

CSN Subject Matter: Student Life

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Meghin Delaney: Welcome to this week's edition of CSN Subject Matter, the College of Southern Nevada's weekly radio program in conjunction with KNPR. I'm your host Meghin Delaney and from CSN's Communications office.

CSN is Nevada's largest and most diverse higher education institution, so naturally we got plenty of great stories to share. Today, I'll talk with Brian Akins, CSN's director of student life and leadership development about Student Life at CSN and how new student unions are changing the experience on campus. In the second half of the show, we'll welcome two of our most active students who are both part of student government.

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Hi Brian, thanks for being with me today. The first thing I'd like you to do is, is can you give our audience a little introduction a little bit of who you are and what you do for CSN.

Brian Akins: Sure, again my name is Brian Akins and I service as the director of student life and leadership development here at CSN. I am born and raised in Los Angeles, California, so just a good four-hour drive away from here depending on who's driving but my life, I guess you could say my professional career has been working in the student affairs field and the student services field. I started off as a student worker, you know working for the Martin Luther King Center as well as the Recreation Center at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona, and from that point just escalated, you know my previous supervisors said I think you'd do really well if you would work as a profession on campuses of higher education and ever since then it's kind of just took off and grown. I can't even see myself working at anything else besides a college campus, and like I said, I love it, I have zero complaints.

Meghin Delaney: And how long have you been with us at CSN?

Brian Akins: I've been with CSN since December of 2016, so I'm coming up on my third year.

Meghin Delaney: And so for folks who are unfamiliar, can you explain what student life means and what that entails?

Brian Akins: Sure, so student life you have to look at it as basically, the life and learning outside of the classroom. Many campuses, in particular community colleges, they are more PLCPL, with stands for parking lot-class-parking. Get to campus, go to class and then go home. My role is to make sure that there are opportunities outside of the classroom for you to continue the learning process, hence the leadership development. The learning process can take place with anything from student government to joining a student club, to working to volunteering, to service-learning opportunities, that's more my role to make sure the outside of the classroom there is life generated on campus.

Meghin Delaney: And so it seems like an easy question, but why is it important that our students don't park, come to class, go back to their car and leave. Why do we want to create opportunities for them on campus?

Brian Akins: Plenty. The research shows that students that are well connected to the institution outside of the classroom, those are the ones that tend to do better academically. They are also the ones that are more invested in the institution. You know, they'll say hey I was a member of this club or organization, I was a member of your sorority or a sports organization and things of that sort. You kind of tie yourself to the institution that you're attending school at. Then also, the learning process you know if you are working in a group, you learn how to do things such as just the basics of sharing, to learning and learning how to study better and things of that sort and those are some of the reasons why it's important to get involved outside of the classroom.

Meghin Delaney: Yeah I know for me the student newspaper was my big tie to my college so I'm glad that we're working on opportunities for provide those things for our students, but one of the things because we are a community college we have students from all walks of life so can you tell us a little bit about what CSN's student body looks like?

Brian Akins: Sure. We're the most diverse institution in the state of Nevada. We have students from all aspects of diversity whether that be cultural to socioeconomic background, we have students that are international students as well as a matter of fact, the International Student Association is one of the largest campus student clubs and organizations on campus. We have students that are mothers and fathers and grandmothers that are married that are taking care of parents and things of that sort. So we have a big diverse student body here on CSN's campus.

Meghin Delaney: Yeah, I think the average actual age of a student on campus is mid-to-late 20s, something around 27 or 28, right?

Brian Akins: That is correct. That is correct. I just did a presentation for the classified council in which the title of the presentation was "Scoot Over Generation X, Baby Boomers and Millennials and welcome Generation Z" which welcomes the newest a population of students that bring a different skill as different set of assets and skills to the college campus.

Meghin Delaney: So Generation Z, those are the students that are coming straight out of high school to our campus and what are some of the things either research has shown so far or you've seen yourself about this generation. What are they looking for when they come to college?

