

**Convocation 2020**  
**President Ellen Neufeldt**  
**Remarks as Prepared**

**Intro/Welcome**

- Good morning! Thank you, Carl!
- I want to welcome you to your first Cal State San Marcos Convocation!
- Who knew you would make history as the first provost in the CSU to be hired virtually!
- It's great to welcome all our faculty and staff who have logged on to participate in this morning's event.
- I especially want to welcome all our new staff and faculty this year.
- Yesterday afternoon, I enjoyed attending the Faculty Center's virtual welcome reception for new faculty!
- It was wonderful to meet everyone, and I even bonded with Dr. Aaron McDonald, our new assistant professor of Management, over our love for Tennessee Tech, where we both earned our bachelor's degrees.
- This morning is another first for Cal State San Marcos – a fully virtual convocation!
- I have the pleasure of coming to you from the heart of CSUSM at the University Student Union.

- Although many of you are watching from your homes – perhaps with children or pets by your side or on your lap – I’m grateful for the opportunity for us to come together.
- Even though we are physically distant, our love for our university, our students and our mission will always unite us.
- To represent all those that could not be here, I invited a handful of faculty and staff to be in the audience, taking all health and safety precautions and sitting at least six feet apart of course.
- They represent many of the departments or units that have continued to work on campus to assist with essential functions that could only be done in person.

### **Reflection on Year One**

- This past year has been a time of Listening and Learning – I want to thank all of you who met with me and shared your hopes and dreams for Cal State San Marcos.
- A theme for me has been **gratitude** – something that I have tried to practice on both my personal and professional journeys – through successes and setbacks, joy and pain.
- So, today, I’d like to start there – with gratitude.
- I am grateful to be standing here as your president – one year in and still very humbled to be a part of this special campus community.

- Obviously, there have been tough days – every new president expects that there will be challenges when accepting the job.
- But a pandemic? THAT was not on my radar!
- But what has kept me going this year – in the good times and the more difficult times – has been my deep appreciation to all of you.
- You are the everyday heroes who have shown me just how much our mission matters.
- CSUSM heroes like:
  - **Maria Chiem** and the team from the Dreamer Resource Office who have collaborated with many partners on and off campus to provide resources, and updates about the DACA program this summer.
  - This has been an anxiety-ridden time for our Dreamers and their loved ones – and we will continue to fight for them.
  - Heroes like **Ryan Dokich**, a business student and Marine Corp veteran.
  - Ryan battled lymphoma during his first semester on campus, and he let me know just how meaningful the Epstein Family Veterans Center has been to him.
  - We are so grateful for the support of the **Epstein Family** and I look forward to seeing how we can further enhance our services for our military-connected student population.

- Heroes like **Dr. Reza Kamali Sarvestani**, our founding faculty member in electrical engineering.
- When we met last November at a Viasat event, I was so impressed by how we are preparing students for their future careers and all the cutting-edge experiments they are involved in.
- And, I've also had the wonderful opportunity to meet many dedicated alumni like **John Fortune**, president of our Alumni Association.
- John always takes the time to connect with me, and it's clear how passionate he is about keeping our alumni connected.
- You know, I always come back to the fact that 8 in 10 of our graduates stay in the region to lead and contribute in our local communities.
  - What we do here truly has a multiplier effect across our region.
- I've enjoyed exploring Cal State San Marcos, and I want you to know that I never intend to stop listening and learning about you OR this campus.
- When I started here last July, I knew I was joining a special and caring community.
- That "Culture of Care" – where we place our relationships with each other at the heart of all that we do – is key to our success.

- I've seen it manifest in the ways that you help our students.
- And in the ways that you connect, encourage and help each other.
- I believe that we are embarking on one of the most pivotal chapters for CSUSM thus far.
- The only way forward is together – with a focus on our mission of access, student success, academic and inclusive excellence.
- The challenges are immense but so is our dedication to this great university.

