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Cal State Chancellor Resigns Over Allegations He Mishandled Harassment Complaints

By Katherine Mangan | FEBRUARY 17, 2022



CALIFORNIA STATE U.

Joseph I. Castro

California State University's chancellor, Joseph I. Castro, [resigned, effective immediately](#), on Thursday evening amid a growing furor over his handling of sexual-harassment and bullying complaints against one of his vice presidents when Castro was president of Cal State-Fresno.

The stunning development capped a daylong meeting of the university system's Board of Trustees, which had been expected to call for an outside investigation of the chancellor's conduct. The board voted to accept Castro's resignation and to proceed with plans for an outside review of the system's sexual-harassment policies and procedures.

Castro had drawn increasing fire for failing to rein in Frank Lamas, the Fresno campus's vice president for student affairs, who had been the subject of a dozen complaints of sexual harassment and bullying over six years. Castro recruited Lamas to Fresno in 2014, and Castro was aware of numerous complaints against Lamas in the six years leading up to Lamas's departure.

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When Lamas was ultimately found responsible, in 2020, for sexually harassing an employee and creating an abusive work environment, Castro didn't discipline him. Instead, he sent him away with a \$260,000 payment and retirement benefits, a promise of a glowing recommendation, and no public acknowledgment of wrongdoing. Under a settlement, Lamas had only to agree to never again work for a Cal State campus, but with an unblemished record, he was free to go elsewhere.

Lamas had denied wrongdoing and said, in an email to *The Chronicle*, that he received "outstanding evaluations" of his work every year and a "great reference letter" from his former boss.

Three weeks after the agreement was signed, Castro was named chancellor of Cal State, the nation's largest system of four-year universities. He didn't mention the settlement when the board was considering him for the job.

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Late Thursday evening, Castro issued a prepared statement. "I have been honored to serve the California State University for more than eight years, including as its eighth chancellor, and the decision to resign is the most difficult of my professional life," he said. "While I disagree with many aspects of recent media reports and the ensuing commentary, it has become clear to me that resigning at this time is necessary so that the CSU can maintain its focus squarely on its educational mission and the impactful work yet to be done."

The Board of Trustees' chair, Lillian Kimbell, also issued a brief statement. "We appreciate Chancellor Castro's cooperation with the trustees and his decision to step down for the benefit of California State University system," she said.

News of the controversy broke on February 3 with the publication of an [investigation by USA Today](#). In a [public statement that day](#), Castro defended his actions, apologized to those hurt by Lamas's behavior, but said his hands had been tied by policy restraints. Castro said he couldn't have taken meaningful action against Lamas until someone went through the formal complaint process, but [Title IX experts](#) who spoke with *The Chronicle* disagreed, saying that if nothing else, he was morally obligated to step in sooner.

Asked for his reaction to the vote, Jack McGrory, a Cal State trustee, told *The Chronicle*: "It was a sad episode, and we need to move on, to re-establish the credibility of CSU and to regain the trust of our faculty, staff, and students."

Cathy Sandeen, president of the university's East Bay campus, said late Thursday that she was "extremely grateful that the board has taken a strong and decisive action against gender-based harassment and misconduct through their action today."

Steve Relyea, executive vice chancellor and chief financial officer, will serve as acting chancellor until an interim chancellor has been named.

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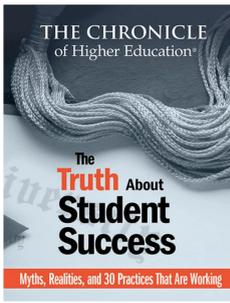
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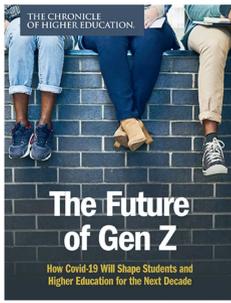
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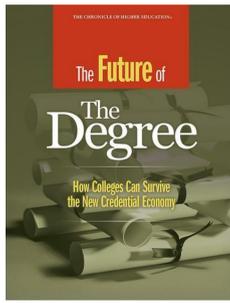
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