Brian Akins: Sure I'll give you a couple. One, is that they are looking for what to be applicable to what they're going to be doing in the future. You may recall, you might not recall because you're rather young, but like people would say things like "I don't need any other math outside of algebra for my life. I'm not using geometry, I'm not using trigonometry to what I do so why do I have to take it in high school?" What Generation Z is saying "OK, you know what help, help make it make sense why I need to take this political science class, help make it make sense why I need to take sociology, how is that applicable to what I want to do for my life?" Then also Generation Z, they are wanting to know why is college even important because you know previous generations said you know hey college and I heard the joke that I went to college and the only thing I came back with was bad credit. You know, Generation Z if I'm going to invest, well help me understand why I would invest tens of thousands of dollars in college when I talk to people that have went to college that are like you know what hey it's not worth it, I'm deeper in debt due to going to college and the job that I have, you know I'm paying more my student loans and it's like I'm working to live, you know, my paycheck is cut due to my student loans and my rent and my utilities and things of that sort all because I went to college. So I want administrative to make college a worthwhile, but help it make sense to Generation Z.

Meghin Delaney: Almost, we need to explain to Generation Z a little bit more when they have this vast opportunities of things they can do after high school, why they should come to CSN. That's fascinating to me, and I know for a long time there was a push that everyone needs to go to college out of high school and I think that has not served a lot of probably mostly Millennials. It hasn't served them well to just send them to a four-year institution immediately after high school, but I think with our changing workforce needs, there's a big push for people to have some kind of post-high school credential so how do you talk to the students about that when you are working with them to explain to them why that's important?

Brian Akins: Sure, definitely. When you're talking to the students, you have to help it make sense and be realistic for them to get to wherever they think they want to go in terms of their profession. So if I say you know hey, I would like to be a teacher and I were to chart out so I can, so you can come to some of my colleagues' offices and say you know I want to be a teacher help that become a reality for me. My colleagues would be the ones, as well as me a little bit, but that's not my expertise, charting out exactly every single step to get to what your dream is. And making it realistic, making it attainable, and giving them the encouragement and the empowerment they need to say you know what hey if I stay along this course this is something that is easily attainable.

Meghin Delaney: So I want to transition and talk about one of the most exciting things happening on our campuses right now which are the Student Unions. One of the things we already talked about is that as a community college, our students come to take their class and they leave. So these student unions are something that you see on your traditional four-year college campus. Can you talk a little bit about where the student unions came from, some features they're going to have and why they are important for CSN?

Brian Akins: Sure, of course. The idea of having student unions on campus came from student government. Maybe four to five different student governments ago said hey the students need a place to congregate. If you want CSN to transition to having more life outside of the classroom and having a place for students to congregate, the student unions is a great place to start and you'll see other campuses having those student unions. One of the things I did before I came on in 2016, was I talked to previous student government members. They would say, hey you you know, we fostered an environment where students would just come, went to class and then went home, but we want to transition out of that. Some of the great things going on within the student unions include having the Coyote Cupboards which is our on-campus food pantry, which is another area that I oversee. On each of the three we will have a pantry for students to come and get free, fresh food, no questions asked or anything of that sort. So that's a great resource for our students because you know, the research has shown that food insecurity is a barrier to students completing their classes so that's a great thing. We'll also have meeting space for all of our clubs and organizations to meet. We'll also have also have the furniture where students can relax and you know whether it be studying or congregate and really enhance the campus feeling.

Meghin Delaney: Yeah, I'm hoping there's a lot of outlets in these student unions, so everyone can plug in and charge their devices because what would we do without our cell phones.

Brian Akins: Of course, of course.

Meghin Delaney: So student government is going to have their offices in there, there's a whole lot of events that are now going to be open to us in these student unions, I've met with some of your staff

who are planning their welcome back events. So what kind of events do you envision having in this space?

Brian Akins: Let's see, we want to have our year-end banquets in our students unions. Last year, we had it in the June Whitley Lounge on the North Las Vegas Campus and in previous years we've had the banquets on some of the golf courses as well as the country club so throughout Las Vegas. So we want to have our year-end student banquets. In the springtime, we want to have a student life and leadership development poster fair for students that participated in things outside the classroom to showcase their events or different things that they learned. We also have different cultural activities that are going to go on the student unions. Also from my department as well, I oversee CSN Services which is our volunteer department we're going to have our volunteer fair as well in the student unions too.

