast CCC21043

Episode 43 – Transcript

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

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.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

The University of California, and the California Community Colleges together play a key role in preparing students for the future and fueling the California economy as we recover from this pandemic.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

The 116 community colleges serve more than 2.1 million students annually and transfer nearly 80,000 students each year to the University of California and the California State University system.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

This partnership fuels California's future and is so important and it is what makes California so great. So, as we talk about the partnership between the University of California and the California Community Colleges, I'm proud to be joined today by Dr. Michael V. Drake, the 21st President of the University of California.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

He leads the world renowned system of 10 campuses, five medical centers, three nationally affiliated labs, more than 280,000 students and 230,000 faculty and staff. Which make up the world's best public research university.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Before coming back to the UC, Dr. Drake served as the president of Ohio State University from 2014 to 2020. So, as we think about the way forward after the pandemic, we think about this great partnership between the University of California and how important the alignment between California's higher education institutions has been and needs to continue to be in order for there to be a recovery with equity. I want to thank again, Dr. Drake, for joining me and welcome, Michael. It's great to have you. You've been a friend and a colleague, and it's great to see you back at the UC.

President Michael Drake:

It's great to be here. We enjoyed our time at UC, as you know, for decades. And then we went to the Midwest for six years, which was fun and actually instructive. We learned a lot. We enjoyed that a lot, but we were really happy to be able to come back to California which is our home and really proud to be able to join our colleagues at the University of California and at the CSU and in the community colleges. It's great pleasure, as I've said to you privately many times, it's a great pleasure working with you and Chancellor Castro on the issues that confront us all. And so we're thrilled to be back home.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Well, it's great to have you back home and yes, there are plenty of issues that we need to deal with, but I also forgot to mention that you were also the chancellor of my alma mater, UC Irvine.

President Michael Drake:

That's right.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

So, go Anteaters.

President Michael Drake:

Absolutely.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

So, Michael, as you come back to California and get settled back in and you take on this enormous role as the 21st president of the UC, how are you settling in? How are things going in your first eight months? And since coming back, did much change at the University of California?

President Michael Drake:

Great questions. I have said to people that starting up again was like you're on a, maybe you're taking an Alaskan cruise, which I would love to do, I've never done that. But an Alaskan cruise and forge where there ice, little hunks of icebergs in the water and coming back with like stepping off the boat into the water. I mean, you start swimming right away. Not a lot of chance to tune up.

President Michael Drake:

We have big issues and we happened to arrive back at the end of the summer. So we're really in the throws of, in the midst of the Covid crisis and the racial justice reckoning that the country was going through. So, it really began a little bit before day one with us, sleeves rolled up doing our best to work going forward.

President Michael Drake:

It's been tremendous, as I said, having a chance to re-join and work with old friends. Many people I've worked with 30 in some cases, 40 years. But the issues that face you, that face me, that face all of us, are really new and changing every day. So, there was no time to rest on one's laurels. It really was you're jumping on a conveyor belt and getting running from the beginning.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

So, it doesn't sound like you had much of a honeymoon coming on board right in the middle of a pandemic.

President Michael Drake:

I thought I, made this line once before I've said, "Always looked forward to a honeymoon and actually we didn't get a chance to get out of the church." I mean, we're walking down the aisle and time to get your sneakers on and get going.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

That's right. So, coming back to UC, I mean, for our listeners, you are a medical doctor. You have a lot of experience working in and with the UC medical system. How did that shape the way that you looked at the pandemic coming on board? And how does your training and the collective ingenuity of UC help you think about how to deal with the pandemic and help California respond to the pandemic?

President Michael Drake:

Oh, thank you. Important questions. You mentioned I was president of Ohio State a year ago today. And so they're starting at the end of February, beginning of March. We began dealing with the pandemic on a truly, I was going to say daily basis, but it was more concentrated with that. It really was hour by hour.

