

Report to the Community 2017
Imagine the Possibilities
President Karen Haynes

Thursday, February 2, 2017

There is much that can be said about the power of imagination. An idea . . . a dream . . . a thought—through imagination and intention—can become reality.

Our founders had the imagination to dream, plan and then build something great. When Cal State San Marcos was founded, it became the first public comprehensive university in the United States to be established in two decades. Our campus fulfilled our highest aspirations as a region and state, and acknowledged the role of public higher education as an engine of opportunity, social mobility and positive change.

Even those founders with the vision, fortitude and political contacts unlikely could have imagined the possibilities of what Cal State San Marcos would be today.

Can you envision where our region would be had they not defied what must have felt like impossible odds? Can you imagine our region without Cal State San Marcos? Thanks to their imagination and foundational groundwork, we don't have to. CSUSM—YOUR University—has risen to become the anchor of our regional innovation ecosystem—a place where doors of opportunity open to endless possibilities!

In less than three decades, Cal State San Marcos has expanded that commitment by creating pathways for the most educationally at risk populations, partnering with regional industries and public and non-profit organizations. Together we have met our audacious goal of raising the educational attainment rate of our entire region, assuring that individuals from all backgrounds are welcomed to imagine their own possibilities.

To date, we've graduated over 38,000 proud alumni! I'm pleased to say that I have shaken the hands of two thirds of them. Last year's graduating class, the largest in our history, included the highest ever, 35 percent, from historically underrepresented backgrounds, and the highest ever, 55 percent, of first generation college students. With statistics like that, just imagine the far-reaching ripple effect that we are creating as our alumni become role models and leaders in our communities.

We inspire our students to achieve their dreams of a better life for themselves and their families. I'm certain that you can relate to that dream—I know I can. In fact, my father's parents were immigrants from Poland who barely spoke English. My parents dared to imagine the possibility of a brighter future for their children through higher

education. While I will never forget their great joy when I became the first member of my extended family to receive a college diploma, I am certain that none of us, certainly not me, could have imagined where that journey would take me.

That's what I want for every Cal State San Marcos student—all 15,000 of them—the pride and joy of fulfilling not just a life goal but, for many, a goal that has been many generations in the making. Goals, with your support and engagement, that are building an important regional legacy. Goals that are only the beginning of imagining the possibilities of ones' life trajectory.

However, today we operate in increasingly uncertain and complex times.

In California, we are facing a degree shortfall while state budget allocations continue to underfund our campus, resulting in constrained resources and turning qualified Californians away. Nationally, we have endured a shockingly coarse election cycle and across our country the support for public higher education is being questioned. Globally and locally, we have witnessed countless violent acts of hate and terrorism, leaving many of us wondering, is this becoming the new normal?

In this time of cynicism and fear, public higher education becomes more important not only as an engine for economic growth, but as a catalyst for spurring individuals to innovation and optimism, empathy and understanding. Through higher education we assure that we will have individuals who bring new perspectives to whatever issues we may face, trained as critical thinkers with a multicultural framework.

Although that should be true for all of higher education, not all universities were built upon the same principles as Cal State San Marcos. Not all universities aggressively set and achieve audacious goals. Some are actually failing students due to short-sighted business decisions, to quantity over quality, to adhering to old models, and refusing self-analysis and adaptive change. So it's no surprise that collectively higher education finds itself in a harsh spotlight.

You know that we are disruptively and unapologetically breaking the mold of public higher education. You know that our goal is not to just impart knowledge, but to develop our students' emotional intelligence and social awareness. You know that we are

committed to establishing and maintaining meaningful connections with the communities we serve.

While the outlook may appear bleak for some institutions, Cal State San Marcos continues to be ahead of the curve because, together, we imagine the possibilities.

Many of you may look back on your own college days and, depending on the date of your college graduation, likely have a perspective of college life that is very different than that of Cal State San Marcos today! I'm not just talking about our state-of-the-art facilities, although that certainly contributes to what we can accomplish. I'm talking about our high-impact learning experiences designed to transform students into experts and leaders.

The “traditional” model of higher education boxes learning within the four walls of a classroom or lecture hall. But our model imagines what happens when students actively engage in the learning process through activities like internships, research and fieldwork, study abroad and community service. We have intentionally grown extra-curricular arts, athletics, leadership, social and cultural programs so that students can imagine all of the possibilities and discover just how extraordinary they can be.

- Students like Connor, who helped build sustainable indoor gardens for K-12 classrooms last semester as part of the 30-hour service learning component of his environmental sciences course.
- Students like Chelsey, who spent 80 hours this summer at our free speech-language-pathology clinic, providing speech therapy to those who have suffered strokes and traumatic brain injuries.
- Students like Nam, a computer science major who recently finished eighth out of nearly 900 entrants from around the world in an online coding competition. Nam found himself in impressive company: the winner was from Carnegie Mellon and four of the top eight were from MIT.