### **Big Challenges and Opportunities of the Year**

- But that's not to say that we are not living through a very difficult time.
- This year we have been struck by not one but two pandemics – one that is viral... and the other which has been called America's original disease – racism.
- In addition, just this week, a twin hurricane threat converged on the Gulf coast while wildfires continue to scorch our great state.
- These are truly unprecedented times – and I want to acknowledge how interwoven all of these issues are right now.
- Many of us have lost loved ones or have gone through the fear of knowing someone sick with the virus.
- We have had to postpone or change important milestone moments.

- If you are like me, you are missing friends, colleagues and family you haven't seen for months.
- I know, it hasn't been easy.
- I have to own that I sometimes struggle to feel the gratitude I mentioned earlier.
- Sometimes I've woken up in the morning overwhelmed and feeling the need to scream out in frustration.
- Even more so when I think of my family – especially my parents in Texas – whom I can't see right now and are in the midst of the hurricanes.
- I know each of you has your own unique COVID story.
- In March when we went online, I wondered how we were going to do this for two months – not understanding that we would be nearly six months in and still not know what the future holds.
- We all crave absolutes and wonder when and how this pandemic will end.
- I know many of you are frustrated like me to not even know what next semester will be like, what our budget numbers will be, or how to plan.
- But here is what we do know: commitment to our students, our university and our region will never waver.
- Our culture of care will always move us forward.

- I was on a panel with the superintendent of Carlsbad and the president of MiraCosta last week.
- We were remarking that with all of the unknown, it is simply amazing to see all that you have accomplished – to bring us to this day, opening our fall semester.
- With shifting upon shifting, you have made it happen.
- We were even the first CSU campus to be approved for our fall operating plan.
- Another example of how you make it all happen was our **Graduates on Parade** – by far the top graduation celebration of my career.
- I want to thank the committee and all those who turned out with their masks and signs to cheer on our graduates as they drove through campus in their decorated vehicles.
- The media coverage was seen around the world – I think everyone was captivated by our commitment to doing something so unique to recognize our graduates.
- I realized that day, that we were getting as much as were giving by being part of that event.
- I want to take a few extra moments today to express a bit more gratitude.

- Ever since we transitioned our work and teaching primarily online, you have offered compassion and support to our students, and helped them understand that they are not alone.
- Here are just a few examples of what I mean:
  - The team in Facilities have worked so hard to keep our campus safe for those continuing to be on campus – including **Veronica Ohm** who has sewn masks for her colleagues.
  - This spring, when it looked like we were going to be shifting to remote, the **Faculty Center** quickly developed training and support for our faculty.
  - And this summer they kept going – creating and delivering 14 different workshops.
  - **Our Student Affairs and IITS staff** provided an eight-week orientation program that was completely online.
  - **Our staff in Safety, Health & Sustainability** worked closely with faculty to support a safe environment for the limited in-person courses.
  - **You helped our Advancement team** raise over \$64,000 in just 24 hours for the student relief fund.
  - In total over \$130,000 has been raised to support our students through this time.



- **ASI and our Financial Aid** helped distribute CARES Act Emergency Relief to over 11,000 students.
  - Our **Office of Global Programs** scrambled to come up with creative solutions to support our international students when it was feared they couldn't remain in the U.S.
  - Thank goodness that issue has been resolved for the time being.
  - **Our Emergency Operations Team** has worked with many experts across campus to create new processes and protocols, despite ever shifting information and guidance.
  - **The University Library** launched a COVID-19 community Memory Archive, which is collecting the experiences and memories of this time from anyone who lives in North County.
  - **And Extended Learning** helped us exceed our summer school projections even while persisting through leadership transitions and so much change.
- These are just a few examples – there are countless others.
  - While we celebrate our accomplishments, we have to acknowledge that it feels as though we have been running sprints in the middle of a marathon.
  - If you are on the staff side, you have been constantly planning, pivoting and changing.

- If you are faculty, you have had to adapt to a whole new way of teaching online.
- I've noticed your tireless work, and I have to give voice to the impossible tasks that we have been working through.
- Someone recently remarked that it feels like we are on week 15, and the academic year hasn't even started yet!
- As president, one of the things I worry about is how hard this is for everyone.
- It weighs on my mind that I don't have all the answers, as we work through how to balance all that we are dealing with.

