

Budzban, Hansen review academic year



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Before taking a break for the summer, Greg Budzban, PhD, dean of the SIUE College of Arts and Sciences, concludes the 2015-16 Segue season by again hosting Interim Chancellor Stephen Hansen, PhD—the show's first guest of the season.

Having now completed the 2015-16 regular academic session, the gentlemen use the show as an opportunity to review the year's outcomes. On the hottest of topics, Hansen discusses the hardships of serving as chancellor during a fiscal crisis, as he prepares to pass the leadership reins to newly appointed SIUE Chancellor Randall Pembroke, PhD.

Conversation begins with the administrators' disbelief in the state budget crisis. The University has now concluded a full academic year without the support of state funding.

"It's absolutely incredible, and I don't really know how to start because I'm afraid that if I get to talking about it too much, I'm going to get angry," shares Hansen. "When I assumed the chancellor duties in August and we didn't have a budget, the worst case scenario was thought to be January. Then, it was extended to March. We heard different things from the Governor's Office and from the General Assembly, so we thought surely by the end of May. Now, sure enough, here we are in June—without a budget.

"I was on a conference call on Tuesday with all of the Illinois public university presidents and chancellors. We were on call with the Governor's Deputy and she was all excited about the Governor's compromise, which included Stop Gap funding. That would get us through the election, and then we could tackle a real budget. As we were talking, news came in that the House was not going to take up that offer. And the deflation ... you could just feel it on the phone call. It was so depressing."

Budzban commends Hansen's work by highlighting the already challenging task as University chancellor, which was further heightened by challenges presented through a fiscal crisis.

"You had to step up and take things on that I'm sure you didn't anticipate when you took the job," he says.

While serving as chancellor, Hansen prides himself in having the courage to set the stage for an incoming chancellor and make decisions which allow SIUE to thrive during hardships, as opposed to hunkering down and avoiding conflict during tough times. While in this position, Hansen was able to develop a "nine percent realignment" plan, an anticipatory financial plan which reduced institutional spending and provided relief to a budgetary deficit of nearly \$7.5 million. Further, Hansen collaborated with faculty and staff to establish a University Congress to discuss the institution's fundamental issues and create a unified understanding of its direction, moving forward.

Budzban credits Hansen by saying, “Your decisions put SIUE on firm fiscal ground for at least another year, and we find ourselves in a situation that many of our sister institutions would be envious of right now.”

The men explain that the key to this preparatory success is to engage in proactive decision making, instead of reactive decision making.

Hansen explains, “People take on this ‘victim’ identity, thinking ‘woe is me, we can’t do anything,’ and becoming somewhat paralyzed. I think that is the worst possible scenario.”

While Hansen has established many important initiatives during his time in the Chancellor’s Office, the scholars discuss their hopes for continued momentum and focus on goals as the chancellor responsibilities change hands. Among the major issues, Hansen hopes that Pembroke continues engaging in both academic and non-instructional prioritization of programs.

“I wanted to determine where our University puts our “pluses,” from a budget-cutting perspective,” Hansen shares. “Those issues often get tangled up. But if you ask the right question for a problem, that will lead to different answers. This is what I hope we can stay focused on.

“However, this idea can be very contentious, because everyone can think, ‘Oh no, I’m going to have my favorite program, my ‘turf,’ cut.’ That’s not the intent; the intent is to know our strengths and grow upon them.”

While priorities of the chancellor role are likely to shift, both Budzban and Hansen are hopeful that the University Congress will show continued success through its heavy input from faculty and staff.

“The Congress has already laid out certain criteria,” Hansen explains. “These criteria need to be elaborated upon and developed, but the faculty and staff develop them and apply them to programs. That really protects us as an institution. It will tell us where we want to put our resources and our priorities, while also protecting us from outside pressures. When they ask why we aren’t cutting programs with low enrollment, we will have an answer because of these criteria. We’re in charge of our own destiny, and that’s what I’m trying to fulfill through these initiatives.”

In reflection of his year as chancellor, Hansen expresses the joy he found in overcoming his bashful personality to engage in heavy community interactions with University friends and allies.

“One of the key jobs of chancellor is to serve as ‘the face’ of the institution in the community. Not only building cohesion among faculty and staff at the University, but representing our University to donors, politicians, community members and more,” he says. “Having a sense of ‘who we are’ as an institution is critical in doing that. I enjoyed going out and working with various groups, because strategically, it’s important for the University to build its allies, and the community is a critical ally for us.”

Inversely, Hansen shared his hatred for bearing bad news to members of the campus community during the fiscal hardships.

“I don’t like to disappoint people. I certainly don’t enjoy having to tell people they’re going to lose their jobs, or telling them, ‘You need to do a better job at ...’ I hate that with a passion. I don’t like having to confront that type of situation.

“One thing I realized is that any action I took as chancellor was like Newtonian physics. Any action I took caused friction, discomfort or some reaction with some other group. Because so many different groups and interests interact with the Chancellor’s Office, even just trying to do something simple causes pain somewhere.”

Now entering retirement for a third time, Hansen explains that his involvement with the University is far from over, as he will soon enter a project with colleagues in the Department of Historical Studies to create a digital history encyclopedia that recounts the history of Madison County from the twentieth century forward.

“No written history has been documented for Madison County since the centennial, which would have been 1903,” Hansen explains. “We hope to work with faculty, both graduate and undergraduate students, and other community resources. This could really be an exciting project.”

Budzban emphasizes the project’s alignment with the College of Arts and Sciences’ vision for the digital humanities and its potential for experiential learning while providing rich history to the area.

The tables are turned at the conclusion of the show, with Budzban convincing Hansen to finally share a special talent of his own.

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