

“IT CAN BE DONE”

Convocation Address
Thursday, August 27, 2009
10:00am
California Center for the Arts

President Karen S. Haynes

Si, se puede. It can be done.

Those are the words engraved beneath the feet of the statue of Cesar Chavez standing at the top of the stairs leading to Chavez Plaza. They express the belief of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta that human determination can overcome great obstacles.

Si, se puede also expressed the spirit of this campus community when it resolved to honor what Chavez and Huerta stood for and the values this university shared with them. Under the leadership of LAFS and the Hispanic Advisory Council,

the statue was commissioned, created, and funded through faculty and staff donations and efforts.

This has been an extraordinary year, unanticipated and unexpected in many ways. When I stood before you a year ago, I asked you to move beyond conversations about fiscal constraints and keep talking about what is important—maintaining a vibrant and engaged learning community and continually fostering partnerships of engagement.

Today I want to talk about how we found a way –not the best way, but the best way within a terrible fiscal crisis – to serve students, to maintain and care for our employees, and to keep looking forward.

I also want to talk with you about our past. I've said to you before that the purpose of our Convocation has always been to give the campus community the opportunity to come together as a whole to celebrate the start of a new academic year, whether it is our fifth, tenth, fifteenth—or like this year, the opportunity to celebrate our 20th anniversary.

Our twentieth anniversary theme “roaring into our twenties” may seem a bit overstated in these difficult times, but, I would argue, there is certainly much to celebrate about this still new and still relatively young university.

And, with the opportunity presented by our 20th anniversary, I think it is also the time to take the longer look at what we have accomplished and built so far, how we have overcome the odds and obstacles before us and what we hope to continue to achieve in the longer lens of the future as well.

However, before I proceed to highlight accomplishments and speak about next year, I need to acknowledge that, indeed, this convocation is my most difficult. This country has not seen such difficult economic times in seven decades. This state is in an economic free fall. We have reduced our budget in one year by 14 million dollars.

Every one of us in this room is taking a pay cut while trying to serve our students and this institution with a quality we can take pride in.

It is a difficult task to find the balance between optimism and building for the future in the midst of this economic crisis. Ten percent pay cuts and 30 percent student fee increases hurt everyone. We are all angry at having to work this way. We are all confused about what will happen next. We're all pointing fingers.

And yet, I am proud of our campus community for our reasoned conversations; for our mutual respect and inclusiveness; for examining what is good for everyone. My pride in what you have done this past year and the way in which you have done it, balances with my painful awareness of the challenges that face us each day as we move forward.

While I can no longer count—nor do I really care to!—how many days of bad budget news unfolded since our last Convocation, I can tell you that our messages were always consistent:

1. We would continue to serve as many students as we can, within our budget and with quality.
2. We would work to protect as many jobs and employees as possible.
3. And we would balance the need to address the budget crisis with the commitment to continue building for our future.

That's what we have done! But it isn't all we did last year either. It's noteworthy that while this drumbeat of bad fiscal news continued, you were still able to submit over 200 items for inclusion in the Honor Roll of Achievements this year Excellence was achieved; progress was made. It can be done.

How did we do it all in what was certainly a difficult year? We stayed focused, but flexible. We focused on our strategic priorities while we made

emergency plans and contingency plans. We practiced prudence in our fiscal decisions and resilience in our outlook. We lived what we believe:

- that open communication is a key component for success,
- that building campus culture and climate is some of the most difficult, time-intensive building there is, and
- that teamwork and collaboration are both essential for moving forward.

Highlights of this past year are many, so I'll mention just a few:

- We were given an outstanding grade and reaffirmation of our accreditation from WASC with special mention of our First Year Programs.
- For the third consecutive year, we placed on the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll with Distinction.
- For the fifth consecutive year, we earned the Environmental Protection Agency's Recyclemania Grand Championship!
- The School of Nursing graduated its first class of nurses this past year – more than 120 – 2/3 of whom were not supported through state funding.
- We were recognized with Asian American Native American Pacific Islander serving status as our enrollment numbers exceed the 10% federal requirement.
- This past spring we reached enrollment numbers of 25% Hispanic students, which if these numbers are sustained, will make us eligible for Hispanic Serving Institution status.
- In July, the McMahan House—a five million dollar gift to our campus—opened its doors, giving the campus a long-awaited place for meetings, events, and conferences – a place that further “blurs” the line between our campus and our community.
- And this year, we opened Cal State San Marcos at Temecula, completely self supporting, and with \$575,000 raised through private funds.

