Convocation 2015: *Forward Together*

Remarks by President Karen S. Haynes, PhD

California State University San Marcos

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USU Ballroom
INTRODUCTION

Today marks my 12th convocation and another opportunity to celebrate our 25th anniversary. How exciting it is – and how proud I continue to be – to talk about where we’ve been and where we’re going – Forward Together.

We are known as a University that sets big audacious goals … and makes good on them! We are able to do that because of the wonderful, talented people who make up the Cal State San Marcos community – all of you! The legacy we have built – the positive change this University has brought to our region and to higher education – is truly remarkable.

Here, in our 25th anniversary year, we can look forward to a promising and exciting future for Cal State San Marcos. A future that builds on our proud past … but also goes beyond the achievements of yesterday to take full advantage of the challenges that a rapidly changing world will certainly bring our way. I believe we will mold and master the future of this University by staying true to the themes that define us … and by ensuring continued support for the people and the programs that power us.

But we are not alone in our efforts. The boundaries of this University are not big enough to contain the wellspring of support from all around us – from community members, businesses, elected officials, alumni, donors, and a multitude of other stakeholders. They strengthen, enhance and give added meaning to everything we do here.

25 YEARS STRONG

But first, allow me to “brag” about how far we’ve come ... how much – through good and very tough times – your talents, your spirit, your collaborative nature has gotten us to where we are today. Let’s reflect on a quarter-century of achievements … a quarter century of changing lives … a quarter century of making a real and lasting difference in our region and beyond. Cal State San Marcos has brought to this region a dynamic center of learning that speaks to the transformative promise and community-building power of higher education.

Former CSUSM administrators – Dr. Dick Rush, our University’s first executive vice president, and Dr. Bill Stacy, our founding president – were both at our 25th Anniversary Gala this past June. Both were clear that they, and the region that “birthed” us, could not have imagined us as we are today.
At commencement ceremonies for the Class of 2015 held last May, some 2,650 students received their degrees. For the third year in a row, over fifty percent of them were the first in their families to earn a four-year college degree. And they brought the total number of proud Cougar alumni to over 35,000 strong.

Thanks to the work you all do on a daily basis, Cal State San Marcos continues to rise as a first-choice University. This semester, we received eight percent more applications from first-time freshmen in the priority enrollment period than last fall, and almost 20 percent more than Fall 2013. That’s the second-highest two-year increase in the entire system. And for the first time in our history, Cal State San Marcus will have a student body numbering just over 14,000 students!

Also for this academic year, we were granted system funding for a seven-percent increase in students, compared to a funded growth rate of only three percent for the system as a whole. That’s a system recognition of our high demand, our diversity, our successfully reaching out to and graduating at-risk students … and that’s some impressive growth!

And as our student body grows, we have continued to strategically grow the ranks of tenured and tenure-track faculty and of student affairs professionals – these in particular – to ensure our students have the quality support they need. We added 49 new tenure-track faculty positions and 32 new Student Service Professionals, including replacements, over the past two years alone. And we have in consultation with, and with support from, community and industry partners assessed and grown academic programs year to year.

The physical growth of our campus has been no less impressive. This academic year alone, we have celebrated several important milestones:

- Last September, our innovative, “gifted” Veteran’s Center opened as a new home for military-affiliated students.
- In January, we brought our Student Health & Counseling Services Center back to campus after 18 years off campus.
- In February, we opened a new center for ACE Scholars services and named it the Jan & Esther Stearns Center for ACE Scholars in recognition of their one million dollar gift to that program.
• And we celebrated the School of Nursing’s arrival on our campus into a state-of-the-art remodeled space.

• In March, we broke ground on an impressive and long awaited Sports Center – which will be the home, on campus at last, for all our Cougar sports – starting just one year from now in August 2016 as we enter our third and final year in NCAA D2 candidacy.

• And just this month, our campus’s first Latino Center opened here, with a grand opening celebration slated for September 17.

These are vibrant manifestations of our growth – growth that all of you are helping to make possible. It continues to be an exciting time to be part of the progress taking place at Cal State San Marcos.