### **Social Justice and Inclusive Excellence**

- Especially when I think about the added layer of the “pandemic within the pandemic” of racism, which COVID has further exposed.
- Ever since Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd were senselessly killed, many have shared with me that you are emotionally overloaded and exhausted.
- Even Monday morning, I awoke to the news that a Black man named Jacob Blake was shot in the back and critically injured in front of his three children.
- I spent many anxious days this summer feeling like we needed deeper action and balancing how we get there.

- I had to face – and will continually face - my own ignorance, blind spots and privilege.
- I know this will be an ongoing, lifelong process.
- But I'm grateful to all of you who courageously brought forward your experiences.
- Each voice has had an impact; and each story has added another layer of humanity and urgency to our work.
- It's meant so much to me to work alongside with **Marilyn McWilliams, Ariel Stevenson and Patricia Prado-Olmos** in the Office of Inclusive Excellence during this time.
- They have helped me engage even more deeply in these conversations.
- What has emerged, thanks to the work of many, is a series of action steps we are taking to address anti-Blackness and systemic racism at our university.
- The message I shared over the summer outlines these steps in more detail.
- This is my commitment to what we are doing now.
- It isn't "one and done" and it's NOT just about going through the motions and checking off a box.
- This is just part of a journey that many of you have been on before I got here.

- I especially want to thank Drs. Sharon Elise, Lori Walkington and Mohamed Abumaye who are working on a study of the CSUSM Black experience.
- This study aims to document and amplify Black student and employee voices across campus.
- It will be published online following a public presentation this fall.
- Other action steps we've committed to include reviewing and changing exclusionary or biased university policies – and I want to thank the Academic Senate for their partnership in this.
- We are also launching a Task Force on Innovative Policing to make sure that we are approaching our campus safety efforts in a holistic and caring way.
- In June, the Black Student Center hosted a virtual space for reflection and community, facilitated by John Rawlins.
- I attended and was extremely moved by the shared experiences.
- There were people who tried to intimidate us with anti-Black and anti-Semitic imagery and words during the event, but our students, staff, faculty and alumni spoke bravely and powerfully despite the disruption.
- At the end of the evening, John left us with questions to ponder.

- One of which was, “What is one personal commitment you are going to make to support institutional change and support our Black community?”
- Today, I extend that question to everyone listening.
- I invite you to not just ponder it, but to act on it and be empowered to lead from where you are.
- There are moments in our personal lives, and in the lives of institutions, that call upon us to work collectively to achieve together what we cannot achieve alone.
- This is one such moment.
- If we are to realize our vision of a campus with a culture of care, it will take each one of us committing to be a part of the change we wish to see.
- For those who look like me, sometimes our privilege enables us to compartmentalize – and I own that due to my own ignorance and unearned privilege I have not always done enough to lead from where I am.
- But today I stand before you, committed to ongoing growth, reflection and education – today and everyday this WILL be a part of who I am as a leader.

- I encourage everyone who is part of our community to examine ourselves – because addressing and dismantling anti-Black racism requires looking inward – at our organizations and ourselves.
- As you think about your role, you might wonder – what can I do? How do I enter the conversation?
- This fall, the Office of Inclusive Excellence will be sponsoring conversations on this topic and I invite you to attend and participate.
- We have for far too long asked our Black colleagues and students to carry the burden.
- And some of you have told me that you are tired and traumatized, wondering if anyone really hears you or believes you?
- To me, your labor and energy are not in vain.
- Moving forward, we are working to document our recent campus history and the requests and demands that have been made in the past.
- Today, I want you to know, I am NOT going to let fear or imperfection hold me back from being the leader Cal State San Marcos needs me to be.
- I want you to know, I am committed to:
  - real conversations
  - and real actions
  - that lead to real change.

