

President Karen S. Haynes
Convocation Address
Clarke Field House – Hunter Gymnasium
Thursday, August 25, 2011
10:00 a.m.

For nearly 15 years—almost three-quarters of our institutional history—we’ve kicked off the start of each academic year with an annual excursion to the California Center for the Arts in Escondido. Today, we have finally brought Convocation back to campus—where it belongs! I’m pleased to welcome you to the start of the 2011-12 academic year here at home!

If you were at last year’s Convocation, you will remember that we celebrated 20 years of serving students, and we reflected on how far we had come in just two short decades. Cal State San Marcos is now 21 years old—about the same age as many of the students we currently serve! And like any one of our students who have spent the majority of their lives doing the foundational work of growing, learning, preparing, and thinking about what they want their future to be like—it’s time for us to focus on tomorrow and what we want our institutional “adulthood” to look like.

When I arrived in spring 2004, we discussed and collectively agreed upon our strategic priorities and created a road map to the future through academic excellence, student life, campus climate, community partnerships, and educational equity. We did this with aspirational and measurable goals aimed at transforming our university. Since then, we have positioned ourselves well for the future: improving retention and remediation rates, facilitating time to graduation, nurturing and greatly expanding community partnerships, enhancing our visibility within our region and far beyond, and purposively creating more campus life all while aligning our budget with these goals.

I applaud the work that you have done—the commitment you have shown to our strategic priorities. I know how challenging the work has been, especially considering the fact that our progress has coincided with one of the most devastating economic recessions in history. But with your diligence and our steadfast focus on the future, we have navigated this crisis very carefully, making decisions aimed at the three principles that I have talked about at 14 budget forums over the last three and a half years:

1. Serving as many students as we can within our budget and without sacrificing quality;
2. protecting as many jobs as possible; and
3. balancing the need to address the ongoing budget crisis with a commitment to building for our future.

Because of all of this, today we can celebrate that we are where many other institutions are not. We can celebrate that in just the last year alone:

- We have advanced key initiatives in diversity and community partnerships by institutionalizing them.
- We have modified some of our internal structures and processes so that all of our priorities are better supported.
- We have hired new faculty and staff, filling positions that have been vacant due to retirement or attrition, and adding positions in key areas.
- And over the last fiscal year, we have hired 43 staff members and 10 MPPs.

We have positioned ourselves well to tackle our future goals, and I would even venture to say that we are “thriving”—relatively speaking—in continued tough economic times.

Consider just a few of these points of pride:

- We have brought home to campus all of our signature events, beginning with our Annual Gala in 2010, Commencement this past May, and now Convocation!
- We are breaking ground on our student union project this March!
- We have partnered with Urban Villages San Marcos on the University District project—a multi-use area that will provide living space for nearly 300 students when Phase 1 is complete in Fall 2012.

To some of you, the activities and initiatives of the past year might have seemed connected to only one particular department or division. But I assure you that collectively they were very much intentional, synergistic, and future-focused; linked to our consistent and overarching five strategic priorities; supportive of our commitment to being student-centered, university-first, and community engaged; and essential to our plan of positioning our university for our 25th anniversary in 2015.

Future Focused

And so, as we begin another academic year as a university community and look toward our 25th anniversary, my vision focuses on Cal State San Marcos and on the ways that we will connect to our communities while providing more opportunities for our communities to increase their support for us. Our future, focused well, includes all of us.

My vision of our future is that by 2015,

- we will have raised the educational attainment rates, particularly among the most educationally at risk populations,
- thus assuring economic vitality and social transformation throughout our region,
- while modeling best 21st century concepts in curriculum, pedagogy, research and community engagement.

What does this mean? Simplified, it means that we at Cal State San Marcos will focus our efforts on what we do best:

- Preparing tomorrow's leaders.
- Building great communities, and
- Solving critical issues.

Preparing Tomorrow's Leaders

We are a comprehensive university that prepares tomorrow's leaders by providing our students with the hands-on learning experiences they need to succeed.

As our students continue to work alongside faculty, engaged in research and hands-on learning . . . as they participate in community service learning projects, discovering firsthand how to become more responsible citizens and better leaders . . . and as we improve processes and fortify structures to support them on their academic journey—we are preparing students to not just be aware of the “big questions”—both contemporary and enduring—but to ask how they can respond and contribute to finding the answers. What we are doing today is educating our students to be globally aware, culturally competent, excellent communicators, and creative, critical thinkers. Indeed, we are preparing tomorrow's leaders.

Building Better Communities

Since 2006, The Carnegie Foundation has recognized Cal State San Marcos as a Community Engaged Institution, and we have made it a priority to build better communities—internally and externally—through successful partnerships and initiatives that respond to regional challenges and needs.

- Our new division of Community Engagement—the first and only of its kind in our system—has grouped and coordinated several of our highly praised programs such as Leadership North County, Chamber Champions, and other expanding initiatives including those with our tribal communities, K-12 school districts, the military, as well as with businesses and non-profits.
- Our MOU partnerships are beginning to pay dividends for students by providing support in achieving “college readiness” with an incentive—guaranteed admission to Cal State San Marcos. To date, we have accepted over 1,200 students.
- We have spent the last year looking forward to increased opportunities for engaging our communities in our activities. The number of our athletic teams has grown, providing more chances for our neighbors to come to campus to cheer on our teams. We have added more recreational activities, and we are creating a more robust and diverse schedule of cultural performances and programs.

