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CONTACT: Kalifa Madden, Communications Manager
CSU Student Success Network
k.madden@csus.edu, 916-278-4258

CSU Student Success Network Names Bianca Romina Mothé as New Director

Dr. Mothé, Professor at Cal State San Marcos, Plans Strong Role for "Middle Leaders" in Advancing Equity and Student Success in the CSU

The CSU Student Success Network named Bianca Romina Mothé, Ph.D., professor of biological sciences at Cal State San Marcos, as its new director. As a faculty member and researcher at San Marcos since 2003, Dr. Mothé has helped design novel vaccines for rapidly mutating pathogens, including HIV. She also served as associate dean for undergraduate studies from 2016 to 2018 and faculty director for service learning from 2013 to 2016. She has a PhD in Molecular and Cellular Pathology from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and a BS from Beloit College in Wisconsin.

The CSU Network is an independent entity--facilitated by the Education Insights Center and housed at Sacramento State University--that provides spaces and time for "middle leaders" throughout the CSU system to work together and share strategies to improve equitable student learning and success. Middle leaders are defined by the Network as faculty, staff, and administrators who have leadership roles in working with students, whether or not their position title acknowledges these roles.

"I am a middle leader, I've been a middle leader for a long time now," Dr. Mothé said. "I'm also a first-generation college student. Higher education is changing now, partly due to the pandemic and the social unrest that has occurred. This offers an opportunity for all of us to reimagine higher education for our most marginalized students, which is a key purpose of the CSU, to serve these students."

Dr. Mothé said that in addressing this opportunity, the CSU faces unique challenges as the largest university system in the nation: "One of the challenges that we face in the CSU continues to be working within a very large and diverse higher education system where each campus has its own set of practices and approaches, with few opportunities to exchange ideas and strategies across campuses."

She pointed to the CSU Network as being a game changer in providing opportunities for faculty and staff to step into leadership roles and build relationships within their own campus and across the CSU system. "We have a long way to go in the CSU to build practices and systems that fully support equity and student success. But the CSU Network provides time and space to support middle leaders in examining evidence, identifying barriers, developing innovations, and sharing their practices for equitable student success. I am extremely proud to see the engagement of campuses coming together in the Network to tackle these issues from a cross-functional perspective."

As the CSU Network enters is fifth year, its impacts are already being felt on campuses, including actions taken in the midst of a pandemic:

- At Long Beach State, a transfer center was created after a campus team participated in and shared information with other CSU campuses at a Network convening on supporting transfer students.
- San Diego State likewise implemented a range of actions to support transfer students, based on participation by campus teams at the Network convening and in the Middle Leadership Academy.
- A campus team from Chico State, after participating in the Middle Leadership Academy, included equity language in the campus's new strategic and master plans, as well in the campus's General Education mission.
- Colleagues at San Marcos created a course for faculty and staff on using student data, based on information and feedback they received from colleagues from other CSU campuses at a Network convening.
- Based on plans developed by a campus team at the Academy, CSU Northridge established a community-based-learning component in the campus's freshman seminar courses that first-year students enroll in.
- At Humboldt State, equity training is now in place to support faculty, after a campus team gathered information and developed plans at the Academy.
- Middle leaders have described the importance of Network activities in providing them with leadership and relationship-building skills that have expanded their leadership roles and career opportunities in supporting equitable student success. Last year, close to 400 CSU colleagues participated in the Network's first annual conference.

Dr. Mothé has served in leadership roles at the CSU Network since its inception, working as a facilitator of the Middle Leadership Academy in 2017, joining the Advisory Board the same year, and becoming director of the Academy in 2018, a position she held through 2019-20. Most recently, Dr. Mothé served as interim executive director of CSUPERB in 2020-21. As well as directing the Network, Dr. Mothé serves as co-director of the Middle Leadership Academy.

"It is an honor to be stepping into this role as Network director and working with talented colleagues and students from campuses throughout the CSU, both those participating in Network events and those designing and managing them," Dr. Mothé said.

During its first four years, the Network has expanded services annually, to offer:

- **The Middle Leadership Academy**, a year-long professional development experience for campus teams to create a project associated with equitable student success on their campus. Applications are now being accepted for 2021-22.
- **An annual student success conference**. This year's conference, "The Time is Now: Forging New Visions for Equity in the CSU," will be held virtually October 13-14, 2021.
- **Convenings and workshops** focused on specific topics. Virtual sessions on race and equity for CSU middle leaders are planned for Sept. 10, 17, 24, and Oct. 1, 2021.
- **Action-oriented research** findings for CSU middle leaders, available on the Network's Knowledge Center.

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