But we’re not keeping it all to ourselves. We’ve connected with the region as never before! We’ve worked to give CSUSM a more important presence in the larger community and well beyond – with impressive results. In January the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching gave Cal State San Marcos its prestigious Community Engagement Classification for the second time for our commitment to community engagement through teaching, research, service and community partnerships.

An example of this is playing out at the Rincon Tribal Nursery in Valley Center, which has been in the business of selling plants important to indigenous cultures for six years. When the nursery sought to expand its customer base, our Senior Experience Program in CoBA rose to the challenge.

A team of business students began working with the nursery to develop a feasible business expansion plan. And the timing couldn’t be more perfect – our state’s historic drought means a more favorable market for drought-tolerant, fire-resistant plants, which are among the nursery’s specialties.

These successes – and the well-deserved national recognition they have brought us – indicate to me that setting strategic priorities and sticking with them – matters.

When I first came to Cal State Marcos in 2004, I boldly declared that we would raise the educational attainment rate of our entire region; and that we would diversify our student population to reflect the demographics of the region we serve. We have done both! I believe this is emblematic of you – the people who make up Cal State San Marcos – not afraid to set high
goals … and then willing and able to collectively work towards achieving them.

Over the past year, our successes have been shared on a national level. We are telling the “CSUSM story” to major national higher education associations and publications … and we are being heard. What is the story we are telling? That Cal State San Marcos is a place of empowerment and success for traditionally underrepresented students … an innovative university modeling best 21st century concepts in curriculum, pedagogy, research and community engagement. And how Cal State San Marcos supports economic vitality and social transformation throughout our region.

We are also sharing how our students have enriched Cal State San Marcos and our region immeasurably. Students like Carlos Rosas, winner of the 2015 President’s Outstanding Graduate Award. Carlos excelled at CSUSM with talents and determination that enabled him to overcome numerous challenges on his way to earning a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology.

When Carlos was young, his parents were farmworkers who dreamed of providing a better life for their children. And Carlos did not disappoint. At Cal State San Marcos, he designed and implemented his own research project, examining the mental health effects of group discrimination among Latinos in the first quantitative study of its kind, which has the potential to make a significant contribution to the field of social psychology.

Carlos exemplifies our University’s commitment to community engagement as a founding member of the Human Rights Council of Oceanside, which educates local immigrant communities about their civil and human rights. Carlos now has his sights set on a graduate degree in psychology from the University of Illinois Chicago as a recipient of the Abraham Lincoln Fellowship.

In an essay he wrote, Carlos said, “Just a few years ago, getting a college degree seemed like an unclimbable mountain … Now, the younger generations in my family have someone to look up to; now, they can say, if Carlos did it, I can do it too.” To that, I will only add that students like Carlos are what Cal State San Marcos is all about.

**EXEMPLARY FACULTY AND STAFF**

We have exemplary faculty and staff dedicated to serving students like Carlos – professionals who are committed to excellence and teamwork and who pitch in to create cross-functional successes that truly move our University forward.
There are countless examples of members of our CSUSM family working together across divisions and colleges every day. I would like to highlight a few examples and offer my thanks to all of you who go the extra mile to make a big difference in these collaborative ways:

- **The 25th Anniversary Committee** – You held numerous planning meetings, marshalled a small army of volunteers, brainstormed brilliant ideas, and developed and executed a series of exciting events and activities to give our University a birthday the likes of which we have never seen before. A highlight of your work, of course, was Discover CSUSM Day in April, when over 5,000 people came to our campus to experience activities showcasing various aspects of the University. They also gained exposure to exciting faculty research demonstrations, ranging from solar telescopes and STEM lab tours, to endangered languages and the power of product placement.

- Another relevant example of cross-functional success is the **Cougars Affordable Learning Materials project**, or CALM, which encourages use of affordable alternatives to pricey textbooks – including online resources. Started last year, this effort has placed Cal State San Marcos at the forefront of a nationwide movement to lower escalating textbook costs and has helped hundreds of our students save substantial money on textbook purchases.

- Across the institution, we have come together in impressive fashion around two vital efforts aimed at measurably enhancing our campus climate.
  - **The ‘Great College to Work For’ task force** is a perfect example of how we don’t rest on our laurels when getting national recognition, but rather want to learn from any recognition of how to maintain good practices and, more importantly, improve.
  - And the in-depth work of the **Diversity Mapping committee** is showing that we don’t shy away from honest looks at our campus community.