And, despite the hard times and lack of compensation increases for over three years, our own campus climate has improved as we have looked within ourselves to build better networks and relationships while improving institutional practices. For instance:

- We created the Associate Vice President for Diversity and Equity position to ensure that our policies are inclusive and that we continue our commitments to diversity, social justice and equity.
- Campus Connect, now in its seventh year, continues to provide faculty, staff, and administrators with an “eagles view” of our campus and a better sense of what a University First perspective must and should mean.
- We re-launched the Leadership Academy, previously put on hold because of the difficult economy. And we will implement the suggestion from staff forums to now direct monies from a central pool toward staff training.

- And our staff appreciation picnic seems to get more spirited every year as divisions and departments participate in a friendly competition to showcase their hidden talents—and our positive campus climate—in the air band contest!

As our university's physical boundaries become more blurred with the greater community's; as we pursue partnerships with external organizations for the benefit of the region; as we ensure that our campus remains a best place to work; and as more of our neighbors to get to know us as the vibrant and rich center for exploration, innovation, creativity, and lifelong learning that we are, we will continue to build better communities.

Solving Critical Issues

Today, we face the remarkable opportunity and responsibility of providing leadership to our region to solve critical issues. Efforts are taking place right now in our classrooms and centers, and through the research activities of our faculty and students, to engage in research and scholarly activities critical to understanding, reducing, preventing and, yes, maybe even solving some of society's most pressing issues.

- For example, our Video in the Community Program requires that our students' topics focus on real world social issues—from homelessness and gang violence to education, health and nutrition—teaching them skills related to media activism and technology.
- Our Robot Expo brings physics, computer science, and engineering—as well as a good dose of imagination—to life for our students with practical, hands-on learning that can be applied to future high-tech jobs.
- And let's not forget our Office for Biomedical Research and Training, exposing and equipping our students with the knowledge and skills they need to pursue a Ph.D. and obtain a career in the sciences.

Focused on the future, we will continue to embrace new technology to support student learning; to collaborate on research projects; to help regional businesses develop and incubate, and to take full advantage of federal and other external grant opportunities. We have measurable objectives to reduce the educational achievement gap between our traditional college student and our first-generation in college students; to garner visibility and support for research and related activities; and to further enhance opportunities for collaborative partnerships in the pursuit of solving critical issues.

The work of this year: 2011/12

We've come a long way in our 21 years, doing the “heavy lifting” of building a university literally from the ground up—developing curriculum, creating service infrastructure, and constructing facilities.

Since I arrived almost 8 years ago, we have increased enrollment by 25 percent while increasing our employee base AND our academic programs by over 30 percent. Today, we have nearly 1,300 employees and offer 28 majors, 37 minors, 12 master's, and 1 doctoral degree not to mention the many certificate and credential programs offered in education and the courses accessible through Extended Learning.

We've built Markstein Hall, the Center for Children and Families, The McMahan House, our first parking structure, the Social and Behavioral Sciences Building, the Public Safety Building, and new playing fields for softball and baseball. Clearly, we have done a lot of work in a short amount of time to get to where we are today.

With most of the work of building behind us, it is now time to refine and improve what we have already implemented. This academic year, with our 25th anniversary just four years away, we can expect our work to take a more moderate pace and to be of a slightly different nature. It's time to improve practices, refine goals, and carefully review the ways that we can collaborate in the areas where our work connects and intersects.

Within our divisions and departments, the tasks of this year will be to refine our 2015 goals by determining annual measures of success.

We will continue to align our resources—from the state, from philanthropic sources, from research grants, and from self support—to our priorities so that we can achieve them.

We will reach out to donors to build lasting relationships, connecting their interests and passions with giving opportunities that support our work. And while we have been talking about development for some time, over the past year we have added deeply experienced development staff to help us achieve our philanthropic goals.

We will not be shy in reminding our friends, neighbors and community leaders that there simply is no better investment in the future of our region than in public higher education—and, more specifically, in Cal State San Marcos.

We will communicate through a variety of mediums and mechanisms our university's contributions and share stories—YOUR stories—of success and achievement.

And we will go beyond the answers we have always given and the boundaries that we have always maintained to support students, advance research, build for the future, and remain always agile and responsive to the needs of our region.

Closing

Collectively, we have done an extraordinary job of recruiting a lot of new talent to Cal State San Marcos. I know that this success was due to your time spent on searches and on outreach, as well as your willingness and ability to tell our stories of the past with a true excitement for our future. Thank you for that!

However, I have not lost sight that even more important than attracting new talent is the “re-recruitment” of each of you and the nurturing of the new recruits every day. While I understand and “own” that much of the appreciation, communication, and opportunities for development and renewal start at the top—and that’s me—it doesn’t and can’t end there. All of us own a piece of it.

So, as we navigate toward 2015 with a more mature organization, with additional talented faculty and staff than we have ever had previously, and as we “fine tune” this marvelous institution, we will do so at a more thoughtful pace, with increased attention to refining and enhancing our best practices.

As we start another academic year with our focus firmly planted on the future, remember:

- Right now: we are preparing our students to assume their positions as tomorrow’s leaders.
- Right now: we are building better communities and expanding our reach.
- Right now: we are solving critical issues – pushing the frontiers of knowledge further.
- Let’s not wait. Right here, right now, let’s embrace this magic moment. Let’s create the Cal State San Marcos that we envision – the Cal State San Marcos of tomorrow!