Helping students grasp and apply content requires innovative approaches to teaching. Our faculty strive to provide deeper learning experiences, often through technology and

“flipped learning.” In physics, one instructor “flipped” her classroom, using short video lectures that are viewed by students before the class session, and then using in-class time for group discussions and projects. This strategy ensures that every student has the opportunity to engage with the faculty and with each other while learning complex course materials.

I’m proud of our commitment to learning by doing...the kind of community engaged learning that has been recognized by the Carnegie Foundation. We are one of only 56 institutions out of 4,000 that has risen to and remained at this elite level for 10 years.

Together, we are not only challenging the traditional higher education model but we are challenging students to think differently—not just about their coursework but about themselves. We are giving our students the real opportunity to imagine the possibilities and turn dreams into reality.

You have heard me boast about how impressive our students are, how hard they work. You have heard my pride in their demographics – educationally at risk, first generation in college and underrepresented in higher education. Yet I find that there are continued misperceptions about today’s college students.

The stereotypical image of an undergraduate student is someone who enrolls immediately after high school and pursues their studies on a continuous full-time basis, often with the full financial and emotional support of their families, completing their degree program in four years. For some universities across our nation, this is still the norm—but not here. At Cal State San Marcos:

- One in three students falls outside the traditional age range of 18 to 22.
- The majority must balance responsibilities to families with full time or part-time jobs.
- Forty-five percent come from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds, including the highest per-capita number—and the only increasing number—of American Indian students in our system.

- Nearly half are the first in their family earning a 4-year college degree.
- Many are veterans who have served our nation, or former foster youth who against all odds are attending and graduating.

In fact, 80 percent of our students defy the stereotype of the “typical” young, white, second generation college student who attends full-time and graduates in four years.

For many of our students, college was a goal they never could have imagined just a few years ago. That’s why we must attract, accept and keep the doors of higher education open to all of them. Our student body’s diversity—of experiences, backgrounds and perspectives—is what makes our university and this region stronger.

To that end, the Alliance to Accelerate Excellence in Education has become a vitally important program that seamlessly bridges the gap between students’ educational aspirations and college degree attainment. What began a decade ago with one local district has grown to include ten, encompassing 200,000 K-12 students.

We are the only institution bold enough to open the gates this wide—to not only create a path, but blaze a wide road with turn-by-turn navigation from public school to college acceptance through graduation. To date, nearly one thousand Alliance students have started their higher education journey at Cal State San Marcos and 158 have already graduated!

But these MOUs are not just about admitting students to CSUSM, they are about building relationships with our K-12 partners so that more and more students are not only able to go to college but are ready for college once they get here.

The data are impressive. They come prepared without the need for remediation, and they graduate more quickly than other students. Along with the data are the personal stories that underscore the Alliance’s success: Jesus is a first-generation college student who said the Alliance reinforced his desire to attend and succeed in college...and succeed he is. Jesus recently returned from a prestigious 16-week internship with the U.S. Department of Energy’s Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory.

While some may worry that our commitment to assuring access to educationally-at-risk students may inadvertently reduce our academic quality, national recognitions and awards indicate that this is not the case. Just this past year alone we were:

- Designated a “Top 100” university for graduating minorities in ten different disciplines by *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* magazine.
- Ranked for the third straight year as one of America’s best universities for veterans by *Military Times*, while once again earning the “Military Friendly School” designation from Military Advanced Education; And,
- Recognized for our commitment to diversity and inclusive excellence with a Minority Access Award—we were one of only 38 universities recognized nationwide.

Despite our positive accolades, it’s impossible not to read media coverage concerning our nation’s student debt crisis. The stories decry that too many students are graduating with debt that exceeds the salary levels they’d earn, and question whether overcrowded or weak job markets are leaving college graduates underemployed.

Critics would have you believe that public universities are to blame for rising national student debt due to escalating university costs, noting that students graduating from public institutions have a staggering \$1 trillion dollars in student loans. The critics fail to indicate that it is for a very straight forward reason: we educate the most people. The critics also fail to connect the dots between reduced state funding and increased public university tuition which in part contributes to increased student indebtedness.

So, we work in an environment where many of the parameters affecting costs are outside of our control. We don’t determine state funding nor our system’s allocation to our campus. We don’t control tuition increases, and we have no control whether or how much a student borrows—or what it’s used for.

The average American college student graduates with \$35,000 dollars in student debt. But 50% of our students graduate with ZERO debt and our students ‘average debt is only \$13,000 dollars—about a third of the national average! Just imagine the possibilities if

more employers stepped in to provide student loan repayment or tuition reimbursement benefit plans to help reduce student debt.

