Five minutes with PROVOST AND EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT MARY PEDERSEN

By Ann Claycomb
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In today’s “Five Minutes with SOURCE,” Provost and Executive Vice President Mary Pedersen sat down to discuss her role in Courageous Strategic Transformation and its impact across Colorado State University.

The Courageous Strategic Transformation plan articulates a commitment to student access, which is of course also part of our land-grant mission. The meaning of “access” has changed a lot in 150 years. Can you talk about some concrete ways that will manifest in Courageous Strategic Transformation?

In the context of Courageous Strategic Transformation, “access” means making education at Colorado State University available and accessible to all learners. This is a key part of our land-grant mission and a central focus of CST.

While we want to pursue a truly inclusive and comprehensive approach to access, we also are prioritizing efforts to expand access for Colorado residents and for traditionally underserved populations. To that end, CST Priority 1.1 affirms our commitment to “provide access to educational excellence and opportunities that arise from it” and to “offer all of Colorado’s students access to a high-quality education.”

Priority 2.2 vows to establish a financial aid strategy that makes CSU more accessible and affordable for all Colorado students. Priority 2.4 emphasizes the importance of developing accessible, inclusive spaces across campus. Priority 4.4 aims to expand our representation and impact in Colorado’s rural communities.

Our strategic plan includes multiple approaches to help us accomplish these critical goals. We will partner with the CSU System on our Rural Initiative and other efforts to increase the percentage of diverse, first-generation, rural, veteran, and historically underserved students at CSU. We aim to pursue new pathways of access through programs offered at Collaboration Campuses across Colorado. We will expand the reach of financial aid among our students, and enhance graduate student recruitment and financial support. We want to be the campus where everyone belongs, and CST can make that happen!

The plan also talks about student success, which is often defined very broadly using graduation data. But what do we mean when we talk about student success in the Courageous Strategic Transformation plan? Can you give some more context beyond just graduation numbers?

Yes, student success relates to high retention and graduation rates, but it also involves so much more. Like access, student success is essential to CSU’s land-grant mission. That’s why our first priority in Courageous Strategic Transformation, Priority 1.1, focuses on ensuring “Student Access and Success.”

We will promote student success by pursuing a range of student success initiatives and by systematically tracking their effectiveness. We are already piloting several such projects through the Office of the Provost, including new targeted retention efforts. As
the plan articulates, we aim to broaden outreach and support for students in need while expanding access to high-impact practices, experiential learning, and education abroad.

Additionally, Priority 1.3 of the plan recognizes that the success of our students rests on fostering an inclusive community, Priority 3.2 is focused on providing access to comprehensive behavioral and mental health resources, and Priority 3.4 is about maintaining a general education program that integrates excellence in the liberal arts and sciences. Finally, it is about making sure our degree programs effectively prepare students for the 21st-century workforce, which is a principle aim of our Academic Master Planning process as well as Courageous Strategic Transformation.

**We commit in this plan to student success both at CSU and in the workplace once our students graduate and leave our campuses. What specifically do you envision us doing in the coming years to prepare our students to enter the workforce?**

The future workforce is going to be an increasingly crowded, competitive, and volatile place. Preparing students for that future is not only central to our land-grant mission, it is also essential to staying relevant as an institution. This effort requires us to be agile, adaptive, and innovative. We will likely see increased demands for specialized training and expertise, but we know broad-based skills like communication and critical thinking will remain important.

Courageous Strategic Transformation provides a way to balance these imperatives and forge a leadership role in the future of higher education. It includes guidelines for innovative practices in our general education program as well as specialized areas of study, addressing both our current pillars of strength and areas of potential growth. Our Academic Master Plan, a cornerstone of CST, will support this effort by helping us better understand our current and future students’ needs so we can best serve them.

**Finally, you are leading another planning process right now that involves partners from across the University, the Academic Master Planning process. Can you explain briefly how this fits into Courageous Strategic Transformation?**

The Academic Master Plan is a major component of Courageous Strategic Transformation. It will allow us to strategically plan and pursue our enrollment goals, course offerings, and space to adapt to demographic shifts, changing economies, and student needs and desires. This work also will direct the pedagogical aspects of what we do, who we are, and who we want to become. It will involve assessing our core curriculum, the value of current programs, and the potential for new initiatives and opportunities.

The AMP also parallels and echoes core aspects of Courageous Strategic Transformation. It recognizes and draws on the relationship among learning, research, and engagement. It highlights our strengths in key areas such as health and environmental sustainability, and it seeks to cultivate and build on CSU’s green and gold aims of a sustainable thriving planet and flourishing humanity. It involves understanding and embracing CSU’s difference, including our unwavering commitment to our students and our planet. Like CSU’s broader strategic planning process, the AMP aims to guide us through current and future challenges, to position CSU at the forefront of higher education.