Report to Tribal Nations
Thursday, April 12, 2012
10 a.m.
Pala Band of Mission Indians
Administration Building

Dr. Karen S. Haynes
We cannot abandon Native American students. We cannot fail them. We cannot let their dreams die. We must recommit, today, to working together to advance the well being of Native American students through self-determination, academic achievement and community service. Native American students are essential to the future prosperity of our region.

I don’t need to tell you that Native Americans have the lowest high school graduation and college going rates of any of the “at risk” groups. Through our combined efforts, we can change this reality! We can change lives. We can transform families. We can rebuild communities. That’s what higher education does. That’s what our mission is at Cal State San Marcos.

In San Diego County, fewer than 50 percent of Native students graduate from high school. Recent California census data shows an increase in the high school graduation rate for all races and ethnic groups except for Native American students. High school graduation rates for this group are actually getting worse, having decreased almost five percent over a 10-year period, starting in 2000. Clearly, these numbers are going in the wrong direction. But even the Native American students who do graduate from high school are not
always prepared for college. Less than 20 percent have taken the required courses for college. This means that students are coming to us unprepared for the rigors and challenges of college and, therefore, are more likely to have trouble succeeding in college.

We owe Native American students more in preparing them early for college and supporting students once on campus. The near absence of American Indian students on our college campuses deprives the higher education community of your perspectives and contributions to research and teaching. At the same time, your communities are deprived of the contributions that a formally educated workforce can make to your community’s sovereignty, self-determination, health, education, and economic development.

As our region’s only four-year institution of higher education, Cal State San Marcos is committed to engaging with our communities, to increasing the numbers of Native students enrolled in and graduating from college. When I became president in 2004, I made very clear that CSUSM’s mission, our guiding principle, would be to raise the educational attainment rates of our region’s students, especially among underserved student populations. We have done that. And we
will, with your help, continue to move more Native American students from high school through college.

Since our founding 22 years ago on the land of Luiseño Indians, we have been involved with area tribal nations. We have held American Indian Storytelling events, featuring local elders. We have hosted American Indian art installations, organized panels of Indian speakers and, in 1992, established the American Indian Student Alliance. Even our mascot, Tukwut, honors the contributions of Native Americans to our region.

I appointed the first tribal liaison in the Cal State University system in 2004 to connect the university better to the tribal communities. We remain the only university in the system with a tribal liaison – a full-time position dedicated to creating connections with and pathways to us. In 2005, I formed the first Native American Advisory Council in our entire 23-campus system to listen and learn from you about the educational needs of our local tribal nations and how we might be able to address these.

Last November, the university hosted, for the very first time, the Southern California Tribal Education Summit. Nearly 50 participants came together to discuss how the university and our tribal neighbors could work together more
strategically to address Native students needs. The group included representatives from at least 10 tribal nations across Southern California, including elected tribal council leaders and Native American professionals and educators.

From the summit, and from ongoing outreach and conversations, we know that we need to create stronger pathways to college, that parental involvement and personal attention from school personnel is key, that mentorship programs help; and that we need to celebrate and promote the academic achievements of area Native American students.

Because of CSUSM’s long history working with area tribes, we have the knowledge and expertise to translate our ideas and values into action. We know that solutions will not be found overnight; that it will take hard work and frank conversations. We know that best practices to move Native American students forward include:

- American Indian programming on campus such as California Indian Day, Native Heritage Month Celebrations, and the American Indian Honoring Ceremony, which will take place this year on May 1.
- continuous feedback from my Native Advisory Council;
and our recent establishing of the California Indian Cultural and Sovereignty Center.

Opened in November, the center is unlike any other in California— a place where students will find academic and career support, where faculty will find fresh ideas for lesson plans and projects, and where area tribes will find countless opportunities for collaboration.

We are diligently working to attract and retain Native students. CSUSM signed an agreement with the Valley Center Pauma Unified School District in 2006 and one with the Santa Ysabel Band of Diegueño Indians in 2007. These agreements guarantee high school students admission to Cal State San Marcos upon the satisfactory completion of required coursework. Considering that we had more than 16,000 freshman and transfer applications this fall for about 2,500 slots, guaranteed admission is big deal.

Faculty and advisors work closely with students and their teachers to make certain that the correct classes are being taken, that admission guidelines and deadlines are adhered to, and that all financial aid options are explored.

The agreements are working. Close to 1 percent of the student population at CSUSM is American Indian, among the highest percentages in the CSU system. This number includes
four American Indian students who are pursuing their masters degree with us and 24 Native American students who will be graduating next month. What’s more, we have admitted 62 American Indian students for fall 2012.

Just as impressive is that half of our students are first generation in college. … and they stay at CSUSM because of the support we provide, because we are an inclusive campus that believes personal and academic enrichment can only come by having students of diverse backgrounds and circumstances on campus.

