

SCSU STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY ADDRESS
PRESIDENT JOE BERTOLINO
OCTOBER 6, 2022

Hello everyone.

It's terrific to see all of you in person early on in what I hope will be a turning point year for Southern.

After the trials and stresses of the pandemic, and the hesitant and challenging first steps back to full campus operations, I feel that we are poised to take a large step forward.

Certainly, the energy has returned to campus – it's been wonderful to see so many students engaged in involvement fairs and other activities during the first weeks of the fall semester.

I've taken the opportunity to talk with many students at the various events and they are thrilled to be back and to experience all that college life has to offer.

In fact, some have been quite busy, even ahead of the fall semester.

Jordan Davis of the SCSU men's track and field team won the NCAA National Championship in Javelin, landing the best throw in all of the Division II season and setting a new Southern record.

Andreina Barajas Novoa, a first generation college student and a first generation U.S.-American, was one of ten Latinas selected from a national pool of applicants for a prestigious Esperanza United Fellowship.

And Sasha Stelmakh, a first-year student who bravely fled the war in Ukraine and now, through the goodwill of a group of wonderfully dedicated

individuals here at Southern, is safely boarded in one of our residence halls and pursuing his dream of becoming a computer scientist.

Our university motto: Expect More. Be More. is alive and well in these stories.

And yet amidst all the enthusiasm and the energy, we also recognize that for many, it may take a little while yet for life to be back to what we once would have called normal.

COVID is still with us, albeit in a less virulent form. And the ongoing repercussions of the pandemic are likely going to impact the foreseeable future.

But we have also learned many valuable lessons during the last two years and we can apply our new-found knowledge, versatility and nimble thinking to moving the institution forward.

I believe that we now have a unique opportunity to take a long hard look at everything we do -and to maximize flexibility in both curriculum and services.

I know that we have the talent, the dedication and the abundant energy needed to do so.

Lots of changes and consolidations this summer. The newly branded SCSU Athletics & Recreation department is one example.

This partnership between our varsity sports, club sports and intramural combines the expertise of staff and enhances coordination in both of these areas,.

And most intentionally it increases competitive and social opportunities for our students – to even include a new Esports lounge in the Adanti Student Center. Thank you to Chris Barker and Andrew Marullo for their thoughtful leadership in this area.

Positive changes are also under way in IT, as Dennis Reiman and his staff work to upgrade the Banner interface, enhance the security of the computing environment and change complex paper-based practices to easy-to-use digital experiences.

Anything that means less paperwork will certainly be a welcome development!

During the next few months, we'll undertake a collective effort to develop a new strategic action plan that will lay the groundwork for the next three-to-five years.

This plan will build on the set of strategic priorities that were developed with Southern's extended leadership team to help the university move forward in the short term.

They fall under the general themes of stabilizing our fiscal position, driving enrollment, ensuring student success, advancing social justice and anti-racism on campus and beyond, and expanding our community engagement.

Each of you should have found a copy of the priorities on your seat when you walked in. I ask you to familiarize yourself with them so that you can contribute meaningfully as we chart the next phase of Southern's journey. I also to share them with your respective teams. The priorities document outlines what we will be focused on this year and how we will move the needle on each priority.

As always, the campus looks terrific – thanks to our facilities team – and it's inspiring to view the progress on our two major building projects – the Health and Human Services Building and the new home for our School of Business.

As you know, we held a ribbon-cutting for the new HHS building less than three weeks ago, before a large and enthusiastic group of attendees.

This state-of-the-art building will truly be an asset to the campus and Connecticut's future healthcare workforce.

And, reflecting our social justice and anti-racism mission as a public university, it will also serve as a wonderful resource for the off-campus community through our expanded speech therapy and hearing clinics, human performance lab and our center for adaptive sport and inclusive recreation.

Congratulations to Associate Vice President Eric Lessne and our facilities team and Dean Sandy Bulmer and the members of the College of Health and Human Services, whose vision and sheer hard work saw this wonderful project become reality.

Next to open, in Spring 2023, is our new home for the School of Business.

This will be the first state-constructed building to be net-zero in terms of its carbon footprint, exemplifying our commitment to creating a sustainable campus.

And it nears completion at an exciting time for our business school, with new leadership – welcome Dean Jess Boronico – outstanding faculty, and pending AACSB accreditation.

Another public unveiling that we are looking forward to is the Division of Equity and Inclusion's opening of its new suite of offices in Engleman Hall B106.

A Grand Opening & Author Event on October 20 from 3 to 4 p.m. will be followed at 5 p.m.

by a discussion with the two editors of the book: "We Are Not Okay," which details the challenges that black faculty face in higher education and offers strategies for retention and support.

As well as the new space, Vice President Diane Ariza has added staff in three key areas, including:

Kelvin Rutledge, Associate Vice President for Institutional Inclusive Strategies and Change Management

Daisy Torres-Baez, Faculty and Staff Diversity Recruitment & Retention Specialist

And Patricia Gagliardi, Director for Inclusion and Restorative Justice Education Development

Please stand and be recognized!

As I mentioned earlier, defining what social justice and anti-racism mean for Southern is one of our five key priorities as we move toward developing a new strategic plan.

As well as determining what we will do to end inequality on campus, and how we will engage with the community to promote equity, justice and anti-racism, we will also continue work to embed DEI in our academic mission.

While there is much work ahead, we start the year on a strong note, with Southern being recognized at the Connecticut VOICE Magazine Honors Awards for Pride in Education.

This statewide award is given annually to an individual or organization that advances education to the LGBTQ community or educates others on how to become an ally. Thank you to our SAGE Center, under the leadership of Jenna Retort, and the many other individuals elevating Southern's work in this cause.

Looking ahead, a new initiative has been introduced to diversify our faculty by pursuing a fellowship program.

This would draw from open national searches whose applicant pool comprises Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and other institutions with high BIPOC terminal degree student bodies.

The first of these Southern Fellows in Residence will hopefully join us in Fall 2023 and spend up to three years honing their teaching, practice, and research skills on campus, making them increasingly competitive in a tight faculty market – even as our hope is that they will be primed to stay on and teach at Southern.

We are steadily moving closer to being a minority-serving institution demographically (almost 45% of degree seeking undergraduates are students of color), and this initiative is one way to increase the number of teachers and mentors with whom our students can identify and model.

We are also creating a process to review bias incidents on campus using restorative education and support, ensuring that such incidents are properly documented and the campus climate can be assessed on an ongoing basis.

With leadership from the Diversity, Equity and Advisory Council, members of a task force that initiated the process this summer will be meeting with different stakeholders to receive input, with a view to implementation next fall.

To help members of our community more deeply engage in this work, social justice and anti-racism grants are now available for the 2022-2023 academic year.

These grants support projects that demonstrate a value of equity, diversity, a climate of inclusion, environmental racial justice, and anti-racism.

I encourage anyone with ideas to please apply.

The Greek Life community has developed a plan to strengthen their relationships across chapters.

This includes cultural education and anti-racism training for all Greek Life members, instituting a Multicultural Greek Council, and enhancing membership recruitment, education, leadership development and governance through a commitment to equity, inclusion and cultural literacy.

We are also working to engage our BIPOC graduate students to ensure that the learning environment within our graduate and professional programs is supportive for their needs.

And we are beginning to take a broader look at space equity on campus...

...not only ensuring that our Multicultural Center and other existing offices have the space and locations they need to thrive, but that we have adequate resource centers available to support the full range of our diverse student population: for our Muslim, Christian and Jewish students, for example.

We know that in undertaking these efforts that there will be folks on one end who say: “You shouldn’t be doing it” and there are others who will say: “You’re not moving fast enough.”

Such is the nature of this important initiative.

With every step we take, we are reaffirming our commitment to being a social justice, anti-racist university, that provides a safe, welcoming and inclusive climate for all its members.

And an important component continues to be ongoing, productive partnerships with the greater community.

A notable new collaboration begins shortly, with the New Haven Symphony Orchestra taking up residency at the Lyman Center and performing a series of concerts at the Lyman Center.

The first is on October 23rd – get your tickets now, there are discounts for Southern faculty, staff and students.

The NHSO is not only bringing concerts to Southern but also a host of internship and learning opportunities.

These include a new Arts Administration and Cultural Advocacy minor, which gives students studying literature, history, art, or performance a direct step into a field that generates more than \$9.3 billion in Connecticut alone.

They'll receive hands-on training and a guaranteed paid internship at a cultural organization in the New Haven area, which as we all know, is a hot-bed of creative talent and energy.

Congratulations to co-coordinators Joel Dodson from English and Mike Skinner from theater.

And stay tuned for a partnership announcement with the Long Wharf Theatre.

In education, our first cohort of students under the \$1.4 million Noyce scholarship program is starting this semester.

This five-year, National Science Foundation grant will help reinforce science and math education in the state's high-needs school districts, and students accepted into the Noyce program receive full-tuition scholarships for their final two years at Southern, plus \$800 toward books.

Education received two other pieces of good news recently:

A new state investment to defray certification-related testing costs for aspiring educators in Connecticut – announced by Governor Lamont here on campus – will give a boost to our teacher education programs.

More than a quarter of the \$2 million funding is being set aside for educators of color and other educators who will be completing their student teaching in city school districts.

In addition, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation announced that our Education Preparation Program is one of 32 providers nationwide to receive recognition for leadership and commitment to continuous improvement.

Our EPP, which consists of 58 programs run by departments in the colleges of education, arts and sciences and health and human services, achieved accreditation with no stipulations or areas for improvement – an outstanding accomplishment.

In the sciences, we've received two notable grants that provide new opportunities for students in economic growth areas.

We've partnered with UConn on a program designed to teach critical research skills to college graduates from underserved communities, better preparing them for employment in expanding fields such as genomics and biotechnology.

And a team of computer science and biology faculty led by principal investigator Dr. Sahar Al Seesi secured a \$1.5 million NSF grant to recruit and develop undergraduate students with expertise in computational biology.

Not only will this address a growing employment gap in the industry, it will also bring opportunities to talented students with financial need through four-year scholarships, provide dedicated mentors and cohort support, and offer a tiered 3 summers research experience program, in partnership with local industry.

We look forward to starting this program in Fall 2023, and to building on the strong connection we've established with New Haven's biotechnology industry through BioPath and related initiatives.

These type of achievements, coupled with our strong liberal arts curriculum, rooted in the humanities, ensure that a Southern education prepares individuals to be well rounded, engaged citizens, prepared for a global workforce.

On the subject of grants, I should note that this has been a banner year, with 141 submissions and more than \$11 million in total award funding as of October 2022.

That's more than five times the total awarded in 2017 – kudos to Amy Taylor and Julianne Fowler in the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research, as well as all those who submitted successful proposals.

Our external fundraising is also on an upward trajectory.

Philanthropic giving has more than doubled in the last two years – from \$3 million to \$6.5 million, boosted in part by a record \$865,000 generated by our 2022 Day of Caring.

As a result, our program and scholarship support has climbed to \$2.6 million annually – by comparison, scholarship funding alone was at less than \$700,00 five years ago.

These are excellent numbers during a difficult economic period and are making a real difference for students facing financial hardship.

And this just in– we've secured a \$3 million pledge from the Werth Family Foundation to support key initiatives in the sciences, including the Werth Nanotechnology Industry Academic Fellowship Program.

The Werth Foundation has now donated more than \$6 million to Southern, following its naming gift for the Werth Center for Coastal and Marine Studies in 2013.