- We cannot remain silent about injustice.
- We must stand up and speak out with one voice.
- Inaction is simply unacceptable.
- As president, I will set the example.
- Together, we must ALL do our part to lead a new day of healing and transformation.
- Words are important, but words are not enough.
- Together, we will all be a part of action and change.

## **Employee Care**

- Let's go back for a moment to this double pandemic and what it means for all of us.
- If there's one lesson we've learned, it's that who we are personally – our identities, our responsibilities to our families, our hopes and fears for the future - can't be separated from who we are professionally.
- And that was never a logical expectation to begin with.
- This summer, the **Staff Needs & Experience Survey** revealed that you have a lot on your mind – from concerns about potential impacts of budgets; to fears about the health of your loved ones; to worry over our political and racial climate.

- And through all of this, most of you have been adapting to working at home, balancing video meetings and projects with caring for children or other family members.
- Most of you shared that your telecommuting experience has been largely positive and that you have newfound flexibility in your day.
- You also shared some of the challenges including screen fatigue, finding it difficult to disconnect from work, and missing colleagues in person.
- I relate to “zoom burnout” myself some days I never want to look at another screen again!
- With the stress and anxiety ALL this brings, we need to ensure that we are embracing flexibility and creating a more humane academic workplace.
- I carry gratitude for the way that this virtual world has allowed me to be a part of your families and lives in ways that never would have been possible before.
- I’ve had the pleasure of meeting many young “co-workers” like **Vanessa Vincent**’s sweet children or **Dr. Rebeca Perren**’s new puppy!
- And speaking of new puppies, I have a new buddy at home myself – **Bailey!**



- We've only been together about a month, but he's helping me deal with living in the gray area of uncertainty and change, which we will all certainly be facing for quite some time.
- Right now, we have more questions than answers – including, what's the plan for spring?
- I wish I could answer that – but COVID is setting the timeline for us once again.
- We are planning for multiple scenarios, and will work with the Chancellor's Office just as we did in the fall.
- This is just one example of the ever-evolving reality that we have been living with since COVID came into our lives.
- The gray area can be unnerving – as soon as one question is answered, it seems as if there are a million more unknowns.
- But, what I do know is that we are going to continue to move forward with a mission of student access and success, as well as a “Culture of Care” which we will extend to ALL members of our community.
- Before COVID, we were already working toward the launch of FACES (the Faculty, Advocacy, Care, Engagement and Support Initiative) and the Staff Center.
- Committees are coming together to move this work forward.
- In addition, we will be sharing with you the results of the Staff Needs and Experiences survey and bringing together a cross-campus team to

develop and promote professional development opportunities to our employees.

- These initiatives are more important than ever as we renew our focus on care and support for faculty and staff.
- Our people are our priority.
- Whether together in person or online, we WILL get through this.

### **Organizational Updates**

- Because right now there's a lot of pain in our world.
- We've mourned the killings of unarmed Black men, women and children.
- We have ached for the fears of DACA students, immigrants and refugees.
- We have denounced violence against women and the mistreatment of people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- And we have declared that we won't let anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and white supremacy take root here.
- As we stand in solidarity against hate and discrimination in ALL its forms, we must continually nurture our Culture of Care and commitment to inclusive excellence, by providing support and resources that honor the humanity of all members of our university.
- Because, hate against one of us is hate against ALL of us.

- Last fall, I shared with you that three Inclusive Excellence workgroups had convened to tackle some pressing matters related to this topic.
- Some of this work was delayed due to the pandemic, but outcomes that have been completed thus far are now posted online.
- Inclusive Excellence Workgroup 1 – led by Ariel Stevenson and Allie Carr – looked at the staffing and resources of the Office of Inclusive Excellence.
- As you read in my message, they found that the Chief Diversity Officer position not only needs a seat at the leadership table but must work horizontally across the campus to better guide ALL of us in our work toward a more inclusive and socially just university.
- With their recommendations, I am launching a national search for our next CDO who will report directly to me as an MPP administrator 4 at the same level as a VP, but without the often-limiting divisional fences.
- While this search is underway, **Dr. Ranjeeta Basu** will serve as our interim CDO.
- I'm so thankful that Ranjeeta isn't afraid to take on big jobs!
- Hopefully she won't stop answering my calls!
- **John Rawlins** has also agreed to provide support to OIE in addition to his role with the Black Student Center.

- Ranjeeta, John, Marilyn and Ariel each play critical roles in the Office of Inclusive Excellence – but they can't do it alone.
- As the report indicated, we need to further strengthen and appropriately resource the office – and we will build towards that.
- But, again, this work is owned by all of us – and there's so much to be done.
- As I was reviewing the report, I was inspired to think about a couple other areas on campus that – like the Office of Inclusive Excellence - also transcend divisional lines and must work horizontally across the campus.
- One of those is the division of Community Engagement, the other is the Office of Communications.
- Both of these areas will be brought under the umbrella of the Office of the President because their work has far reaching impacts that transcend divisional boundaries.
- Building on the great work of our Community Engagement and Communications teams, this is just the next step in our commitment to engage deeply with our region and tell our stories cohesively across our university.
- More details can be found in my recent campus message, and I thank both Dr. Patricia Prado-Olmos and Margaret Chantung for their ongoing work and partnership in these areas.

- And one more organizational update:
- It is with bittersweet emotions that I share that Vice President Neal Hoss, has let me know that after nearly 16 years of tremendous service, he is ready to enter the next phase of life and enjoy more time with his beautiful family and grandchildren.
- Neal expressed his desire to retire in December and will spend the semester helping plan for the transition.
- I can't begin to express my admiration and gratitude to Neal – at key moments in the history of our university, his effective leadership and expertise has allowed us to grow in unprecedented ways.
- He came to CSUSM in 2005 as our VP for FAS, then transitioned to become our VP of Advancement in 2009, where he served for nine years, helping launch our historic \$55 million philanthropic campaign.
- In 2016, he returned to lead FAS during a critical time and through it all has been a champion of our university and our mission.
- Neal will always have my tremendous respect and gratitude for all that he has done.
- I will announce next steps regarding a search for our next CFO and VP of FAS very soon.

## **University Cabinet/PAT**

- As we further look at leadership, on my Listening and Learning Tour, I heard that sometimes you worry that the president can be insulated from information that might challenge assumptions, strategies and decisions.
- As a leader, it's important to me that I am not operating in a bubble – I want and I NEED your ideas, your perspectives and your questions.
- I welcome the opportunity to connect with you during a Listening and Learning group session or you can email me at [pres@csusm.edu](mailto:pres@csusm.edu).
- I am committed to regularly meeting with our staff leadership, Academic Senate and ASI.
- In addition, I charged a new University Cabinet, which includes student, staff, tenure-track faculty, lecturer, associate dean, and dean-level representation.
- A department chair rep will be added as well.
- The Cabinet has come together frequently over the summer to discuss topics ranging from the fall reopening plans, to budget, to enrollment, to anti-racism actions and next steps.
- I've been so appreciative of the Cabinet's candid reflections, questions and input.

- Another leadership group that may be familiar to many of you is Executive Council (EC), which consists of the vice presidents and myself.
- Moving forward, the group will evolve to the President's Administrative Team (PAT) and will include ALL my direct reports – including the Chief Diversity Officer.
- All of these actions represent my commitment to consultation, hearing diverse perspectives and receiving input.
- You are too important – and I enjoy connecting and getting to know you too much – not to have these conversations.
- Because this isn't my university – it's OUR university – and I'm fully committed to shared governance.

## **Budget Update**

- I know like many of you, part of the fear of uncertainty is what has been happening with our budget.
- I've been engaging in conversations with campus leaders, including Cabinet and our shared governance entities, about the fiscal impact of COVID on Cal State San Marcos – both short and long term.
- As I shared with you in my letter, we have an estimated \$19 million budget deficit this fiscal year.