I thought I’d share a few stories that further illustrate my point.

Rose, a freshman and first generation college student, is developing a stronger sense of self at CSUSM. A former foster and adopted youth, she grew up on the San Pasqual Reservation not knowing if that’s where she really belonged. After almost a decade away, she returned to the Santa Ysabel Reservation of her birth father.

Rose always knew she wanted to attend college, but she was unsure of the process, of what she needed to do to make her dream a reality. Through the American Indian Recruitment Program and the support of a CSUSM graduate student mentor, Rose found her way to our university and is
now working on her bachelor’s degree. She is learning to balance her academic life with the traditions of her *Koo-me-eye* (Kumeyaay) culture and mentoring Native high school students so that they, too, know what it takes to get into and stay in college.

In every way, our students are discovering firsthand how to become more engaged and responsible citizens of the world. Their educations extend well beyond the classroom and into our communities. Our students by their nature are dynamic and inventive, and I believe that to prepare them for leadership roles, their education should develop their entrepreneurship and creativity, it should prepare them to be team players, and it should encourage them to be civically minded.

An education at CSUSM does just that. Michael, a sophomore business student and member of the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians, once had no plans of leaving the reservation. He was a self-described “troublemaker” with no goals and no direction. Today, he is an active member of the American Indian Student Alliance and is part of a team trying to preserve the Luiseño language. Along with CSUSM staff and other Native students like Tommy Devers, a member of the Pauma tribe who is working toward his master’s degree in
sociology, Michael regularly visits the Pauma reservation to collect photographs and record the native language once predominately spoken by tribal members.

The recordings and images are uploaded onto cartridges as songs, quizzes, images, and stories and then distributed to tribal members for use on a Nintendo DSi. The project helps reinforce students’ ties to their communities and provides a valuable service to the reservation — the preservation of disappearing customs and traditions.

Through projects like these, we are reaching out to area high school students, tribal communities, and foster youth to let them know that Cal State San Marcos is their university, a place where their dreams will be encouraged, where their intellectual curiosity will be nurtured, and where their every step toward earning a college degree will be supported.

Our programs and commitment to Native students are two of the many reasons why Tommy, a San Pasqual Indian, decided to attend CSUSM. A model student who’s set to graduate this May, Tommy is a strong advocate for Native American students and culture. During his time on campus, he earned a prestigious Washington Internship for Native American Students in the nation’s capitol where he honed his
leadership skills, discovered new educational opportunities, and met lawmakers and legislators.

Tommy is now using the knowledge he gained during his internship to encourage future generations of Native students to pursue higher education and to honor their Indian heritage. Tommy hopes to use his communications degree to continue sharing the stories of Native peoples with the world.

And there are certainly stories worth telling, stories of Native students succeeding in college, in harmonizing mainstream teachings with the traditional lessons of the reservation. CSUSM is taking measured and significant steps to ensure that students in our region are better prepared and thus have access to higher education. With everything that we do, we put the best interests of our students at the core and forefront of the university’s priorities.

But we cannot do it alone. We need your help, we need you to partner with us and engage with us in the dialogue and actions that will help move Native American students forward. We need to set small, achievable goals that move us closer to our bigger, specific goal of increasing college graduation rates among American Indians.

The future must be filled with an educated workforce, with individuals who listen, who respect and value different
ideas, and who act boldly. Our region and our country rely on these graduates to power our economic engine. To not include Native Americans in this future is a disservice.

As educators and as engaged members of our communities, it’s our responsibility to help students fulfill their academic and social potential. We owe students the chance at a better future — and we know that education can provide that chance. It is the one sure path to a more equal and prosperous future.

The educational challenges tribal communities face were generations in the making, and it will take courage, commitment, and collaboration to undo the status quo. There is no excuse for inaction. We have a unique opportunity to make sure that all Native American students get a quality education and the chance to pursue their dreams.

From the education summit that I mentioned earlier, tribal educators and leaders and our Native Advisory Council determined that increasing the recruitment and retention of Native students will require:

- working together to develop annual college fairs specifically for Native students;
• working together to make clear the expectations of what it takes to get into college, including the application and financial aid process;
• working together to identify opportunities to bring Native American scholars to campus to teach;
• and working together to educate current CSUSM staff, faculty, and administrators about Native customs and how to better integrate Native studies into the overall curriculum.

If we commit right here, right now to tackling these recommendations together, we can and will increase the numbers of Native American students with college degrees. A college education is quite powerful, and as I always say, it not only transforms the student’s life, it transforms families, and indeed, entire communities.

We cannot afford to wait any longer to ensure that Native American students lives are transformed by a college education. Committing, together, today, to achieve this goal means that we will help transform tribal communities and assure a better future for Native Americans and tribal communities in our region.