Meghin Delaney: So one of the things you mentioned is that these unions are paid for by students, it was a student government led initiative. Clearly the students think these are important, so can you talk about what you're hearing from the students that you're interacting with?

Brian Akins: Excitement. Excitement. It's a brand-new space and also we have food service now. CulinArt is the vendor that's going to be providing food service for our student unions and so students won't have to drive you know five to ten minutes away to get food, they can just do everything on campus, which is the big draw to the students so they're definitely excited about that.

Meghin Delaney: So I think what you're telling me is the parking lot's going to stay full for longer in the day on all these campuses.

Brian Akins: Correct, correct and that's what you want. We want to drive students to the student union, to utilize the student union. They're paying for it, definitely utilize it.

Meghin Delaney: So one of your other responsibilities on campuses is you oversee the student government. They've done a lot of really good work in the last couple years, so can you highlight some of the things student government has done, some of the ways they've given back?

Brian Akins: Sure definitely. The last Senate we gave 25,000 toward the Henderson Campus Health & Science building, which is huge, you know, we're going to have this state-of-the-art building on the Henderson Campus and that was very instrumental by our previous student government. The last student government gave \$27,000 towards an online orientation platform and so our colleagues in the orientation department are putting together something that's more state-of-the-art and more relevant to the students than previously they had, so we gave \$27,000 towards that.

Meghin Delaney: One of the other things that I remember from last semester that I thought was amazing was a fund for students who are experiencing financial hardship. So can you tell me about that initiative and how it works?

Brian Akins: I don't know how I forgot about that. The student emergency fund is another initiative that was birthed, that was suggested I would say by student government and then with the OSIT grant and we were able to help out students that may find themselves in a different economic hardship. Students are able to apply for the funding to help out for a different emergencies that come up.

Meghin Delaney: So if I'm a CSN student all of a sudden, I lose my housing, I don't have money to pay my rent, I can come to some government and apply for this emergency fund to help me get over the hump. Is that how it works?

Brian Akins: It wouldn't be through student government. It would be through Student Life & Leadership Development. I have an emergency fund committee that consists of four administrative faculty, one family member, one classified staff member and a student. They basically fill out the one page form detailing that their hardship and make submit some supporting documentation, whether it be an overdue utility bill or an eviction notice or anything to kind of say here is that hardship that I'm having and we are able to help up to \$250.

Meghin Delaney: And, so what we want is that they're experiencing this temporary hardship, you don't want them to leave CSN and drop out of their classes to try to take on another job to overcome the financial burden. We want to give them a little bit of money to help get them over the hump and keep them in school?

Brian Akins: Yes, that is definitely the goal.

Meghin Delaney: And you said that is something that came from students?

Brian Akins: Yes, that is correct.

Meghin Delaney: Some of the other things I know you guys work on, you've already mentioned the food insecurity, I think there is a lot of talk right now around transportation so can you talk a little bit about what you hear from students around their transportation issues?

Brian Akins: Sure, some students aren't able to take all of their classes at a particular location and so some students may have to be closer to the Henderson Campus but for that one class or for that two classes they may have to commute over to the West Charleston or the North Las Vegas campus or visa versa.

Meghin Delaney: So we're going to look at some ways with student government to maybe help and see how we can lessen that burden.

Brian Akins: Yeah, that's something we're looking at, we're brainstorming, we're bringing in other Las Vegas entities to that conversation as well.

Meghin Delaney: Well, we're excited to see what your students come up with and what we can talk about in the future that you guys have done. If you're just joining us you're listening to CSN Subject Matter, the College of Southern Nevada's weekly radio program in cooperation with KNPR. I was just chatting with Brian Akins, CSN's director of student life and leadership development and I'm very excited to get some students on here in just a moment.

Did You Know? There are more than 35,000 students at College of Southern Nevada seeking degrees and another fourteen thousand in our workforce training programs? CSN, now you know.

