Meet the Dean: Janice Cervelli

University Relations - Communications
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They're experts in their fields and essential campus leaders, but how well do you know deans across the University?

This regular Lo Que Pasa series will introduce deans across campus and provide insight into their motivations, challenges and reasons for choosing to work at the UA.

This week, meet a dean who contemplated a career as a rock star before deciding to go into urban design and planning.

Dean: Janice Cervelli
College: College of Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture
Number of years as dean: 6
Fun fact: I think most people don't know that I am and have been in a rock band for many, many years. I almost chose not to go to college, and pursue going on the road as a performer, but I decided that my parents would disown me. So I chose to stay in school.

What do you enjoy most about serving as dean of the College of Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture?

I enjoy serving with some of the most talented faculty, staff and students in the country. They are certainly people who are particularly passionate about creating a sustainable world, which is a guiding philosophical principle for me. I believe that serving the southern Arizona community, and the community of Arizona at large, by connecting it with our faculty and students to help realize its sustainable future is fundamental. So it's this community I like to call it the "communiversity." I enjoy advancing and fostering a really strong communiversity.

When and why did you choose to join the UA?

I joined the UA in July of 2008, and the reasons I did were the terrific reputation of the University, the great colleagues I knew here and the potential that the college possesses in being able to solve some of the largest issues facing Arizona. I also had a lifetime dream of working in the Southwest; I have always just absolutely loved it. I had done extensive visits and travel around the Southwest, and the Sonoran Desert has always held my interest? it's been very intriguing. Any self-respecting landscape architect desires strongly to live in the Sonoran Desert at one point in their life, and I have the great privilege to be able to live and work here.

What are some of the challenges and rewards of serving as dean?

We're going through a historic transition in U.S. public education, so the challenges are of continual disinvestment by the state to public education and higher education. It's been a real
challenge for the University to think of itself more as a private institution or an entrepreneurial undertaking. With that have come some rewards. With respect to creating a stronger sense of self-sufficiency, a reward is being one of the most well-run colleges, which has at the same time been able to focus on what's most important in what we do while doing it efficiently. We have been able to weather these challenges while maintaining the high quality the academic community has come to expect from us; this is perhaps our proudest reward.

What's one big thing going on in your college right now that people should know about?

I am working with Dr. Esther Sternberg on the establishment of the new Institute for Place and Wellbeing and the partnership with the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine. This has been an inspiration and pleasure in finding demonstrated ways to make where we live, work and play a healthier environment.

Work is important certainly, and we all have very challenging and stressful jobs, particularly as we go through these budget cuts. We have to do more with less, and a lot of times that's on our own backs. I openly express my hobbies, and share that with colleagues from the college. When there are challenges around family we pull together and we really help people, whether it's health, or other challenges. We are bringing in exercise events here; we're trying to make the University a healthier and more fun place to be.

I am also engaged in a number of design review and advisory committees for the city. I'm on the Ronstadt Transit Center Selection Committee to review the proposals that we developed for a four-acre parcel in downtown, a key opportunity for transit-oriented redevelopment. I've been engaged in trying to set strong planning and design criteria for downtown Tucson, which help the quality of those projects in elevating the expectations of new developments. I've also been the board chair for the Downtown Tucson Partnership. As recent past board chair of Arizona Forward, a state-wide environmental organization, I led advocacy efforts around the I-11 international transportation/trade corridor and the cost of water and water infrastructure in Arizona. Those are just a couple of examples of the communiiversity.

What does the future hold for the College of Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture?

We are on such an amazing trajectory stemming back to the last five or six years. We have been able to attract great students and faculty during historically challenging times. The recession really hit our professions hard. Despite all of that, and despite all the budget cuts, we have maintained the quality of our programs, and actually have elevated all of them. We have nationally ranked programs in architecture and planning. Again, we've been able to grow the breadth of degrees, and expand the mission of the college including the new Master of Real Estate Development and the B.S. In Sustainable Built Environments, which is now available online.
I think all of that is reflective of the demand and strong need for our professions in the world today. I see the future as being very bright, because of the environmental, economic and social challenges that we’re facing. The growth in the state of Arizona is projected to continue to be healthy in terms of the population in a much-challenged environmental condition. That calls for the ability to plan, design and construct in a highly sustainable way. At the same time, the state of Arizona needs to transition into a much broader and varied economy. We can certainly contribute to that.

**What hobbies or activities do you enjoy outside of work?**

I have a major passion for music. I have had that passion since I was a teenager, and I have been involved in a number of rock bands over the years. I'm in a band right now, sometimes in more than one, but right now my band is called Skyline. It's an outlet for enjoying music, enjoying performing at various events, enjoying my bandmates, many of which are alumni or active faculty members, including professor of architecture Nader Chalfoun and Eller alumnus Andy Briefer and students in the college. ... I'm the lead singer of the band, and I play the guitar, and I also play keyboards. I love a very eclectic range of music from Gershwin all the way up to Adele, and everything in between. ... We've played at downtown events. We've played at Bear Down Fridays at Main Gate Square. We just had a gig for PICOR Real Estate Company's 30th anniversary party. ... I'm also an avid tennis player. I believe firmly in health and well-being, and I try to bring that message as a dean to the college. ... I try as a dean to demonstrate that you need to have a balanced life.

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