- To address this loss, we will be applying a multi-year budget approach and using our reserves responsibly.
- University wide, we are going to implement a 5% permanent base cut so that we can protect our three priorities: our people, our students' success and the long-term sustainability of our university.
- It is my hope – although I can't make any promises – that layoffs are not needed this year thanks to all of the budget-conserving actions we are making.
- The \$19 million estimate may still evolve in the coming weeks as we understand what our enrollment is and finalize the number of students living in on-campus housing.
- I invite you to go to our budget communication webpage, located on the Office of the President website, to review more budget information, including the previous year's budget for each division in easy-to-understand pie charts.
- Thank you to the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate for the suggestion to post these charts.
- I'll continue to keep you updated as more information is known.
- In the meantime, I want to thank you for the shared sacrifices you are making.
- We will get through this together, driven by our innovative and resourceful spirit.



## **Fiscal Stewardship**

- On that note, earlier this year, we endured a difficult time in the spotlight on the topic of fiscal stewardship.
- It was heart wrenching to watch our institutional reputation get tarnished in the media, even as most of you work hard each day to make the right choices.
- While it has been a difficult and painful moment, we've taken substantial steps forward to prevent the future abuse of our precious resources.
- You can view a complete list of actions on our Fiscal Stewardship website.
- This includes the hiring of a new internal auditor – Melanie Marker-Elle – a new Travel Expense Claim precheck service, and a review of our hospitality procedures.
- We've also created a new Business Process Improvement Team, led by Brittani Brown, AVP of Compliance and Operations, who – along with Melanie – will report to me and provide updates and progress reports.
- Their goal is to make it easier for YOU to do YOUR job while ensuring that the appropriate checks and guardrails are in place to protect the future vitality of our university.

- We also completed a review of travel for this last fiscal year which can be found on the Fiscal Stewardship website.
- The review process was extremely smooth due to the travel ban, and the report is a lengthy three pages long!
- I want to thank Brittani Brown who has been leading our fiscal stewardship and business improvement efforts with a passion for doing this right.
- I truly appreciate these efforts, because Cal State San Marcos is a special place, and our students and all our stakeholders – including taxpayers – deserve nothing less than full compliance and a commitment to fiscal stewardship at every level.
- I know that sometimes the terms “compliance” and “innovation” don’t appear to go hand in hand; but compliance really does compliment innovation with best practices, collaboration, and end-to-end solutions.
- Every step of the way, we need to be sure we are thinking about appropriate business practices, particularly as we consider the question: what do we want the next 30 years to look like?

## **Strategic Planning**

- A critical piece of envisioning the future involves outlining a new strategic plan that represents the voices and priorities of us all.

- We were already due for a new plan.
- The double pandemic – which has shined a light on racial and social disparities – makes it even more urgent that we have a common road map in place for where we want and NEED to go.
- As we venture forward, we must build on our commitments and achievements to create the Cal State San Marcos of the future:
  - a university laser focused on access, academic excellence, student social mobility and student success;
  - a place where, thanks to community-engaged and hands-on learning, students graduate not just job-ready, but future-ready, prepared to be civic-minded leaders in the continued growth and prosperity of our region.
  - a campus where the full spectrum of innovation – from inspiring bold thinking to training students how to bring their ideas to the world – can come to life.
  - And, integrated throughout all of these, an ongoing commitment to inclusive excellence, social justice and equity that is woven into the fabric of all that we do.
- Our strategic planning process will kick off this fall – a component of which will be looking at our academic masterplan - and we will ensure there is appropriate representation from ALL our stakeholders,

including students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni and community partners.

- Because this isn't just about me and my vision – it's about US and OUR hopes and dreams for the future.
- This is a critical moment in time.
- We can't slow down.
- We will keep our eyes steady on the horizon ahead of us.
  
- **Student Success**
- Part of this plan will also be our focus on student success.
- COVID-19 has further revealed the higher education opportunity divide and the role universities play in exacerbating systems of inequity.
- While college graduation rates keep soaring for the affluent, for those in the bottom half, a four-year degree is scarcely more attainable than it was 50 years ago.
- But we play a critical role in offering our region access to an affordable, quality education – we are proud that the majority of our students are first in their families to attend college.
- This year we ranked 36 out of almost 1,500 schools nationwide in the annual Social Mobility Index.