Another criticism of public higher education is that students are taking too long to graduate—but that expectation of a four-year college degree is tied to the student demographics of yesteryear and eighty percent of our students don't fit those demographics.

Most students at public universities end up completing their degrees in six years or more for a variety of reasons: some need to work or care for family members, some come to us underprepared for college-level work, and others are delayed because we don't have sufficient funding for course sections.

While we strive to eliminate barriers so that everyone can proceed to graduation at a timely pace, it's also important that students aren't pushed through at the expense of opportunities that allow for self-discovery. It is common for a student to change their major of study as they explore new subjects. Some even decide to double major to increase competitiveness in the future job market—our students have uniquely combined biotechnology and criminal justice; nursing and Spanish; and business administration with visual and performing arts.

College should offer a chance to study abroad, to gain valuable skills from internships, or participate in research experiences. It's a time to join extra-curricular activities—clubs, athletics, the arts, volunteer and service projects—to help develop lifelong skills.

Doing all that in four years is ambitious for anyone, let alone for the large population of nontraditional students who we enroll and support. We cannot, we should not and we DO NOT expect to meet the needs of first-generation college students with practices developed for second- and third-generation college students.

We also know that skilled graduates are one of the competitive advantages of our region—although the outlook for the future is alarming. California is facing a workforce demand for 1.1 million more baccalaureate-educated graduates by 2030 than all sectors of higher education are predicted to produce. Can you imagine the possibilities if California

actually stepped up and closed this gap? Those possibilities would mean that California would retain businesses, industries and its competitive edge. We could grow our economy and reduce unemployment.

We are leaning in and doing our part to ensure that our students complete their degrees. Our campus closed the achievement gap in first-year retention rates between underrepresented minorities and majority students three years ahead of our goal and reduced the achievement gap in our graduation rate from 10 to 5 points.

These successes occurred against the odds. Since 2008, our number of low-income undergraduate students more than doubled, and we increased our number of underrepresented minority students, military-affiliated students, and former foster youth—all populations we know require additional support.

Even with these successes, we imagine the possibilities of doing more and doing it better. We have put in place additional high-impact practices such as our seven academic support centers. Our decisions have always been data informed as we zero in on factors that encourage—or inhibit—student success. Our new Cougar Care Network acts as an early alert system, allowing faculty and staff to refer students who may be experiencing challenges inside or outside of the classroom and providing these students with resources and support.

Recently, the nonprofit research organization “Educate to Career” released its 2017 College Rankings Index, which rates colleges by the Economic Value Added for their graduates. This is a measure of how well a university prepares its students for the workforce by looking at job readiness, employability and earnings. In the latest rankings, Cal State San Marcos placed 11th out of almost 1,200 universities nationwide. This is the second year in a row that we were ranked this high, placing ahead of Harvard, UC Berkeley and Stanford.

You know how well we are delivering on our promise because our alumni are your employees. They are fueling our schools, health care facilities, government agencies, small businesses and startups, nonprofit organizations, biotechnology, pharmaceutical and cleantech companies, microbreweries, hospitality and lifestyle organizations. Every day Cal

State San Marcos graduates are applying their education to make a critical difference in our region:

- 2014 sociology and women's studies graduate Cipriano Vargas served as a CSU student trustee appointed by Governor Brown. Now he serves as a newly elected member of the Vista Unified School Board—the first Latino to serve on that board.
- 2012 master's in biotechnology graduate Ikenna Nedosa is a co-founder of the Carlsbad-based startup Eco Feedstock, helping to fuel the green tech revolution.
- 2004 neuroscience graduate Jayson Sack credits faculty mentorship for inspiring him to find his professional calling as a neurosurgeon.

Cipriano, Ikenna and Jayson are just three of the 38,000 Cal State San Marcos alumni who are leading successful lives and giving back. And they are giving back right here since over 80 percent of them stay in our region after graduation—an impressive 20 percent more than SDSU and 55 percent higher than UCSD!

Our alumni are continuing the trailblazing legacy instilled here and carrying it forward to you. Can you imagine the possibilities as our growing alumni base continues to build a better region—a better world?

As we look toward our 30th anniversary in 2020, what do those possibilities look like? Whatever our budget outlook, I know that we will continue to make strategic, thoughtful decisions that position us to seize opportunities connected to our core mission.

Just a few weeks ago, Governor Brown released his 2017-18 budget proposal, which includes funding for our system that will cover mandatory and present employee costs but other priorities—including student success, enrollment increases, infrastructure repairs and improvements — are not covered.