In the words of its foundation president, Peter Werth: “We appreciate Southern’s commitment to building the state’s workforce as well as its focus on research connected to the community.”

Which is a great statement about the university and its invaluable contribution to Connecticut’s economy.

Congratulations to Michael Kingan, our vice president for institutional advancement, and his development team on this latest gift and an excellent year for philanthropy!

When we have high levels of stable financial support, we’re better positioned to focus on the finer points of student success.

During the past 18 months, the Division of Student Affairs, led by Vice President Tracy Tyree, has launched the Thrive, Matter and Succeed Framework to improve holistic student support.

This initiative is geared to helping students thrive through a focus on well-being, emphasizing their sense of mattering and belonging through relationship-building and engagement...

and increasing their likelihood for success through added support and the removal of barriers in their progress to a degree.

It also seeks to connect students in meaningful ways with peers and others; ensures that they feel seen and heard on campus; and prepares them to stand out as they enter graduate studies or the workforce upon graduation

The mental health of our students remains a top priority – reinforced by the recent visit of US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy to campus, where he led a workshop on this very topic.

We recognize the significant impact that the pandemic has had on our learning, on our lives, and on our community.

And we also understand the disproportionate effect that these challenges have had on our historically marginalized and underserved communities.

As a result of grant funding we have launched several new programs and services, including QPR Suicide Prevention Training, Mental Health First Aid and Professional Certification in College Student Wellbeing, Trauma, and Resilience.

Additionally, we have equipped all residence halls and several academic buildings with public Naloxone boxes that are accessible to all members of the community in the event of an opioid overdose, as well as offering Naloxone trainings for faculty, staff, and students.

With a significant number of retirements and other departures from the division, Student Affairs completed 27 searches in the spring and summer, welcoming 17 new members to Southern, 2 new members from other parts of the university and 11 staff receiving permanent employment or promotions.

And, with the permanent loss of an associate vice president position, the leadership structure has also been reconfigured to provide even greater support and supervision.

One outcome is the new department of Conferences, Events and Student Affairs Auxiliaries which brings together staff from the Adanti Student Center and Lyman Performing Arts Center as an integrated team.

Led by Rob DeMezzo, the department has been charged to create a more cohesive and streamlined approach to the planning of events on campus; optimize the use of university spaces; develop a robust conferences and camps program; and enhance revenue generation through the use of campus facilities.

Revenue generation is indeed a continued cause for concern and area of focus as we move into the new academic year.

Speaking of Revenue and Budgets..... I'd like to address an issue that has come up in the past 48 hours . Specifically, rumors circulating about the contents of a budget memo from President Cheng to the University Presidents dated this past Monday, October 3rd. It appears that the memo and its contents were shared with the Faculty Senate at Eastern.

Unfortunately, I had not had the opportunity to share it with my leadership team, let alone faculty/staff leadership. Nor was there an opportunity to work with faculty and staff to discuss best ways to both share the information and plan a process for addressing the directives outlined in the memo.

Rumors had spread across the system that the CSCU was declaring financial exigency for ALL four of the CSU's. Let me be clear, this is NOT TRUE. It could not be further from the truth. I have shared the memo with faculty/staff leadership and will share the memo to the campus community. However, right now, I'd like to read to you the most salient portions of the memo. (Insert memo here).

So we are NOT declaring financial exigency. We certainly have some hard decisions to make and we have our work cut out for us. But there is a lot we can and will do as a community in our budget planning and implementation, and there is a lengthy and complex process, before we would reach that point.

Executive Vice President Mark Rozewski and his team will be leading an inclusive and informative new budgeting process that will help us to collectively develop ways to address our \$26 million structural deficit.

As part of this process we have been requested to ensure that our program offerings are aligned with the needs of 21st Century students and society, plan for new academic and student support programs that will create efficiencies or generate revenue, and analyze our current business practices to realize both short- and long-term savings.