- This means we are one of the top universities in the country when it comes to educating more low-income students at a lower tuition and graduating them into good paying jobs, prepared to lead in the world of tomorrow.
- However, you know that access can't be our only goal – it must be authentic, “real” access that offers students the support and resources they need to be successful.
- Let me call out just a few examples:
  - Our **Professional Mentor Program in COBA**, connects students with industry professionals to discuss career paths and more.
  - The **CHABSS Global Commitment Program** engages students to increase their global competency.
  - The **FIRST-2-STEM program**, a partnership between CSTEM and the Office of Undergraduate Studies, supports underserved minority students.
  - And in CEHHS, **Project SUPPORT** assists Latin-x students on the pathway to becoming teachers.
- When I think back on my Listening and Learning tour, I loved learning about these programs and so many more.

- I was amazed to see how in every session – no matter what department or what audience – the conversation always came back around to our students and their success.
- One of the things that I heard several times, was that our efforts could be further enhanced if we worked together in a more cohesive way, moving past silos.
- There was a concern that while we have many great programs focused on student success, we still aren't reaching everyone who we need to reach.
- So many of you came together to tackle this, and one example is the **Student Success & Retention Committee** – comprised of faculty, staff and administrators from across campus and led by **VP Lorena Checa and Provost Carl Kemnitz**.
- This forward-thinking group is already implementing new strategies designed to nurture students with a stronger connection to campus, giving them that signature Cal State San Marcos experience even though most can't be on campus right now.
- In addition, they launched a new **Student Success Coaching program** which will ensure that each incoming student has their own dedicated advocate, partnered with an academic advisor and GEL instructor, who can help guide them on their own CSUSM journey.

- I want to thank **Dr. Dawn Formo** for chairing the First Year Experience group and **Dr. Valita Jones & Justin Lewis** for co-chairing the Student Success Coaching group.
- I also extend a huge thank you to the committee members who provided these recommendations that are now becoming a reality.
- And I must acknowledge all our wonderful new student success coaches who are transitioning from other areas across campus to help implement this critical initiative.
- So many people have come together this spring to support our students in other ways and I also want to take a moment to give just a few more kudos:
  - **Kris Roberts** helped organize an enormous student calling campaign with Enrollment Management Services.
  - **Our Athletics Staff and Coaches** – even with the season on pause – continued to support current and incoming student athletes.
  - **Tasos Laza-Ree-Dees** – pushed our Cougarbot to the max and was instrumental in our ability to get critical information to and from students.
  - **Our deans and associate deans** across the colleges worked closely with department chairs to help students get full schedules.

- And I want to thank ALL our faculty who offered zoom information sessions about majors and ALL our staff who responded to thousands of questions and requests.
- The phrase “teamwork makes the dream work” never rang truer.
- Your resilient and innovative spirit should be celebrated and applauded!

## **Innovation**

- I’m not a historian – but my father is – and if he were here, he might point out that throughout world history, epidemics like the coronavirus, have altered society – leading to breakthroughs in science, medicine and new ways of life.
- But as we know so well, progress and innovation have already been occurring at an incredible pace – especially here at Cal State San Marcos.
- I’ve been continually impressed by how engaged our faculty are in research and creative activities that expand the frontiers of knowledge.
- And I also think we are second to none in the kind of out-of-classroom learning experiences we provide students.
- In fact, just this Monday, the Office of the Chancellor announced that our very own Academic Senate Chair, **Dr. Sharon Hamill**, has been



recognized with a Faculty Innovation and Leadership Award for her commitment to advance bold, creative solutions to enrich student learning.