- These collaborative efforts show that we are an engaged learning organization ... that we actually use data and findings to build pathways to even better and more high-impact practices that will, we know, result in a stronger future for our University and better experiences for our students and our employees.
• This academic year will be the most important period in our University's current WASC accreditation cycle. Some fifty employees from across our campus have been hard at work for the last few years, preparing our report and getting our campus community ready for the WASC team visit March 16-18. The WASC accreditation process is about all of us and the quality of our educational services – and it is our chance to show what we do best.

• I’d also like to thank everyone involved in so many other collaborative efforts – too many to mention – but all of which foster professional development and comradery among faculty and staff like the Faculty Mentoring program, our four Faculty/Staff Associations, our Leadership Academy and our Campus Connect program.

We may tend to take this collaborative style for granted – but I don't. I know that it is a unique element of CSUSM and one that contributes to our success and innovation.

We have weathered storms – economic as well as those fueled by the forces of nature. Through the worst economic downturn higher education has ever known in our lifetimes, we made it through six difficult financial years … due to nimbleness, innovation and an entrepreneurial spirit. And in Spring 2014, we came together as never before to recover quickly from a literal firestorm. And we were put to the test again last May to reschedule part of commencement due to thunderstorms! Our collective response to these threats exemplifies the “can-do” spirit of this “unique and special” University.

My presidential colleagues sometimes ask me, “How did we accomplish this?” Whatever “this” is – growth during a recession; quickly rescheduling commencement after catastrophic wildfires … or thunderstorms; diversifying our student body; improving retention of educationally at-risk students – there is no easy answer. No "plug and play" model to share with them.

Because the answer is in this room. It is … you. It is our spirit of perseverance. It is our willingness to come together and our talent at collaboration. It is our ability to set high goals and high standards for ourselves – and achieve them. This is the work ethic that gets us through. These are the qualities that lift up Cal State San Marcos as a model for others to follow.
We excelled on numerous fronts – and moved the mark for other universities to reach – with some exceptional honors. Let’s reflect on a few from the past academic year – honors, I might add that truly align with our strategic priorities:

- We received the 2014 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award from Insight Into Diversity magazine, recognizing our outstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion;
- We were named a 2014 Great College to Work For by the Chronicle of Higher Education;
- We earned a place on the President’s 2014 Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll – again – the highest federal recognition an institution can receive for commitment to community involvement, service-learning and civic engagement;
- We were awarded a 2.5 million dollar Award for Innovation in Higher Education by Governor Brown for our innovative efforts to serve traditionally underserved first-year students.
- Then there’s our prestigious 2015 Community Engagement Classification from the Carnegie Foundation;
- And we have been honored every year since 2010 by Military Times and G.I. Jobs magazines – and designated for the last two years as a “Top School” by Military Advanced Education – for our commitment to serving those who have served their country.

**A FUTURE FILLED WITH PROMISE**

We have come so far in just 25 years! I am continually surprised – and filled with honor at the same time – when I think about being on that journey with you for nearly half the lifetime of this University. But as great as our past quarter-century has been, we must and we will continue to set big goals, to adapt – to excel! – as we move forward together to meet the new challenges ahead.

The world is getting more complicated, not less. The demands placed on our University will increase, not decrease, in the years ahead. As I scan the horizon, the following issues will require our best thinking and strongest teamwork to tackle:

- The ongoing debates about the role of all sectors of higher education;
• The continued economic and population growth of our region;
• The rapidly evolving workforce demands;
• The continued barriers blocking access to higher education for underrepresented student populations;
• And the continued tenuous balance of access, quality, and affordability; along with the increasing public focus on the cost and value of higher education.

These are complex challenges. But working together, we will continue to tackle them creatively while further strengthening our University and our region.

**STAYING TRUE TO OUR THEMES**

All of us involved with Cal State San Marcos are united by common goals and a common dedication to the success of our students, our University, and our region. Working together, we are meeting our goals in impressive fashion.

