



Dear CSUSM Faculty and Staff,

Thank you for all that you are doing during this time of COVID-19. As we walk through this pandemic and continue to actively fight against hate, racism, injustice and so much more, many of you have shared with me that the pressures feel more difficult, and it can be hard to find work/life balance.

When I first arrived on campus last July, we started having conversations about what it means to have a “Culture of Care” – a campus culture that values how we care for each other and our students. When incidents happen – in our nation, our world, or even right here on our campus – we talked about how we do a great job of ensuring our students know who they can turn to, but we have work to do in providing resources for our faculty and staff.

Last fall, an innovative proposal came forward from a Faculty Learning Community workgroup led by Drs. Fredi Avalos and Laurie Stowell called FACES – the “Faculty, Advocacy, Care, Engagement & Support Initiative.” FACES aims to create spaces for faculty care, support, training and engagement. I shared with faculty at Academic Assembly in January that we would move forward with this concept, but our efforts were temporarily thwarted due to the necessary focus on COVID-19.

In addition, last fall, I shared with many of our staff leaders that I understood the need for a resource hub that would similarly be focused on extending care, resources and professional development opportunities to our staff employees. Our staff plays such an important role in supporting our students and our mission – we need to do more to support their great work. Today, I’m pleased to share that we are also moving forward with a new Staff Center.

We will officially launch phase one of FACES and the Staff Center this fall, focusing on care and support of faculty and staff. While we are working remotely, these centers will provide services virtually, but once we return to campus, we will work to identify physical spaces.

In order to make these centers a reality during the hiring chill, we are reallocating two talented individuals to provide interim leadership for these initiatives. We’ve identified Dr. Betina Scott for FACES and Susan O’Connor for the Staff Center.

- Betina currently serves as director of ACE Scholars Services and as a lecturer in the Department of Social Work. She has over 15 years of experience in the field of social work serving various communities, especially in clinical settings. ACE Scholars Services will continue its great legacy of support to former foster youth under the leadership of Dr. Geoff Gilmore alongside the talented ACE staff.
- Susan currently serves as executive projects manager in the Office of the President. She has extensive experience in resolving complex customer and constituent concerns, and working collaboratively across the university on various committees and projects. A staff committee, including representation from our staff employee unions, will work with Susan to help guide and provide a vision for the center.

With so much going on in our world, it is clear that both FACES and the Staff Center are vitally needed. I look forward to the synergies that these two initiatives will create, in partnership with our shared governance groups, unions and other existing campus resources, including the Office of Human Resources, the Staff Appreciation and Development Committee (SAND), Office of Faculty Affairs, the Faculty Center, Cougar Care Network and Office of Inclusive Excellence.

At the end of spring semester, the Faculty Center, in partnership with IITS, released a plan for summer faculty professional development. It’s important that we offer professional development to our staff as well. We will be sharing some upcoming opportunities for staff workshops and trainings and, later today, staff will receive an invitation to take a CSUSM Staff Needs and Experiences Survey, which will help us understand your professional development needs and interests moving forward.

Finally, while we won’t move forward with recruitment of an AVP of Human Resources due to the hiring chill, we are bringing in interim support via a retired CSU annuitant, Kent Porter. Kent, who has over 30 years of experience in the CSU, will join us as interim AVP of HR. He will work closely with Lisa McLean and our other dedicated HR staff to help us continue to champion our workplace and campus culture across our employee life cycle – from recruitment to retirement.

I will close with a final thanks and best wishes to you, your families and loved ones. These special initiatives I’ve shared today are just the beginning of further cementing our culture of care. I couldn’t be prouder to be part of this community, especially as I near my one-year anniversary. I look forward to more focused work in this area in the weeks and months ahead.

Sincerely,
Ellen Neufeldt
President

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