

THE FORUM

President Dobkin, ASW reaffirm commitment to building community at CommUNITY Talks event

Brendan Sudberry, November 19, 2020

ASW hosted a CommUNITY Talks event Wednesday where they facilitated a conversation with President Beth Dobkin about the importance of building community at Westminster College.

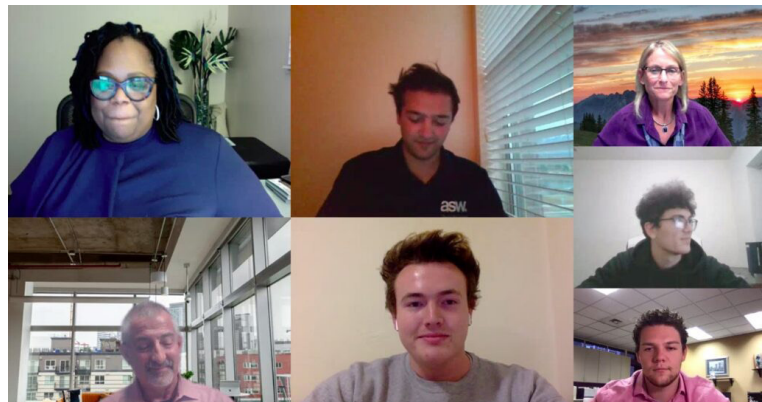
According to ASW President Obaid Barakzai, the event was organized in hopes of allowing students to reconnect with their peers and communities – especially as in-person events have been more difficult to organize because of COVID-19. Barakzai also said ASW hopes this event will bring students a sense of hope.

Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Tamara Stevenson and Interim Vice President of Student Affairs Glenn Smith also attended the event.

“In a world so polarized by many tragic national and international events happening this year, we in ASW wanted to remind our students to sail past the politics of cynicism and find hope in community-building,” Barakzai said.

During the event, President Dobkin reacted to student survey responses that were collected via email on Monday from Barakzai, while also answering live questions from students in attendance.

“Community creates a shared purpose and brings people together under a shared



understanding,” said Dobkin when discussing what community means to her. “The project of learning in and of itself creates community. How you go about connecting is super important.”

Tamara Stevenson, vice president of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, added to the conversation to discuss why community-building is important.

“The ultimate goal is for each member of our campus community to feel encouraged to bring their whole and best self into our campus community and into the world beyond graduation,” Stevenson said.

Dobkin highlighted the effectiveness of virtual events that various campus organizations have sponsored this year to create a space for community-building, including virtual trivia and wine and paint nights she has attended.

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President Beth Dobkin

“Finding ways to have a bit of fun together and learn from each other are what really are inspiring to me,” Dobkin said.

Additionally, she touched upon the opportunity this semester has provided for more intimate connections between students and their faculty members – pointing to personal phone calls a professor has made to students in their class simply to check-in.

Omar Al-Jafari, a first-year student, responded to Dobkin after she mentioned wanting to get feedback from new students on their ability to build community this semester.

“I think I have experienced a lot more community even during these hard times, so definitely the good efforts have been made [for community-building],” Al-Jafari said.

Although this is the first CommUNITY Talk, Barakzai said ASW plans to host more community-focused events throughout the remainder of the academic year.

“We are hoping to make planning such community-building events a strong culture at our school,” Barakzai said. “We encourage everyone to reach out to their community even more so now to seek help from and to offer help.”