Now, as demand by qualified students continues to rise and state funding continues to fall, we must renew our commitment to being strategic, entrepreneurial and creative. Reducing academic quality, turning students away and charging higher tuition are all distasteful and largely unacceptable not just for us, but for our region and our state. The

only real guaranteed return on the state's investment is in funding education as it assuredly creates an educated workforce that generates revenue for California.

But as state funding continues to be unreliable and insufficient, I'm proud to share that our faculty across disciplines are expanding our research enterprise to record levels. In the first two quarters of this fiscal year, we've already been awarded \$14.6 million dollars in new research awards—an increase of nearly 60 percent over last year!

These grants include:

- A \$3-million-dollar award to train the next generation of stem cell scientists;
- A \$2.5-million-dollar grant to support dual language teachers;
- A \$1-million-dollar grant to increase the number of American Indians earning nursing degrees; And
- Our largest of the year: a \$6-million-dollar, five-year grant that will seed our very first engineering programs!

However, additional support is vital to get these engineering programs not simply launched but established with sustainable funds so we continue to reach out to industry partners and philanthropists to secure the necessary funding.

In an op-ed published last month in *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, Mark Cafferty, President and CEO of the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation wrote, quote, "It is only through this type of investment and partnership that these critical programs will flourish. The return on investment couldn't be higher—the university offers its qualified graduates as immediate returns," end quote.

And those returns are students educated in small classrooms, engaged with faculty in lively educational encounters and solving real world problems.

- Physics Professor Dr. Gerardo Dominguez is a 2016 Hispanic Engineer National Achievement award winner for outstanding technical achievement based on his research in planetary astrophysics and atmospheric chemistry.

- Professors Kristine Diekman from Visual and Performing Arts and Keith Trujillo from Psychology, were respectively presented with the 2016 and 2017 CSU Wang Family Excellence Award for their exemplary contributions and achievements—particularly outstanding when the CSU selects only five faculty from a pool of 26,000 systemwide.
- Dr. Paul Stuhr [Stew-er] was honored as one of five Research Fellows selected by the Society of Health and Physical Educators—only one of three California professors awarded this status in the last 20 years.

These professors are among the hundreds of extraordinary faculty who bring expertise, enthusiasm and passion into their roles.

However, bringing ideas to life, finding solutions to real-world problems, and applying these ideas through partnerships and collaborations require resources. That’s why “Solving Critical Issues” is one of the three themes of our fundraising campaign, *Forward Together*, launched just 16 months ago. The other two themes, “Preparing Tomorrow’s Leaders” and “Building Great Communities,” also speak to our desire to imagine the possibilities for future generations of students while our university flourishes as a regional center for art, culture and community engagement.

Already individuals, corporations and foundations have given over 66 percent of our \$50-million-dollar goal!

- Generous donors have included us in their estate plans, one committing to establish an Endowed Chair in our College of Business Administration and another to provide \$1 million dollars in scholarships for students in our College of Humanities, Arts, Behavioral and Social Sciences.
- Attendees of our annual gala contributed, just in that evening, \$200,000 dollars for student scholarships.
- In just 24 hours during CSUSM’s second annual giving day, 550 individuals donated over \$170,000 dollars—including a generous matching grant from our own Foundation Board Chair Jack Raymond.

- **Five regional art advocates donated \$150,000 dollars in under two weeks for the purchase of our first Steinway Performance Grand Piano.**
- **Six founding sponsors ensured that our new sports center would have enhanced seating, spectator hospitality and student-athlete amenities; And**

The sum of all these gifts—plus the many I haven’t mentioned—is truly the difference between accomplishing dreams and merely imagining them. Philanthropy is moving our university and our region forward.

CONCLUSION

Our founders dared to imagine the possibilities, and this special place was birthed—a university that is fulfilling the promise of a quality higher education to an extraordinarily diverse, nontraditional, growing student population.

Together, let’s debunk the myths and stand up for public higher education. Share your personal experiences about Cal State San Marcos, spread the news of our accomplishments and national accolades—in your businesses and organizations, while at coffee or during cocktails, in elevators, airplanes or boardrooms, and on social media. Talk about us and tell anyone who will listen why we must protect public higher education—especially this university that we love and is so vital to our region.

I know that the antidotes to the cynicism and fear of our day are right here: optimism, curiosity and innovation fueled by education, research and partnerships. Imagine how we can continue to redefine what higher education can be. Imagine a region fueled by the accelerated pace of this university!

There is a passion that moves us.

We are resilient and resourceful.

We are creative and courageous.

We are trendsetting and trailblazing.

Today's big, audacious dreams, with intention and determination, become tomorrow's progress.

If we can dream it, we can make it happen.

**Ahead of us lies anything we choose, constrained only by our ability to
IMAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES**