



BRADLEY University

Below is the transcript of the first ever Presidential Roundtable. Speakers include (in order) Libby Derry, Executive Director of Communications and Media Relations; Jonathan Michael, Interim President; Betsy Hull, Vice President for Finance and Administration; and Dr. Angie Cooksy, Vice President for Enrollment, Marketing and Communications.

This Roundtable was recorded Thursday, August 8, 2024 and was fueled by questions and topics submitted by the Bradley University community.

Libby: Hi, I'm Libby Derry, Executive Director of Communications and Media Relations here at Bradley, and this is our first ever presidential roundtable. Thank you for joining us, and I'm happy to be here with some of our senior leaders, I have interim president Jon Michael, Vice President for Finance and Administration, Betsy Hull and Vice President for Enrollment, Marketing and Communications, Dr. Angie Cooksy.

Thank you for joining us today. We hope to have a really good conversation. The point of this roundtable is really for senior leaders to discuss the issues that are important to our entire campus community, and in order to do that and make sure that we got some of the most relevant questions to our campus community, we asked faculty and staff to submit some questions, and you did, and so thank you very much for that. We are trying to get to as many of them as we possibly can, especially those most frequently asked questions. But in this time frame, we won't be able to get to all of them, but I think we should get started just to make sure.

So maybe we can start with our interim president here, and you can introduce yourself to the campus community and speak a little bit about your leadership style or your communication style.

Jon Michael: Thanks. Libby, yeah. Jon Michael, I've lived in Peoria for 42 years having worked for RLI, a local property and casualty insurance company, New York Stock Exchange company that's grown in leaps and bounds over the 42 years that I've been here. I was the CEO and president for 20 years, and I was chairman for 11 years so and I retired on June 1 and became interim president of Bradley On June 1. So that's all good. I've been an admirer of Bradley for a long, long time. It's a big part of the community, and I know that it's a great institution, and I felt the desire to step up and take the reins until we can get a permanent president. I've been on the board for over seven years. I recently was chairman of the board as of February of this year, so I was a likely successor, I guess, but so here I am, and thanks. And then you asked about my management style.

I'm collaborative. I listen. I think I listen pretty well. I won't dictate things to you too much, but so I think that's my style.

Libby: Well, you mentioned the permanent presidential position, and that was a question that we got a lot of. So what is the status of that search, and what are some specifics that you're looking for when it comes to the next leader of Bradley? And what do you anticipate that timeline looks like?

Jon Michael: I think, as of today, we now have the final pieces of the selection committee so and we've, we've hired a search firm to represent us in that search. I'm going to be a non-voting member of the committee. The committee will be a committee of 12 people representing staff, faculty and trustees. So, really good committee.

We will start the search as soon as possible. It's not the best time in the world to be searching for a president. I'm told that the search will likely go on until March or April of next year, and with the new president starting June or July of next

year. I think it'll be a successful search. We have a very good search firm, Russell Reynolds. It's not the same search firm we've used in the past, and we think that's the appropriate thing for us to do this time.

Libby: We definitely have multiple interim leaders, President, Provost, there are three deans. Is there a strategy in place to fill these positions? Will it be done simultaneously, or in some type of scaffolded approach?

Jon Michael: I forgot to answer your question about the attributes of that.

Libby: Oh, right, we can reverse and go forward.

Jon Michael: Let me go back. So, so we're looking for a leader. First, we're looking for somebody who can help with the trustees, create the vision for Bradley and to have that leader be, you know, the type of person that people want to follow, so those are probably the most important attributes that we're looking for, for a leader of Bradley. And as for the the interims, we've got a lot of interims. One of the goals that I have, I guess I kind of said that I have, you know, three or four things I'm really looking at for this period of time. And one is enrollment. Because if we raise the level of enrollments that raises revenue for Bradley, and a lot of things get taken care of if our revenue numbers go up. So we want to really concentrate upon enrollment. Everybody's responsible for enrollment, but Angie is the point person in her department is, you know, championing that. The other thing I want to do is tone down the temperature on the campus, and we'll do that through collaboration these types of things. I want to get to know people on campus and make sure that we're all working toward the same things as for those interim things. And that's where I'm getting to this. Somebody asked it was something about, are we looking at doing it, you know, in a stair step approach?

