University leaders field questions on $20 million TSU expansion, faculty conduct during Pizza with the Presidents

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The $20 million redesign of the Titan Student Union was a center of contention Thursday during a dual-purpose Pizza with the Presidents town hall. The event was also an opportunity to give feedback on proposed TSU designs.

Proposed designs drafted by three competing architecture firms were unveiled for the first time less than two weeks ago. Since then, the Titan Student Centers Governing Board, which approved the redesign, has sought feedback on potential designs through open forums held on campus.

Representatives from the Fullerton chapter of Students for Quality Education, a student advocacy group, were concerned with the fact that $20 million had been allocated from reserves for the redesign. Carie Rael, a history grad student and member of the group, said there should be a way to divert funds from Associated Students, Inc. and the student centers to help the campus in ways that would benefit the campus as a whole, like repairing and reopening the closed floors of Pollak Library, she said.

Floors 1, 4, 5 and 6 of Pollak Library South have been closed since the magnitude 5.1 La Habra-centered quake in March. The floors are likely to stay closed for at least another three years as the library prepares for a large-scale renovation that was planned before the earthquake.

Students at the Thursday meeting asked for a stronger push from Associated Students to both distribute funds and change the way funds are allocated to allow money to be diverted to emergency needs within the university.

"ASI is a state-incorporated entity and (California State Student Association) could come together and allocate funds that would come from ASI fees to pay for something like the library, especially in cases where a university doesn’t have access to books. That’s the issue," Rael said.

Associated Students representatives did not acknowledge a resolution for redistribution of funds for library repair.

"These fees were also allocated before the library earthquake happened, so there is no way for us to kind of use these exact fees for that because they were allocated in the past and they were saved up in the past for this expansion," said Associated Students Executive Vice President Michael Badal.

SQE, however, is demanding more action and accountability from Associated Students.

"This is an extreme case where an exception should be made," Rael said. "We’re holding you, our leaders, accountable as ASI, as supposedly representing the students."

There was also concern regarding how the future Student Union construction would affect students’ ability to use the Student Union. The availability of space during the renovation will be contingent on which plan is chosen, said Associated Students President Harpreet Bath.

Construction is planned to take about 2 1/2 years, he said.

Worries regarding faculty conduct were also raised. CSUF student Spencer Snook expressed serious concern that reports filed by students regarding faculty misconduct had not been dealt with.
Snook claimed that five years ago a professor sexually harassed a class that he was in. He declined to state what occurred, but said the course was being video taped as content for distance learning courses. He and several students reported it and nothing was done, he said.

“No one cares,” Snook said.

He added that this wasn’t the only case of inappropriate faculty behavior that he’s reported. He said another one of his professors frequently has “meltdowns” in class.

“We do care,” said CSUF President Mildred García. She called forward Vice President of Human Resources, Diversity and Inclusion Lori Gentles to speak to Snook’s claims.

“We do have a process for students, as well as faculty and staff, to report any type of abuse: sexual harassment, hostile work environment, discrimination, retaliation,” Gentles said.

She directed the audience to read about the process online and said that there were places on campus where students could go, such as Student Affairs or the WoMen’s Center.

“It’s disheartening to hear that scenario that (Snook) explained,” Gentles said. “I think we can do a better job of communicating all the avenues that our students can access to get assistance when they need it.”

TAGS: Associated Students Inc., California State Student Association, Pollak Library, Titan Student Union

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