Dear Carnegie Re-classification Review Committee:

As President of California State University San Marcos (CSUSM), I am pleased and proud to provide this leadership statement in support of our re-application for the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification.

By way of context, let me tell you that CSUSM is one of 23 campuses in the California State University system, founded as the 20th campus in 1989 and still the only four-year comprehensive public university in San Diego's north county region. We are an Hispanic Serving Institution (27% of our students are Hispanic), and an Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander serving institution (more than 10% of our students fall into this category). Our student composition reflects the demographics of the region we serve; 50% of our students are students of color, and 40% of our graduates are the first in their families to earn a college degree.

The region that CSUSM serves is comprised of multiple cities and communities that straddle three counties and merge together to form one large, diverse, eclectic macro community that recognizes CSUSM as central to its economic vitality and social, cultural, and educational viability. Similarly, CSUSM recognizes that the community is central to its economic stability, and is key to helping the university advance its goals of serving—indeed transforming—the region.

Since my arrival at CSUSM in 2004, I have led this university on the premise that public higher education is a public good, and I believe in the ability of education to transform lives and entire communities. I believe that at CSUSM we do so with purpose by preparing tomorrow’s leaders, building better communities, and solving critical issues. And, believe that the best and only way to do this is by engaging our community for our common good.

Of course, all universities can tell of ways in which they have engaged with their communities and can cite examples of single project or initiative that has had significant impact on the community it serves. In the case of Cal State San Marcos, what I wish to emphasize is that everything we do—every initiative, every project, every program, every event—grows out of a deeply ingrained institutional culture of community engagement. Community engagement is the mentality that undergirds our existence, the culture that shapes our ideas and ideals, the environment in which we work and study, and the spirit that guides every initiative and activity we undertake. It is the defining principle that sets us apart from all other CSU campuses and, I believe, from many other institutions of higher education in the country.

As one of our five overarching university priorities created through campus consultation in 2005, community engagement is inherent in and informs the other four: academic excellence, educational equity, student life, and campus climate, and CSUSM is continually recognized for its foundational approach to community engagement. We were pleased that CSUSM earned the Carnegie Foundation’s Elective Classification in Community Engagement.
Engagement in the 2006 inaugural year of the designation, receiving it in both categories of Curricular Engagement and Outreach and Partnership. And, for multiple years, CSUSM has been named to the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, the highest federal recognition a college or university can receive for its commitment to volunteering, service-learning, and civic engagement.

So integral to the mission and core values of CSUSM is community engagement, that in 2006 I began the process of institutionalizing the priority by appointing an advocate to the role, an individual focused on strategically identifying and building our partnerships with the community. By 2008, this role grew into an associate vice presidency for community engagement, and in 2011, I appointed the first vice president for community engagement in the CSU (and still the only one) and dedicated an entire university division to ensuring that community engagement is fully institutionalized across all segments and sectors of the university, that it includes all students, faculty, and staff, and that the community is at the center of everything we do here at Cal State San Marcos. Through this division, CSUSM reaches out intentionally and strategically to all the communities we serve, from underrepresented students to tribal neighbors to military establishments to health organizations to the business community so as to connect the University to the larger community in every productive way possible, including the service learning/civic engagement activities of our students and the engaged scholarship of our faculty. We are unaware of any other such position or division in the country that takes such a holistic approach to community engagement. This community engagement “best practice” is just one of several. For instance, we are the only University in the CSU or UC system to hire a tribal liaison, dedicated solely to building productive bridges between the university and tribal communities. And, my work as President is continuously informed by an actively engaged 35-member community-based advisory council, that helps connect me and the University to “all things community,” and a 20-member Native Advisory Council that keeps us informed of current issues and trends in the tribal communities. Together, we identify and work to solve critical issues that impact our community. In addition, our Academic Senate has appointed a Community Engagement Faculty Advisory Committee that ensures strategic linkages between faculty and community via engaged research and scholarship opportunities.

I believe that solving issues critical to our region is the hallmark of an engaged institution. And, as a public university, I believe that community engagement is a moral obligation. We cannot consider ourselves to be the public’s university without interacting with the community around the issues of our time. Quite simply, community engagement makes sense because it builds on core CSUSM strength: putting academic inquiry at the service of solving real-world problems. This CSUSM difference crosses all of our majors and takes a hundred different forms. I find this blend of intellect, entrepreneurialism, and service everywhere on campus. Every discipline at CSUSM aims to answer the questions vital to our region’s growth and prosperity. We are a catalytic force in our region. Through our students, faculty, alumni, and our countless connections to community partners, CSUSM is our region’s great agent of change and progress—economically, socially, intellectually, and culturally.

For nearly 25 years, the community has entrusted CSUSM with the education of our region’s talent and with the development of our region. CSUSM has returned that trust by crafting a university that is uniquely the community’s, one that not only responds to but anticipates the public’s needs, and one focused on preparing tomorrow’s leaders, building better communities, and solving critical issues. And, we have continued on this trajectory during the toughest times that public higher education has ever known. We have done it with a constancy of purpose and with focus on the future. We have done it with the community’s support and help. We have done it for the common good.
Clearly, the impact of community engagement by CSUSM cannot be judged or defined by a single action or activity. Rather, it is realized today and every day by our very way of being, by what is core and fundamental to all that we do. It is in this spirit that we are re-applying for the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement Classification.

Thank you for your consideration of CSUSM for this prestigious recognition.

Sincerely,

Karen S. Haynes, Ph.D.
President

KSH/jj