We continue to **Prepare Tomorrow's Leaders** with intentionality by:

• Providing educational opportunity and support for former foster youth with our ACE Scholars Services program;
• Serving those who have served their country with our multiple Veterans support programs;
• Providing multifaceted support for Native American students through a tribal liaison; our Native Advisory Council and in research activities with faculty through our CICSC;
• Creating a welcoming campus climate that celebrates and honors our diverse student populations with hubs of activity and empowerment like:
  
  o The LGBTQ Pride Center;
  o The Gender Equity Center;
  o The Cross-Cultural Center; and
  o The just-opened Latino Center.
• Enhancing student success and community engagement with growth in both scholarship
and internship opportunities;

- Supporting an Athletics program poised for continued success in NCAA Division 2;
- And cultivating student leadership with initiatives like the Tukwut Leadership Circle.

And these efforts are paying off, as we are one of very few CSUs to close the achievement gap in one-year continuation rates between under-represented minority students and majority students. And we didn’t accomplish this by simply raising admissions standards.

We will continue to Build Great Communities by forging more connections – and further strengthening our already substantial links – with important partners beyond our perimeters.

- For example, high-impact, community-focused programs like the Alliance to Accelerate Excellence in Education, which reaches back to the elementary school level with guaranteed admissions programs in 10 local school districts, covering some 200,000 students. We are forging clearer paths to college success for new generations while enhancing the rich diversity of our student population.

- We are also becoming better prepared than ever to enhance regional spirit and build community pride in two important ways – through the arts and through athletics. From our newly created School of Arts and our expanding Arts & Lecture series … to our under-construction Sports Center and our move into NCAA Division II athletic competition – there’s no stopping us!

And we continue to Solve Critical Issues, with an unshakeable emphasis on academic excellence defined by interactive and applied learning opportunities, social justice, community service, civic engagement, and future-focused curriculum to meet the needs of the 21st Century.

- We are preparing our students for jobs in vital and emerging markets and high-demand fields, with pertinent offerings like:
  - Our Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies;
  - Our specialized MBA offerings in Business Intelligence, Hospitality and Tourism Management, or International Business;
  - Our immensely popular Bachelor of Science in Nursing programs;
  - Our new American Indian Studies major taking shape this academic year;
• Our Professional Science Master’s Degree in Cyber-Security;

• Our Certificate in Water Resources Management and Leadership;

• And so much more.

• We are also making a difference with cutting-edge faculty research …

• Like that of assistant professor of kinesiology Dr. Hyun Gu Kang, who studies aging and how to prevent devastating falls among the elderly. His work reflects the CSUSM focus on community engagement by involving our students from several majors – nursing, human development, kinesiology – in coordination of a fall prevention program for patrons of the San Marcos Senior Center.

• Or the innovative work of professors Judit Hersko and Merryl Goldberg in our School of Arts, who are merging arts-based techniques and STEM skills to address our region’s water challenges with an art installation that can squeeze moisture from the atmosphere. Their work connects CSUSM to the San Diego Incubator for Innovation and to innovation incubators addressing other pressing issues in Illinois and Massachusetts.

• And the Institute for Palliative Care is carrying out groundbreaking work across the CSU system – at seven CSU campuses including our own – to shape the dialogue on a critical aspect of our nation’s approach to health care. Last semester, the Institute involved CSUSM faculty and students in a ground-breaking and thought-provoking campaign that asked “What Gives Your Life Meaning?” – challenging us all to think about our futures, and those of our loved-ones, in a new light.

**STRENGTHENING THE CORE**

Preparing tomorrow’s leaders. Building great communities. Solving critical issues. Those are tall orders for any university. But at Cal State San Marcos, we have shown that we are achieving them. With so many individuals, programs, and teams doing so much good at CSUSM, it is crucial that we assure support for the core systems, programs and people who provide the critical platform upon which all of our successes depend. If we are to continue to be successful – and we will be – if we are to effectively address tomorrow’s challenges – and we must – we now must strengthen our foundational capacity.
I am talking about crucial support functions so necessary to the successful operation and growth of our campus – like Human Resources, Procurement, Facilities Maintenance, Data Infrastructure, Auxiliaries, and other areas which are not necessarily involved in direct student instruction or support … but which are nonetheless critical to the continued progress of this institution.

