

The State University in the State Capitol: The Maturing of a University 1984 to 2003

As new leadership came to California State University Sacramento in 1984, interest in the simple fact that CSUS was, and would be, THE State University in the State Capitol was strong - among members of the Board of Trustees of the CSU System, the then chancellor and her staff, and many of the presidents and faculty of other CSU campuses who saw the Sacramento capital campus as important to them. Leadership on the campus, faculty and staff and administrators, had not before taken on the fact, but there was interest among some.

Fortuitously, a major and significant opportunity was presented to the new leadership after my appointment as president of the Sacramento State campus. Shortly before my arrival on campus on July 1, 1984, the voters of California had passed an initiative in June cutting the budget of the state Legislature by one-third. As a very new president, I received a phone call in mid July from the ranking member of the Senate Rules Committee, Senator Bob Beverly, to ask if Sac State would take over, with no budget allocation, the Senate Fellows program, a program which had existed since the 1960s. The campus would need to find the money. I needed to consult faculty leaders, administrators, the then system Chancellor, Ann Reynolds; all agreed to go ahead, but the funds to make it happen had to be found; in a few weeks that was accomplished. This was a win/win for the university. Near the end of the fall semester 1984, Assembly Speaker, Willie Brown phoned; I had come to know him as a recent and very active alumnus in the years 1958-63 when I was a young associate dean at San Francisco State. Willie told me that Assembly fellows were jealous - Senate fellows could get graduate credit for some of their work - would Sac State take the Assembly Fellows Program? And Willie had the funding - the money. A number of months later, then Governor George Deukmejian phoned - he wanted a program like the White House Fellows to be built, and he assured me that it would be funded. So, by the Fall term of 1986, Sac State had Senate, Assembly, and Executive Fellows programs fully operational. George Deukmejian and I had become friends years earlier when he agreed to develop a one day program about the legal aspects of some of the state justice systems for the Institute for Local Government and Public Service at the Chico campus; George was a young member of the Assembly, and I was a faculty member and Director at that time of the Institute.

“The State University in the State Capital” is a set of four discussions about four dimensions of the topic. Each discussion group is composed of faculty and staff, some retired, some still fully active on the campus, all identified in each group. The moderator of each discussion is Steven Boilard, then recently retired, Executive Director of the Center for California Studies. It is important to note that individual faculty members had engaged state government and public policy issues prior to 1984. Two faculty members in the Government Department began in 1976 a program for students from all CSU campuses, most often undergraduate students, they would come to “the Sacramento Semester” and experience that semester with state government entities and public policy matters. Individual faculty members in a variety of programs had undertaken research.

The first discussion group addressed the Center for California Studies. The Senate, Assembly, Executive, and Judicial fellowship programs, and in fact the emergence and the development of the campus and individuals' engagement with state government and public policy in many forms.

The second discussion group addresses three centers for research and actions within state government and public policy. Faculty who built these centers and their colleagues are the participants. One of these centers predated 1984 and the other two emerged over the years. In all three, it can be noted that changes occurred after 2003 which is normal - to be expected.

The third discussion group addresses the emergence of a new graduate program (and after a number of years the identification of the Department of Public Policy and Administration). A first faculty member in that department was an early individual to be responsible for the Assembly Fellows program. The Master's degree in Public Policy and Administration is alive and well.

The fourth discussion group addresses governance in the University. While all this change was going on, and really in all dimensions of the life of the University, what happened in governance?

One aspect which was not addressed in these groups is the two national conferences for state universities in state capitals in all fifty states. The Center for California Studies took on this project in the early 90's, a first in the nation. At the initial gathering, every state university in a state capital participated, all 50 states. In several instances, state universities, not in state capitals, but with branches or centers in state capitals sent individuals to participate. This could be done again, and should be, 25 or more years later. It certainly positioned the Center for California Studies and the University.

The time period addressed in these discussions is 1984-2003, but it would be improper to go beyond 2003. My role in these discussion was limited to brief introductory remarks in each session, and responses to occasional questions. My wife, Bev, and I want to note that this topic, "The State University in the State Capitol", is important to us, and to the University. We are proud that it has provided our students, from all of the CSU System, and graduate students from across the nation, opportunities to participate in these important programs.

FAST FORWARD: On the arrival of Robert Nelsen in 2015, he saw the need for a presence of Sac State in downtown Sacramento, and he immediately sought to purchase a building downtown; thus the Sacramento Downtown Center opened this fall 2018 with a number of departments offering classes, including the Center for California Studies.