Meghin Delaney: I'm joined right now by Devon O'Sullivan and Summer Shams, two members of our student government. They are elected members by the student body. We have representatives on all three campuses. The student government advocates on behalf of our students, they help design and

implement new programs and initiatives to help our students succeed, they're responsible for the new student unions we just talked about with Brian. They oversee clubs and they recently created that emergency fund we talked about. Devon and Summer, thanks for being here with me. Would you guys mind introducing yourselves a little bit, how you ended up at CSN, what you're studying, what your title is?

Devon O'Sullivan: I initially started in high school with an online program and so when I graduated I was really looking for a college that had that same level of online flexibility and I heard that CSN offered that and so that's when I decided to commit to CSN. My program of study is actually an associate of biological science. I'm a pre-med major hoping to transfer to USC when I graduate.

Meghin Delaney: and you are a senator on the Henderson Campus?

Devon: Yes I am a senator on the Henderson Campus.

Meghin Delaney: OK, and how about you Summer? Tell us a little bit about how you got to CSN.

Summer Shams: Well I am also a senator for the Henderson Campus and I graduated from Coronado High School and I knew that I wanted to go to UCLA. I didn't want to just throw myself into something so competitive coming straight from high school and being so young so I have a couple friends that did go to CSN and they said it would be a great transition and be very smooth and easy for me. I'm also pre-med as well and same as Devon I'm also associates of biological science.

Meghin Delaney: Let's talk a little bit about how you got involved in student government. Why was that something that was important for you once you were here talking classes?

Summer Shams: I've been in student council since elementary school. So I started off in third grade in my elementary student council and I went into high school as actually the president we called ASB because I was in California. I was a president of ASB my freshman and sophomore year and then when I moved here to Vegas I also joined student council and was a president of a different club and I knew that this is something I've always I wanted to do I like being a leader and helping students and being the face of the school.

Devon O'Sullivan: For me it was a little bit different because my program for high school was online I never really had that opportunity to just really get involved on school and so when I graduated high school and was coming to college I really wanted to commit and be something bigger than just myself and so I felt like I could really do that with this student government.

Meghin Delaney: And so what have your experiences been so far in student government? Do you have a favorite program or a favorite initiative that you've done as part of student government?

Devon O'Sullivan: My experience with student government has been really great so far. I've learned a lot about how to be a leader, how to take initiative, how to be effective and successful. Right now some of my favorite programs, or my favorite program that we're working on is a Henderson hygiene initiative. So we're providing hygiene needs, things like toothbrushes, toothpaste, razors and female hygiene products to students who might not have access to those things.

Meghin Delaney: And Summer, how was your experience been so far in student government. Do you have a favorite program or initiative that you guys have done?

Summer Shams: Well, my experience with student government has been absolutely amazing. I've become friends with a lot of people and I'm learning a lot about myself as a leader on how to communicate with people and how people don't communicate the same way that you do so it's definitely been kind of life changing in a way too. Same as Devon my favorite program that we're currently going to be working on is the hygiene and helping out our fellow students with making sure that they have all of the items that they need.

Meghin Delaney: And so can you guys talk a little bit about what you say to your fellow students who might not know what student government does, who might not understand why they should get involved, how would you encourage them to get involved and what opportunities are there for students to engage with student government and get involved?

Devon O'Sullivan: So what I would say to students is that we're here to help and we're here to make a change. That's what student government is all about, is really improving the quality of life for us as students on campus and so some ways that you know you can really help is to stop by any of the events that we're planning or throwing. Volunteering is another option to.

Meghin Delaney: Do many other ways to get involved Summer?

Summer Shams: I would definitely say come down to our office with any questions, comments, concerns, anything you need cause we are your voice, we're here to make sure that you know that your voice is important in that you know your needs are definitely the one thing we want to make sure it's been covered.

Meghin Delaney: So part of what we're talking about today are the new students we have on campus, we have one of each campus, so can you guys talk a little bit about how you expect these spaces to be utilized and why you think it's important CSN has these buildings for you guys?

Summer Shams: I'm actually very excited about the student unions cause I want, kind of like what Brian was talking about, I don't want this campus just to be parking lot-class-parking lot kind of campus, I want this to be a home away from home and hopefully with the student unions you know if you want to grab a bite to eat with friends, go to the student union. If you want a quiet little place to study place, you can also go to the student union and do some homework or anything you need to do.