I don't think we'll be, you know, looking to replace, say, the interim provost, or going out for a national search for that. We'll let the new president that'll, I think, be their pick, or at least they have to have a lot of say in that pick.

But what I think we can do is go after some of these interim deans that we have currently, and I don't think we'll do them concurrent, necessarily, so we'll probably do them serially, but we're going to start that right away.

Libby: Okay, all right. And then Betsy, something that came up multiple times, was the budget. And a year ago, we announced a significant operating budget deficit, which caused some major changes on campus, is the university still projecting the ability to resolve that deficit and has the value changed in the past year?

Betsy Hull: You know, we've been modeling different scenarios, and most of them, like Jon said, really revolve around the moment. And we presented a five-year model to our finance committee and to our board, we're hopeful with that five, five-year model that will reduce the deficit, but there's a lot of assumptions that we put into this model. So we have enrollment assumptions, we have tuition increases, we've got inflationary factors, all those things are really volatile, and so it is our goal to get that deficit down to zero as quickly as we can, but also as thoughtfully as we can. And there's, there's a team in place to do this. It's not, it's not my budget, it's not Jon's budget, and it's not Angie's budget, it's the it's the university's budget, and we all have to be part of that.

Libby: When will the university as a whole get a really good look at that budget?

Betsy Hull: That's a great question. So, we've met with our finance committee every month for the last few months, we've been in front of the board now twice with some preliminary budgets. We'll have our final budget once our 10-day count is in and that 10-day count will inform the budget that we propose to the full board on September 20. And so we fully intend to share that budget, once approved by the board, with the full campus. And Angie and I would like to get in front of campus sometime in October to do a full enrollment and budget address to the to the campus community.

Libby: That'd be great. And then another hot topic that's definitely across campus, but also in the questions we received, is pay increases, specifically for staff. The question was, while inflation has been rising exponentially, it's been a while since staff has seen a pay increase, when could something like that possibly happen?

Betsy Hull: It's a great question, and I've heard that theme a lot since I came to campus in February, and it took some time over the last couple of weeks to really dive into the compensation actions we have taken here on campus. And looking back, just in the last few years, we weren't able to do an increment in fiscal 24 but we did a 2% increase in fiscal

23 and we also did one in fiscal 22. They didn't meet the cost of living, and we acknowledge that, but cost of living has been unprecedentedly high, in fact, 5.9% in 22 and 8.7% in 23 that is unprecedented. We have not seen that in decades. We've not seen it in my lifetime. And so for an organization like us to keep up with the cost of living is very difficult, but it's going to be difficult for organizations across the country, nonprofit and profit and profit alike.

So our goal over the five year model that we've been putting together is to try to incorporate as much compensation impact as we can within our means. And like Jon said, enrollment is really driving our budget. And this is a campus community. It's a campus effort in trying to balance our budget, but also acknowledging that compensation should be one of the top things that's included.

Libby: Thank you. And so when it comes to enrollment, can we talk a little bit about what that enrollment forecast is and really what your strategy is when it comes to stepping into this role?

Angie Cooksy: Sure, there's lots of conversation, obviously, about enrollment, and certainly a lot of the meetings that we're having right now are focused on that. It has once again, been a really unique year as we've navigated, and I'm going to use your word unprecedented, FAFSA challenges, we're seeing some significant delays with visas being approved, and so I will be sharing, as Betsy said, our official numbers after 10 day, because I think then we'll know really what the impact of some of those things that are outside of our control will mean for us.

Additionally, I'm really looking at moving forward how we talk about enrollment. We have historically talked a lot about what that fresh treatment number is, and I'm really excited to think about enrollment a little bit bigger. I think it brings more people to the table and allows us to think about all of the campus community. What is, what does broadly look like for our graduate students? What does broadly look like for our international students, for our transfer students, and when we put those populations at the forefront of our enrollment plans and policies, it then impacts the rest of campus.