The plan is due to President Cheng at the system office by April, 2023 – and there are no guarantees that Southern and our sister institutions will receive a repeat of the quarter billion dollar injection of state funds that was administered last year.

The onus is firmly on us to manage our own fiscal situation. If you recall, I previously asked Mark and his team to do a thorough analysis of our revenues and expenditures – looking at our costs per FTE, how much we spend on personnel etc.

We will continue to examine each vacant position strategically and determine whether or how it needs to be refilled.

And, looking ahead, we will need to rethink our budget structures and strategies – how we distribute resources as well as how we fill vacancies.

As I've mentioned previously, we can no longer bet the farm on increased enrollment – demographics alone do not support the notion that we can grow back to where we were 10 or even five years ago.

With the population of Connecticut high school students projected to decline as much as 18 percent by 2037, many institutions in this state will be faced with a permanently reduced enrollment.

Add to this the impact of the pandemic – nationally, almost 20 percent of graduating high school seniors opted out last year, while more than 30 percent were not thinking about college, and questioning the value of a degree.

Our enrollment projections mirror these statistics.

I have talked for some time about the need to right-size Southern – that time is now. The days of 12,000-plus students will never return.

And as a smaller-sized institution, we must look at retention, at our personnel levels and structure, and the programming that we offer – both academic and non-academic.

To become a university of choice, we must focus on what distinguishes us as an institution – the Provost has been leading an effort to identify and market competitive areas that will attract both enrollment and funding to Southern.

In addition, we must be the institution that prospective students turn to when they are thinking about their career choices.

The bottom line is – students and their parents are hyper-focused on outcomes, so we must take every step to ensure career readiness, preparation and employability. We are excited to welcome Thierry Thesatus, our new Associate Dean of Career and Student Success to help lead this work.

We must also look at non-traditional student populations – those 25 and older who completed some college or are now at a point in their lives where they feel a need for further education.

They want it cheap and they want it fast – more online and weekend options, more courses during the winter and summer breaks.

We have to think about how we would meet the needs of those individuals while maintaining the quality of the institution.

To do so, we must be prepared to make the tough decisions.

And as we were during the pandemic, we must be innovative and versatile.

Julie Edstrom and her enrollment management team are being just that, in a bid to develop new areas of recruitment potential.

Here is a snapshot of where we are, numberswise, for the fall:

- A total headcount of 8889, up 1%, boosted by more than 600 Early College students, up from 180 in Fall 2021.
(I should note that Early College is going very well: with 631 students from 59 high schools participating (Trudy) and 46 faculty scholar invitations received already this semester – all records for the program. I'm assured we'll have 1,000 students in place by the spring, which would be wonderful). Back to the numbers...
- Full time undergraduate enrollment is down 5.5%.
- Graduate enrollment is essentially flat.
- FTE is down 3%. We had projected that we would be down 5%.
- The first year class is 1,106, up 8.3%.
- New transfers are down 11.4%, which was expected given the significant enrollment drops among CT community colleges – however, the CSUs are also not the first choice for many community college graduates. And that's in large part because of our cumbersome transfer application process, which we've been tasked with streamlining.
- On a positive note, the retention of first time, full time freshmen is 73.2%, compared to 71.6% last year.
- And in the first year class, 130 students are from New Haven Public Schools, a 5 year high.

You'll note the upward trend in students from New Haven, where the high school population is actually increasing – so as we broaden our engagement with the Elm City, it's an area of growth potential for us.

As a result, we are developing ways to make earlier connections with these students and develop an affinity with Southern:

First Year Admissions is partnering with New Haven Public Schools on school group tours and personalized visits, and offering Sunday, Twilight, and Bilingual Campus tours during the Fall semester.

Earlier this week, we hosted 180 eighth grade boys on campus at an Empowerment Conference for New Haven Public Schools. Eighth grade girls will be on campus for their Empowerment Conference in the spring.