We must recognize that our rapid growth over the past decade – in students, employees, programs, and facilities – as impressive as it is, has also put strains on these other areas of the organization. For our growth to continue, it must be adequately and better supported.

Therefore, in the coming fiscal year, rather than implementing new initiatives or programs, we will begin to direct resources toward enhancing our foundational capacity. We will build upon, strengthen and expand what we are already doing well and what already has high impact. And we will take full advantage of the motivation, commitment and energy we bring to our work every day.

ENSURING A PROMISING FUTURE

We have built a strong and innovative University, and the work we do here is making an enormous difference in the lives of our students, in the wellbeing of our region, and for the future of our state and nation. To continue that success:

- We must continue working in unity – students, alumni, faculty, staff, administrators, business leaders, and supporters – to continue to move our University forward … forward together.
- We must stay nimble and continue to seek entrepreneurial approaches to operations, to funding and to growth.
- We must stay true to what defines our University as a unique institution … but never shy away from frank conversation, respectful dialogue, bold ideas and new efforts that can make us even better … even stronger.
- And we must continue to marshal the collective power of a supportive community.

A CALL TO ACTION – THE COMPREHENSIVE CAMPAIGN

During 2015, we are celebrating a milestone anniversary … and a proud litany of accomplishments that many thought would simply not be possible at this relatively early stage in
our development. On the wave of this tremendous momentum, accomplished through your efforts, good will, collaboration, and “university first” perspectives, next month I will publicly announce to our strongest supporters and biggest donors the launch of CSUSM’s first Comprehensive Campaign.

No other university in the CSU system, and likely in the nation, has attempted to launch a comprehensive campaign at such a young age.

So why this Campaign, and why now? Because of our tremendous growth! In the time since I began as CSUSM President in 2004, we have:

- More than doubled our enrollment;
- More than doubled the number of degree programs offered;
- Doubled the number of buildings;
- More than doubled our total employee base;
- Nearly tripled our alumni base; and
- More than doubled our endowment.

Why now? Because of the students we serve!

- In their diversity and drive, they reflect the future of our nation – and they need our continued support.
- No other university in our region, and well beyond, serves educationally at-risk students like we do – Veterans, Native Americans, Former Foster Youth, ethnic minorities, First-Generation students.
- And no one else provides, in the way we do, programs, partnerships, resources and people … all dedicated to their success.

Why now? Because of our innovation and spirit!

- We have a proven track record of addressing industry needs with forward-thinking academic and certificate programs – and with new public/private and public/public partnerships and funding models – resulting in success stories like CSUSM at Temecula and our Nursing program.
Why now? Because if not now, then when?

- Our growth is not slowing down. Our enrollment of just over 14,000 students this fall is once again the highest percentage growth in the system. And the needs of our students, of our region, are not going away.

- And even though the state this year, for the first time in ten years, fully funded the CSU budget request, it neither “fully” replaced the funds lost and it comes with expectations of both enrollment growth and student successes.

Why now? Because we know that there is no end in sight to the continued uncertainty surrounding public funding of higher education.

- And the funding we do get is insufficient for our unique student population, for our innovative programs, for our need to serve our growing region.

These are the reasons why we have, again, decided to be audaciously bold, step out of our comfort zone, go where no CSU has gone before … and launch the public phase of our campaign now. We have no option but to succeed. And we will succeed in the only way we know that truly works – by joining forces with our community and with all who appreciate the unique value we bring – our friends, current donors, advocates, volunteers, and our growing network of alumni – united in common cause.

We will need all hands on deck for this monumental effort. By pulling together, and with the collective power of you and of our supportive region, I know we can succeed! So, today, I invite you to be a part of this historic initiative in the life of our University. It starts here and it starts now. Working together, we are capable of incredible things. Together, we empower a University that is Preparing Tomorrow’s Leaders, Building Great Communities, and Solving Critical Issues.

That’s what this campaign is about. The Campaign for California State University San Marcos …

- It’s about you.
- It’s about us.
- It’s about CSUSM.
- And it’s about all of us moving forward … together!