Our Honor Roll of Achievements and the examples our vice presidents brought forward earlier underscores the message: It can be done.

Although I have just said that these times are truly unprecedented—and they are!—this young campus has deep experience building its future in difficult times.

In 1990, the first year we admitted students, a capital construction bond put to the voters of California failed—and CSUSM’s next six buildings—along with most of its planning—vanished overnight. By the time Cal State San Marcos was handing out five year anniversary pins, its faculty and staff knew all too well about the unexpected kinds of challenges the state’s economic climate and voter moods could bring them.

How many of you were with CSU San Marcos by 1995?

You know what it felt like, and what “planning” suddenly looked like. The campus’ creative response was to build our Foundation Classroom Building, named obviously for our University Foundation because our foundation loaned the university the construction funds. Most of our business services moved off campus into rented space, turning entire floors of Craven Hall into academic offices. The Library stored much of its collection in the Foundation’s basement because they had no expansion room. That failed bond election—and the university’s response—changed this campus forever. You dealt with the immediate and built for the future.

Despite this significant challenge, by 1995, there were over 500 faculty and staff teaching and working in four major buildings on the Twin Oaks campus, and 1,700 students had graduated with their baccalaureate degrees, even as you continued to operate in space designed for half those numbers.

In 1998 the stand alone library—a 40 million dollar project—already delayed because it was one of those six buildings that weren’t funded, was pushed back even further. The state was again broke and looking to save money. Despite private funds for the planning and construction documents, the library was cut from the state’s

capital construction list. The reason? Enrollment wasn't sufficient for a full-sized library!

By 2000, there were 375 faculty, 446 staff, over 6,000 students, and nearly 6,500 alumni.

How many of you were here by 2000?

You know the absurdity of dealing with the state on budget and construction issues!

Our alumni began a mail campaign to the legislature and went to Sacramento with the President to lobby for the library. Our Founding Library Dean testified in legislative hearings.

The Legislative Analyst's recommendation was eventually overturned by the Legislature, and the library was restored to the capital construction list. It can be done.

Where would we be without Kellogg Library today, the heart and soul of our campus? Arriving as I did, in February 2004, I was present at the official opening of Kellogg Library and I can't even imagine how different our campus would be today without it.

But there were formidable challenges in 2004 as well. It was the "b" word again! The State of California reduced CSU's enrollment by 11,000 students, and we took a 3.2% cut to our enrollment as a result.

To complicate our reduction in state- and fee-based support, our employer contributions to the retirement system doubled, health benefit employer costs increased by 25% and dental costs by 5%, along with an unfunded mandatory faculty salary step increase. The result was a million dollar structural shortfall and the talks of deep divisional cuts and layoffs.

How many of you arrived before 2005?

By 2005, there were 800 faculty and staff and nearly 14,000 alumni of Cal State San Marcos.

You know what it was like to figure the way out of that fiscal crisis. Through good planning, a decision not to lay off employees, and our commitment to close our budget gap, we got through that year, but continued to scrimp and save to grow our way out of our deficit.

Our entire history—all 20 years not just this past year—has been marked and altered irrevocably by major challenges and our responses to them. We've dealt with the immediate and built for the future.

The year ahead is no exception! We face greater challenges than we have ever experienced. Our state's budget crisis is not fixed. Our response must be that much greater as well. It can be done.

Three years ago, I told you where I hoped we would be for our 20th anniversary:

By 2010, Cal State San Marcos will be the region's driving force by leading initiatives and partnering to meet community needs.

Our graduates, prepared by relevant curricula and student-centered services, will reflect the region and be empowered to lead it.