We'll also be honoring the top 9th graders in New Haven Public Schools at an event in January with the hope of demonstrating the quality, care and commitment a Southern education provides.

The Transfer Student Services team has reorganized and is now Transfer Admissions and Services to better meet the particular needs of transfer students, who make up 35% of our undergraduate population.

And after the disruptive last two years, the transfer team is finally back to providing in-person pre-transfer advising at Gateway, Housatonic, Norwalk and other CT State College campuses.

You can also help. The School of Graduate and Professional Studies will host an Open House on Tuesday, October 25 from 3 – 7 p.m. And there's no better candidate for graduate school than the students we have, so please encourage them to attend – or help by spreading the word in your family circles and on social media.

We also have two Undergraduate Open House events coming up on Saturday, October 22 and Sunday, November 13, both from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

We're seeking faculty, staff and student volunteers to assist throughout each event in a variety of roles, from visitor check in to tour guides.

Check your email for a link to volunteer and help us showcase "Southern hospitality."

Your presence will make a real difference in how our visitors experience Southern and help influence their decision to enroll.

As we move forward into this new year, we certainly have much to build on, starting with the talents and dedication of our faculty and staff, and their compassion and support for their fellow employees and our students.

This is an appropriate moment, then, to recognize the recipients of our annual Staff Recognition of Excellence Award for outstanding service to the university community. Please stand as I call your name:

- Karyn Watts, Secretary - Political Science
- Linda Robinson - CSU Administrative Assistant, Academic Affairs
- Melissa Glazier - Secretary II, Student Affairs
- Alicia Carroll - Registrar
- Carol Conway – Office Assistant, Financial Aid & Scholarships
- Ebonee Brown - Registrar
- Nicholas Gleifert - Assistant Director, Admissions
- Barbara Izzo- Financial Analyst, University Accounting
- Beth Winiarski - Payroll Coordinator
- Ken Pereira- Payroll Officer
- John Ruggiero- Director of Facilities Engineering, Facilities Operations
- Pam Mikaelian - Director of Accounting Services
- Suzanne Huminski - Sustainability Coordinator
- Victoria Orozco - Student Accounts Office
- Isabel Chenoweth - University Photographer
- Sue Quagliaroli- User Support Specialist, Advancement Services
- Chester Sample- IT Customer Support Center Manager
- Vu Trieu – Director of IT Support Services
- Dian Brown-Albert- Coordinator of Multicultural Student Activities
- Katie De Oliveira- Director of the Center for Academic Success and Accessibility Services
- Ken Sweeten- Associate Director of Athletics for Communication
- And, Randolph Brooks- Multicultural Programming and Outreach Coordinator

Congratulations to all of you – your dedication and talents are truly appreciated and make a difference for our students and our community.

I ask our recipients to please come up to the front at the end of this program for your certificates and some photographs.

As we move forward through the semester, I'm looking ahead to one of my personal favorites: Homecoming, which is taking place in just a couple of weeks.

This year's celebration will be all the more special as we once again fully engage with our alumni community here at Southern and beyond.

With carnival rides, Zumba, and sip and paint, as well as Owl Town, Kids Korner, and of course, our traditional tailgate there's truly something for everyone.

And I should mention that there's a special component to this year's celebrations as we are also marking the 50th anniversary of our Southern Educational Opportunity (SEOP) program and the contributions of its founder, Jim Barber.

As you may know Jim, a true Southern icon, retired only recently after 58 years of service to Southern, its students and the wider community.

His legacy on campus is SEOP, which has provided learning and practical skills for thousands of promising students who have faced educational or economic disadvantages that have impacted their preparedness for college.

SEOP helped make their dream of a college degree a reality – and you can join the anniversary celebration and thank Jim in person by registering at the link on the screen behind me.

It should be a memorable start to a memorable Homecoming weekend, and I hope to see many of you there.

Thank you again for all of your hard work and dedication on behalf of our students and have a productive and rewarding semester.

I'm happy to take your questions before we have lunch.