Devon O'Sullivan: It's really an opportunity for us to relax and unwind as students as well as being a place where we can socialize with other like-minded individuals and so it's a great opportunity for us not only improve the educational aspects to our college but also the socialization and communication between students.

Meghin Delaney: Since I know that you are both students primarily on the Henderson Campus and you are both going into Medical Health Sciences field, one of the things we talked about with Brian was that donation student government made to that new building that's going to come on the Henderson Campus, so can you guys talk a little bit about why that was important and a little bit more about why you want to go into these fields?

Summer Shams: I think these buildings are important because they are specifically made for students like David and I are, who, you know, we want to go into that medical field and we want to pursue a

career in it. I personally want to go into the medical field cause I really like helping people out and I want to be a pediatric surgeon, so if I can save lives and have CSN help me do that then I'm so for it.

Devon O'Sullivan: These buildings really are for students who have an interest in those fields and everything we won't be around to experience that, we're setting it up for future generations of students like summer and I know have that interest in science and medicine and just that entire stem field. Like Summer, I also want to be a surgeon, probably just a general surgeon.

Meghin Delaney: So as you know, the students unions were student led decision. Previous iterations of student government decided we needed to fund these buildings on campus and here they are for us. Going forward, what are some other things you think student government and CSN administration should be doing to help put students first?

Summer Shams: So one thing that Mr. Brian has previously brought up with us is that a lot of our students are transportation insecure, so they don't know how they're going to have a ride to school, so hopefully we can start partnering up with the local bus stations to figure out a way to make sure that all students have transportation to get to their classes.

Meghin Delaney: I know one of the things that we are working on on the administration side is that we're making sure we're offering courses at times that work for students on the campuses where they are, so I think if we can get those two things to work together, we'll be able to help solve that problem for students who may not have access to a car themselves. Devon, do you have any other ideas of what CSN could do to maybe help students out?

Devon O'Sullivan: Yes, so as Mr. Brian also mentioned was the food pantries that were opening up. We're opening one on each campus and it's going to help students who have food insecurities or food struggles and so this it's really great because we are helping contribute to the students who might be struggling with that.

Meghin Delaney: So I know you guys do a lot of the programming on campus for students, those events are planned by you guys, publicized by you guys, run by you guys in student government, do you have a favorite event coming up this semester? Is there something you're really excited about planning that you're working?

Devon O'Sullivan: Yes, my favorite event that I'm actually planning and coordinating some of the other senators is the Day of the Dead event. It's on Halloween and it's going to be inside our student union buildings. So this event, it's pretty much an altar, a traditional Mexican Day of the Dead Altar that we're going to have decorated. We're also going to be offering traditional snacks and foods for students and it's really going to be a spot for everyone to hang out and come together.

Meghin Delaney: What about you Summer, do you have a favorite event that's coming up?

Summer Shams: I do. I'm currently planning our "Too blessed to be Stressed Week" so this is going to be around finals times and this is going to be the week before when everyone's like really cramming and studying and some of the things that we're going to have is like one day cause, having breakfast before you study is like so, so important because you can't study if your stomach is growling every 3 seconds, you can't really focus. So one day we're going to have pancakes to give out so if someone can just grab some pancakes, go on to they're studying. Second day is going to be coffee and donuts so grab a cup of coffee and have a little bit of energy and then the third day which is probably going to

be Thursday, we're going to have little like survival kits so inside is going to have scantrons and blue books and pencils and pens and everything you need to have success during finals week.

Meghin Delaney: I want to thank you guys so much for joining me and being on the radio, it's really exciting. So you've been listening to CSN subject matter the College of Southern Nevada's weekly radio program in conjunction with KNPR. I want to thank Brian Akins, our director of student life and leadership development and our student government leaders, Devin O'Sullivan and Summer Shams, for being here with me. Also big thanks to KNPR for helping us produce this show, we couldn't do it without you. Once again, I'm Meghin Delaney from CSN Communications Office. You can learn more about CSN by visiting csn.edu or finding us on any of our social media sites. We look forward to helping you succeed and I will see you next time.