- Congratulations, Sharon!
- I also congratulate **Drs. Robert Iafe and Paul Jasien** from CSTEM for receiving a grant of almost \$1 million from the National Science Foundation to support the retention and graduation of high-achieving, low-income students in chemistry and biochemistry.
- And **Lucy HG Solomon** from Art, Media and Design was recognized in April with a Fulbright Global Scholar Award for an art and science research project that will focus on the microbiology of three distinct terrains around the world.
- I also want to highlight **Dr. Fernando Soriano** from the Department of Human Development, who has written a survival manual for graduates in a pandemic, dedicated to his students and the class of 2020.
- And I loved learning about **The Cougar Fund**, a team of undergraduate finance students who, under the mentorship of Finance Department Chair, Dr. Andreas Rauterkus, and members of the Foundation Board, are garnering real-world portfolio management.
- I've been so impressed with all that our faculty and staff are doing to make the most out of distance learning – getting creative with

everything from mailing at-home lab kits to finding software to synchronize music classes.

- Crises can be a mirror for organizations, reflecting their character and values in how they respond.
- Its clear to me that we have an innovative, resourceful spirit which permeates throughout our learning organization.
- In December, Drs. Chuck De Leone and Sharon Hamill led a committee charged with helping us capture our institutional identity around innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Their report highlights an entire ecosystem of how we engage in innovation and entrepreneurial activities every day:
  - From transforming healthcare via our School of Nursing and our Institute of Palliative Care's What Gives Your Life Meaning campaign;
  - to technological advances in software and app development;
  - to social innovation such as the Youth Resiliency Project, Whiteness Forum and an entrepreneurial program for children of undocumented parents.
- This report led to the creation of our new Innovation Hub, which began taking shape in early March in the Extended Learning Building.

- Even during COVID, the Innovation Hub has stayed actively engaged – kicking off a Summer Innovation Challenge, focused on helping K-12 schools deal with new problems related to reopening during the pandemic.
- We aren't the first to establish an innovation hub or to think about how we can teach our students to be innovative and socially aware.
- But we are among the first in the nation to launch something of this nature at the intersection of inclusion, diversity and student success.
- Our innovation hub is becoming a gateway that is both:
  - A place for business and technology leaders from our community to collaborate with student entrepreneurs and faculty researchers.
  - And a place for students and faculty to bring innovations to the marketplace.
- This is so exciting because it's a natural extension of the work we are already doing.
- And it's an important step forward in our commitment to fostering an innovation mindset where we approach problems in new ways and through diverse and inclusive lenses, with the end user in mind.
- We ALL have a role in championing innovation across our university so that we may continue to grow and thrive.

## **CLOSE**

- So, this morning, I want to end where I started – circling back to you, this wonderful campus community and the tremendous gratitude I feel for being a part of it.
- From our custodians to our student healthcare professionals,
- from our faculty in the classroom to our researchers pushing boundaries,
- from our budget analysts to our development officers,
- we are breaking down silos and inspiring our students with hope, empowering them to be the change makers our world so desperately needs.
- Thank you for everything that you have done to prepare us for this moment as we embark on another academic year.
- Yes, uncertainty is all around us.
- Yes, there is still much work ahead.
- But today, we reconvene as a community – together even while apart.
- Even though this will be unlike any other fall semester in history, I can't but help feeling excitement for what's before us.
- So much is in flux, but the fundamental parts of our university are unchanged.
- Our dedication to our students, our region and each other will move us through and past this moment and on to the next 30 years.

- Last year at Convocation, you might remember that I shared my vision for the future of our university.
  - A vision where we would:
  - build on our mission of social mobility and student success;
  - become a national leader in helping students through the student life cycle, fueling the needs of our region;
  - expand programs and processes with the end-user in mind – from the student experience, to the faculty experience to the staff experience to the community experience; and
  - equip our students to become the trailblazers of tomorrow so that they may lead a new day through collaboration and inclusion.
- Because THIS is our defining moment.
- We WILL blaze the trail.
- Our students' success is OUR success.
- Let them be our inspiration for how we start and carry on the academic year – with all the hope, excitement, and joy this brings.
- That's why I'm grateful to be a part of THIS university.
- That's why I'm grateful to be working alongside all of you.
- We are together in this even while apart.
- We will lead the way together.
- We are one CSUSM!