President Michael Drake:

We went to virtual education. We announced that we were going to do that on March 9th. So, we were one of the, in our part of the country, at least the first college to do that. And we did that, once we made that decision it was full speed ahead to try to change the way we were doing instruction, change the way that we were doing research change everything we were doing. Again, I was speaking to the college, you were doing the same thing here, but we began working there. And so it really wasn't an every day effort.

President Michael Drake:

And in parallel with doing those things we needed to do to shift our method of education and shift our method of research. We also had to deal with the patients that were coming to us who hit our doors first at the emergency room. And then went from the emergency room to the wards and to the ICU. And we were really learning every day about that.

President Michael Drake:

By the middle of summer when I arrived here, I shifted there, moved here, started right up again. No break really. Then it was really, what are we going to do about coming back to school? We began August 15th. And so Berkeley was starting about a week and a half later. And we were really looking at what is a safe number of students to be in our dorms? What a safe number of students to be in the classrooms? How do we do those things? How do we protect ourselves?

President Michael Drake:

And so those were ongoing daily discussions. We worked really hard on our campuses to do everything we could to keep our campuses safe. And I will say that I relied a lot on my colleagues in the medical field, as we were making those decisions. Maybe a little more quickly than it might've been otherwise, but we were really all doing these things together. I want to give high props to Dr. Carrie Byington, Executive Vice-President for Health Services. A job that I had at the University of California between 2000 and 2005. So, it was great to have a partner and colleague. Carrie and I worked together in other ways as well, to work with really on an every day basis with our campus to try to put forward the best policies we could to help our campuses be safe.

President Michael Drake:

We were pleased that the infection rates, the sort of rate of positivity on our campuses, as a routine was about one 10th that in the communities in which the campuses were located. So we found that by using the, what we call NPI, non-pharmaceutical interventions, wearing masks, washing hands, social distance, those things, those basic things. We were able to keep the campuses relatively free of infection.

President Michael Drake:

Relatively free means there were infections on campus, but most of those came from people who were infected in the community and then came to campus for one reason or another. The on-campus spread was always low. It tended to rise with the surges that we had in the winter and fall. And I checked actually just today with all the campuses and the on-campus rates of infection are still dramatically, generally about 10% of the rates of infection in the community. So, we've been pleased about that.

President Michael Drake:

So, the first thing I'll say was we worked really on the campus. Let me say the second thing that was really important to us was how we were managing our hospitals and our patients. And I won't talk a lot about that except to say that was quite intense.

President Michael Drake:

And then the third thing we were very interested in managing was the disparate impacts of this pandemic on different communities within our system. Black and brown people, lower income people, essential workers were really bearing the brunt of this problem. The disease, for sure. The pandemic, for sure. Covid, for sure. But also the financial burdens were finding themselves falling more on people who couldn't effectively continue their work at home. Facilities, maintenance, or other kinds of work that you can't do on a computer remotely. And we really worked hard to try to

balance that impact to the extent that we could as well.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

So, given everything that's been going on in the UC and given the success thus far that California is having in keeping infection rates low, what do you see happening in the fall? With the nine undergraduate campuses as well as UCSF, do you expect them to be back open? Partially open? What do you think is going to happen?

President Michael Drake:

Yes, and I'd love to hear your comments on that as well for your campuses. What we're expecting, first UCSF will be, I'm going to guess, essentially 100%. Our medical centers have been working at 110% all of this time, and even our health sciences students have been using PPE and being involved because this is the work that they do. So, I'm expecting our medical centers to be some new version of 100%.

President Michael Drake:

They are, as we speak, I say 100%, they are, the administrative functions are still distributed and people are working remotely where they can. But our doctors, nurses, our patients, and many of our students are doing that work. People in our labs who are working on Covid have been here all along and they will be here in the fall. And we expect, again, even a greater number of people to be back in their offices.

President Michael Drake:

On the campuses, we're expecting the on-campus enrollment to be near 100%. I'm going to guess it's going to be down some. That will be personal preference, or there may be other complications, international students, et cetera, may have challenges that we aren't able to manage. But in general, we expect to be essentially fully open for those who wish to return.