And additionally, we're looking at things and partnering with retention and the whole campus community, what happens when those students get to campus? Because it's not that we can also just recruit our way out of some of these challenges. It's about making sure that once those students get here, they have a really great experience and become graduate students and become alumni and, you know, ultimately reinvest back into the community. So I'm really thinking about this holistically and all of the different ways that students get to enter into our community.

Libby: So enrollment doesn't stop as soon as students deposit.

Angie Cooksy: Basically, right?

Libby: We did have one question that asked specifically about international students. Is there a specific strategy when it comes to, recruiting those students and retaining them?

Angie Cooksy: Sure. So we have had really great relationships with some international partnerships across the world, and we're looking at ways to expand those. I've already, in my first - I'm on day 17 back - had some conversations with partners across campus in different academic areas that have their own relationships, and thinking about ways that we can create new avenues for students to come in.

And so I really would like people to hear that. For me, there's nothing off the table if you have an idea, bring it forward and let's explore it. It doesn't mean I can say yes to everything, but I think there's whether it's international students or transfer students, or graduate students or new ideas about our incoming first year students. I think there's a lot of opportunity here, and it's a good time in our history to look at what does that mean for Bradley, and how can we move forward together.

Libby: Thank you, Angie. We had a tough year last year, whether it was budget or, some decisions that needed to be made. So as for those changes, a lot of tough decisions were made. So the question is, are you planning to continue in this direction - you and the board - specifically concerning the program discontinuations?

Jon Michael: Those will move forward. With those, what's done is done. And I said this, when we, when we made these, these cuts, or when the President proposed the cuts, that if we get 80% of them right, that's a good thing. If 20% of them are wrong, go back and fix those. But I do think that we need to, need to have a level set on that we're not going to turn back on that.

Libby: Has the university's strategic plan changed? And what will the main strategic focus be this academic year again?

Jon Michael: There's no changes to the strategic plan. I've told you what my focus is going to be this year, really enrollment, really the temperature of the campus. I want to tone that down, tone down the rhetoric and get working together again, and some of the dean searches and just kind of directing the university, I want to get to know people.

Libby: And so if people see you on campus, stop and say hi?

Jon Michael: Yeah, absolutely!

Libby: That's what I like to hear. Since I started at Bradley, I can say all of our senior leaders, I think are some of the most approachable people, and I think that that's what makes this university special, too, thank you all for that, too.

Well, then one final question that we wanted to ask is, what are you most excited about? I can say that I submitted this question because I really want to know, you know, when you say you want to address the temperature on campus. There is so much to be excited about here. There's so much to be optimistic about here. So if each of you could answer, what are you most excited about when it comes to the future of Bradley?

Jon Michael: Yeah, I mean, just look out there how beautiful this campus is. It's gorgeous, and Bradley's a huge part of the community, and I'm excited to have Bradley to be an even larger part of the community and to be successful, and it will be, I can guarantee you that will happen. Bradley is going to be a successful, big time University.

Betsy Hull: I think for me, in the short term, I'm really looking forward to faculty and staff being back on campus. It's my first fall on campus, and having been in higher ed for 20 years, this is the best time of the year. And you know, our facilities team has been doing an amazing job getting campus ready. Like John said, campus looks beautiful right now. We're really looking forward to all the faculty and staff coming back and seeing the good work, and just to have the campus vibrant again, populated again, and seeing the students come back with all their stuff and their energy and their youthfulness, that that brings Canvas to life. So really looking forward to that.

Angie Cooksy: Make sure taste of Bradley's on your schedule. That's my favorite part.

For me, I just love this place so much. I'm excited to see what we're doing here together. It's been really amazing being back for the last month, just the number of people that want to be a part of this. And I think Jon said it really well that the work we do is successful when we get to do it together. And I think having that energy and people that are excited about being a part of this place and seeing what we can do is, is what drives me every day, when I, you know, I'm stuck in spreadsheets, at the end of the day like it's really the people that are so magical, and getting to be a part of telling That story is something that I'm really excited about.

Libby: Well, thank you guys for participating. This is a great conversation. I look forward to many more. And thanks to everyone who submitted those questions, those very thoughtful questions, there will be more opportunities for conversations in many different avenues and ways as our academic year unfolds. So thank you guys very much.