As an engaged campus, we will become a best place to work and study.

It can be done—with creativity, commitment, hard work, and flexibility, we will have achieved this vision for 2010.

We have risen to meet many challenges many times in our short history and we have overcome them in a variety of ways. I am confident we will do so again in the year ahead. We will continue to focus on and to mature our five strategic priorities of academic excellence, student life, campus climate, community partnerships, and educational equity.

Since my arrival, one of my preeminent concerns has been our campus climate. Although we may know the state of campus climate without measuring it, measurements give us detail. So this spring, we administered our first campus climate survey.

You told us we are doing a good job of promoting diversity, creating a culture of belonging for all employees, and understanding our mission, purpose and values. And you have told us that the areas of least satisfaction in your work environment are caused by the strained resources to do your job well.

Last spring, we convened a campus conversation about our strategic priorities. Although it was conducted in the midst of budget uncertainties, the conversation was lively and the suggestions creative. We agreed that we will focus our efforts in 2009/10 on critical pieces of our strategic plan:

- We will support our first year students. We will continue to implement strategies that retain students and that graduate students in a timely manner.
- We will, through our campus conversations and actions, define and implement best practices for achieving our diversity goals.
- We will continue to improve organizational productivity and quality. We will expand innovative programs and program delivery. We will continue to reach out visibly to the community and support donor development.

Many of the ideas you came up with can be implemented without additional resources. They included things like utilizing students for peer advising, increasing the visibility of our student organizations, growing our online availability, and recruiting more international students to enrich all of our students' global experience.

You talked about improving communication to students, how we can help our region solve problems, and how we can embed diversity and multiculturalism

throughout our programs and courses. These ideas demonstrate the power of our collective commitment to our students, to our mission, and to our region.

In the year ahead we will also:

- partner with Urban Villages San Marcos to provide a new 520 bed student housing complex across from the existing University Village Apartments—serving our students without increasing our campus debt.
- move forward in our planning to build Phase One of our Student Union.
- celebrate the “beam signing” for our next academic building—the Social and Behavioral Sciences building next week—which, when completed in 2011, will provide much needed lab and office spaces.
- sign additional agreements with local school districts thus continuing to assure access to our most educationally at risk regional students.
- aggressively approach donors to help us—with more student financial support; with specific needs of our academic colleges and departments; to build out our athletic fields.

Today we are 513 faculty and 570 employees strong. Just under ten thousand students will walk onto campus next week into 15 major buildings. Twenty-three thousand alumni can speak to their experience of an engaged campus with students as its focus; and now, many have become our community partners and our reputation builders.

As I have said before—we can and we must move forward with a sense of urgency—not simply hibernate and “get through” this time of fiscal crisis. This crisis—in the nation, in California, for the CSU and for our campus—is not over. The outcomes will, as they have in our past, change us. We will continue to need to plan our way through the year ahead with creativity and with urgency. Because our state legislators did not solve the California budget crisis, our future is unpredictable.

But the gridlock that can result from bad news budgets, dysfunctional state legislative processes, and unfunded mandates cannot be the excuse that stops us. The work we do in higher education needs to be done—in fact, it probably has never been as important as it is now to assuring California's future.

We have the ability to meet our difficult challenges and rise above them. We would all prefer to be looking at the upcoming year as one with increases—in compensation, in enrollments, in state funding—but that is not to be. Instead, next year's challenge will be to keep serving students, to be responsive to potential changes in funding scenarios, and to continue planning for our longer term future.

This challenge can only be met if we retain the ability to work together. At no time has that been more important than these times, and we will—because we must! retain our climate of collegiality, mutual respect, and trust for all members of our campus community in the year ahead. And, I know that this is easier said than done. But with that optimism I referred to at the beginning, I know it can be done. I am optimistic because you care about this institution, our students, and the engagement with our community. Each year you show me that you do.

What will we look like next year – in the midst of our 20th anniversary? None of us is certain. But I am confident that as we've done for 19 years, we will deal with the immediate and build for the future.

It can be done.