President Michael Drake:

The same thing for our faculty. We expect faculty to be overwhelmingly back and that's all being worked out these days. But when I say overwhelmingly back and generally near 100% what I mean is that in-person will be, I'm going to guess 85, 90 some odd percent. And then there'll be an increased fraction of our normal business that will be done online. What that percentage is, I'll know better as the fall rolls on, but I'm 10%, 15%, something like that will be done remotely for our basic educational services.

President Michael Drake:

Let me say for administrative functions, we'll continue to evaluate this over these coming months. And some of those functions may do just as well with people working remotely and they may prefer or find it easier or more efficient to work remotely. And so we, in fact, we had a meeting yesterday about looking at the future of work and how we're going to adjust what the future of work looks like.

President Michael Drake:

So, let me circle back and re-enter in a summary saying that I think that most of our classes, most of our faculty, most of our people will be in-person and that we'll have an enhanced remote, an online component, and that will be adjusted as we move forward to the fall.

President Michael Drake:

Can I ask, what are you thinking about? What's going to happen at our community colleges?

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Well, very similar. We're having conversations about getting, first of all, all of our faculty and staff vaccinated. That's really key for us in getting back because we have 115 physical locations throughout California. There are some variations and depending on which county that they're in. But we're hoping to be back in person primarily. There'll be some hybrid situations with some of the large lecture classrooms, things like that. But there'll be a priority placed on

getting services back that will help our students re-engage with college.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

We had a decline in enrollment because so many of our older students caring for their family had children at home, had lost jobs or had lost hours at work, were trying to piece together opportunities to make ends meet. And so, we're hopeful that with the federal stimulus, with K-12 going back to regular session, that that will help us.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

So, we're hoping all those things come together. If they do and as well as our students being able to get vaccinated, then we're very hopeful that we can begin to get back to some normalcy.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

We will hang on to a lot of remote learning, online learning, remote work. We think those are good things to hang on to but by and large, you'll see a lot of our classes be in person again. Similar to what you just described.

President Michael Drake:

Very similar. Yes.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

So, let me ask you this, given everything that's gone on in the country, I mean we can have a whole day's discussion about the racial reckoning, about the challenges to democracy. But one thing in particular that I think we've all been dealing with, especially now as we hear on the news that there's a lot of people who are concerned about getting vaccinated. You as a doctor in the UC as the nation's top public research university, how can we combat the misinformation that's out there about the pandemic and more specifically vaccination?

President Michael Drake:

Well, very important questions and fascinating. As you said, we could spend a whole day talking about these things.

President Michael Drake:

When we looked at the pandemic and the effect that it had on communities, I mentioned that certain people were more likely to get sick. Certain people were likely to be sick are more likely to die. And I want to make sure that we acknowledge those who've been ill from this or who've lost family members and friends and colleagues. I've had friends who've passed away from Covid and it's been a devastating pandemic for people. People have lost businesses and that a great percentage of the businesses owned by black and brown people have gone under during this time permanently. And a lot of times we're just getting our feet, getting our heads above the water, getting our feet on the ground and then something like this comes and cuts it out from under us.

President Michael Drake:

And so we really want to acknowledge that and say how devastating that has been. And that it's affected all of us broadly. So, at the university we've done a couple of things have worked well for us. One is that we just announced yesterday that we did our 1 millionth vaccine.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Wow.

President Michael Drake:

So, go team.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

It's great.

President Michael Drake:

And I've been able to participate in some of the vaccine clinics. I mean, it gave me a great sense of personal satisfaction to be able to know that I was doing something to help someone be healthier. When I became eligible as a healthcare provider still, I wait until the end of the line of healthcare providers, but when our healthcare providers were available that I was vaccinated. My family was vaccinated because I know it's the thing that's the most important thing that we can do to help protect ourselves, our families, our friends, our communities and our country. And the most important thing we can do to defeat the virus.

President Michael Drake:

I accept it but it's shocking to me to see how much of a challenge this has been. Because we can see in this case clearly the alternative. I mean, it's really devastated the world and still today devastating the world. Around the world thousands of people will die from Covid today and tomorrow. And through the miracle of modern science, we have been able to produce a vaccine in record time which will stop the virus in its tracks.

President Michael Drake:

And so what we're doing is first being respectful of those who are skeptical or concerned to make sure we hear what those concerns are, to address them as best we can, and then to do what we can to be supportive in helping people to make the right decision. And that's an ongoing effort that will continue these months as we roll forward into and through the summer.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

So, let's switch gears a little bit and talk a little bit about the partnership between community colleges and UC as well as some of the initiatives that Governor Gavin Newsom announced recently in his budget proposal. One of the things that he expressed was his interest in making the transfer process easier and more seamless for students.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

You're obviously very familiar with transfer. I'm a transfer student. What are your thoughts about how this can be accomplished? How can we make it even more seamless for students transferring from the community college who want to get into one of the great nine campuses in the UC?

President Michael Drake:

Well, again, the fact that the three of us, you and Chancellor Castro and I can work together on this, I think is terrific because I think we all celebrate the transfer process and pathway and want to do what we can to make it easier.

President Michael Drake:

We have about 30% of our undergraduate students now at the University of California began their careers at a community college. When I was at the Ohio State University, we had not quite that many but a significant fraction, about a quarter of our students began somewhere else. And at commencement always we'd have two speakers. One who began as a freshman in Columbus and one who began someplace else-

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

That's great.

President Michael Drake:

... and transferred. Because the message we wanted to give, and we didn't identify them differently. They were just two people, two of our students speaking, but the concept is that we finish together and are alumni together forever. So real, extraordinarily important to us for a variety of, of reasons.

President Michael Drake:

So, we're committed to work with you and the community colleges and with the state university system to facilitate transfer and to make it as easy as possible. I would love it that it was entirely seamless and straightforward. Hiccups and barbs and tricks. I shouldn't use the word tricks when something's being recorded. There are no tricks, let me rethink of my term. But just things that can make it challenging or confusing, really not in anyone's interest. And we want to do all we can to smooth those pathways. So I'm, as I've said many times, committed to working with you on that.

President Michael Drake:

I will say one thing that makes it a little complicated is that a student may wish to transfer from one of your more than a hundred campuses to one of our campuses in a specific major, at a specific time. And so lining up then thousands of different course combinations that one could take to make sure that they're smooth for the particular major and to make appropriate progress, is an ongoing, active thing. It's not just snap your finger and there you are.

President Michael Drake:

But on the other side of that coin, we're committed to doing everything we can to make that easy. And as I said, 30% of our students nearly 100,000, about 80,000 I think if I'm right about that, began their career at a community college, I think that's terrific.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Well, you don't have to convince me that that's terrific. I'm a product, three of my four kids so far I've transferred. Two of them to the UC and my last one is just now starting community college and wants to transfer at least today to UC Davis. So, we'll see what happens.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

But in any case, it's great to partner with you. It's great to partner with Chancellor Castro. I think California should feel good that the three systems really do care about smoothing out transfer. And of course I can't help but put in a plug to the state legislature to fund transfer capacity at the UC so that we can ensure that as our community college students do what they've been asked to do, which is prepare themselves in the lower division work, prepare themselves to transfer in the majors of their choice, that there's a place for them at the University of California.

President Michael Drake:

Absolutely true.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

So, let's talk about something else that's been in the news quite a bit and UC has taken some significant leadership of late. There's been a lot of discussion over the last couple of years and for many years before that, I'm sure you've heard these discussions on and off throughout your entire career about the accuracy and equity issues surrounding high stakes, standardized tests. Especially for admissions.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

I think particularly in the last couple of years we've heard a lot about admissions. And last spring, the University of California engage in a discussion, engage in a review of the use of SAT and ACT and the University of California Board of Regents unanimously approved the suspension of the standardized test requirements for all California freshmen applicants until fall of 2024.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

What are your thoughts about, where do you see this going? Particularly in the UC and given UC's prominence in terms of public university admissions, where do you see this going and what are some of the things that you're keeping an eye on?

President Michael Drake:

Well, a very important issue and very important question. Even from the days when I was in the health affairs office and office of the president, Dick Atkinson was the president at that time. And he was focused on the disparities in opportunity with the SAT. So that's been two decades ago.

President Michael Drake:

And last year the Regents voted to have the standardized test become test optional for this year. Covid changed that a bit. And because of the challenges that people from different places in the world had in making it to take the test as challenges to those people living with disabilities, this year we didn't use the standardized tests at all.

President Michael Drake:

And our goal in the admissions process, I was an admissions officer, it's to admit students. It's to be able to gather data and do a fair and equitable and appropriate job of admitting students and anything that can lead to inequality in that process or disadvantage certain students is something that we would want to move aside.

President Michael Drake:

And so I think the SAT and the ACT are complicated tests that are very layered. The world has moved so that privilege can help you dramatically in how you do on those tests. And that's something it was appropriate for us to move away from.

President Michael Drake:

Whether or not there can be, you mentioned high stakes tests, is there an appropriate low stakes test that can help somehow and create another pathway to help people be admitted? That's something that we'd want to explore but broadly what we want is to do everything we can to improve access.

President Michael Drake:

Three words that we say there it's access, affordability and excellence. So, we want the university to continue to be excellent. We want the university continue to be affordable, but we also want to make sure we do all we can to broaden access across the state, whatever the zip code, to make it that people have a fair and appropriate chance to get into the university. No matter what neighborhood you were coming from. And where we find that these tests had been barriers to certain people, they've been moved aside and we'll look for evaluating other information as we're admitting people from now on.

President Michael Drake:

I will say that our first year of this is happening right now. And so I'll be learning a lot in a month and two months and three months when we compare how the admissions process was able to work, how our classes look this year compared to last year. Last year the most diverse class in our history. So, we were doing a good job of having it be the most diverse class in our history. We lead the country among comparable universities in our number of Pell students, our number of first generation students. So, we're pleased about the way that's going.

President Michael Drake:

It's not enough, but it's going in the right direction. And we want to make sure we can continue to push things forward in that way. That's the most important thing overall is that we do our best to have, there'll be great opportunity across the zip codes for people to come to our university.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

I appreciate your thoughts, Michael, and the folks who listen to this podcast know my point of view on standardized testing. And so I won't go down that road and on that soap box this time but I appreciate your point of view.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Look admissions is a tough business. UC is breaking records every year for the number of applicants. Places like UCLA see well over 100,000 for freshmen admits. So, it's very, very competitive. So, there are no easy answers to how to best create that opportunity for students but I appreciate that the UC has moved away from one tool that I've argued doesn't really help us see talent. And so I appreciate the work that you've been doing and really wish us all luck on how we figure out admissions. The answer is more funding so we can open up more seats.

President Michael Drake:

You know, I think, let me say that is one of the things that we're working on a lot is doing everything we can once a student is admitted to make sure that the persistence and continuation rates are high and then students move through to get their degrees in a timely fashion.

President Michael Drake:

So, the more students that we can retain and the more that can move to their degree attainment in a reasonable amount of time, the greater number that we can serve in our physical space. So, we are everyday working to try to be a more efficient and better university.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

So, I know we're getting close on time and I just want to put two questions out to you. One is, for our listeners, many of them obviously are familiar with the University of California. Many of them are alumni of the University of California who may be attending right now either as undergrad, a grad student, a faculty member. But if there was one or two things that you'd want our listeners to know about the University of California today, what would that be?

President Michael Drake:

I'd say a couple of things. One is that broadly we're the University of California. I think the "of California" it's in our title, it's in our founding, it's our DNA. It's who we are. We're here to be connected with our communities and to do what we can to help. To train and educate people, to be leaders in our communities and to raise the quality of life in our communities broadly.

President Michael Drake:

And so when I say access, affordability and excellence, we want that to be broadly accessible. We want to be affordable and we want to be the best university system in the world.

President Michael Drake:

We are, I'd say, living someplace else. It was great kind of living someplace else and looking from that vantage point at the University of California. We're the envy of the nation and the envy of the world, as far as a public research university system. We're the gold standard that everyone, the blue and gold standard, I guess I should say, the standard that people try to meet.

President Michael Drake:

And when I say that we are leaders in the country among similar universities in our diversity and inclusion, again, that's not enough, we're moving forward. And I'm speaking of students now we have a lot of room, the close on faculty. But in those areas, we also lead in research in so many ways. We've won three of the six UC affiliated faculty are alums, and three of the six Nobel prizes given to the world this year.

President Michael Drake:

So, it's that balance between those things of being the University of California and being a world leader in our research endeavors. In our health sciences and the things that we're doing to help combat Covid, et cetera. Those things together are what makes us so special.

President Michael Drake:

And I'd say that the commitment of our colleagues on things like ... We have a UCLP office of the president anti-racism

task force that is looking at what we can do. How we can model our own behavior to help our communities see a better way to move forward.

President Michael Drake:

We're looking at campus safety and policing and trying to say, "Gosh, what can we do to model a better way forward?"

President Michael Drake:

These things and many others on a daily basis, we feel are part of our obligation to the state and to the community. And we've been doing it for many years and we want to do a better job of it tomorrow than we did yesterday.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Well, I think on that last note, I'm going to hand you the last question, because I think it's a very appropriate note. Given everything that's gone on in this country with regard to racial reckoning, what you just mentioned, the reflection that the University of California is engaged in right now about race and ethnicity and diversity, equity and inclusion is critically important since so many of us look to the University of California as the leader.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

And so a lot has been said about you being the first person of color to lead the University of California. We have three leaders of color in California who are leading the systems. But on a personal level, what does it mean to be the first black president of the University of California? And what does it mean to the future of the University of California?

President Michael Drake:

Yeah, I think for our country, and you mentioned the three of us together in higher education, the public education system in the state, being first is one set of things but making sure that you're not the last is more important.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Right, exactly.

President Michael Drake:

It really is to change the world so that we can be inclusive in bringing our best talent, our best efforts forward to help us all live better and more productive lives. And I'd say your career and I know well and the hard work you put in and the ways you've served our country, all of that work puts you in position of being the right person to lead the community colleges.

President Michael Drake:

It was decades of work so that you could bring something to contribute to the community colleges and help to change them in your wake. And I think the same thing will be true for Joe Castro. I think the first Mexican American descent to come and lead that system. One of the first Californians, if I'm correct about that, to lead that system.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Right. That's right. I think the first Californian.

President Michael Drake:

Yeah, first Californian. And so amazing and great. But then again, I've known Joe for 25 years and the work that he put into making himself the right person to do that at the right time.

President Michael Drake:

And I think that as we work together, I think we're united in the goal to say, "Great, that was done. That's what maybe we did yesterday. What's important is what do we all do tomorrow?" Making our higher education system and then the leaders of our communities broadly representative of our communities and to help us have a better future for all.

And I think that's the place that we're focused and that's the daily work. And I'm proud to have you as a partner, Eloy.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Well, on that note, thank you, Michael for joining me on this podcast and for the time. Really appreciate your leadership.

President Michael Drake:

Appreciate it as well. Good to see everyone. Good to see you and I know I'll see you week after next at our Regents meeting. And [crosstalk 00:29:56] many times in between. Good to see you, Chancellor, take care.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Sounds good. You take care as well.

Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

I've had the pleasure of speaking to Dr. Michael Drake, President of the University of California. And you've been listening to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's office Podcast. Thanks for joining us.

Voiceover:

Be sure to join us for the next California Community Colleges Podcast.

Voiceover:

This has been a California Community Colleges presentation.