

# SPRING EMPLOYEE UPDATE

Jan. 22, 2021

- Good morning and thank you for joining me as we prepare to kick off the spring semester!
- We don't usually host a spring Convocation but given that we are beginning this year at such a unique moment in time, I wanted to be sure we had the opportunity to come together virtually so I could share updates and the latest information.
- This morning I'm coming to you from the USU amphitheater.
- As I begin, I want to respectfully acknowledge that Cal State San Marcos is located on the traditional territory and homelands of the Luiseño/Payomkawichum people.
- We acknowledge the first peoples of this area.
- Unlike last August, we do not have the small, socially distanced representative audience due to the ongoing COVID-19 surge.
- But I want to thank the small, nimble crew from IITS and University Communications for supporting today's virtual event.
- 2021 is only three weeks old but has already proven to be a momentous year as we continue to face a global pandemic, a profound moment of racial reckoning and difficult economic setbacks that have challenged so many of us.
- Throughout this time, we've been guided by three principles:
  - Our people;
  - student success; and
  - the long-term sustainability of our university as an organization.
- And while we've all experienced this past semester differently, our principles have grounded us in our conversations as we have navigated this difficult time.
- I want to congratulate you on completing fall semester – our first full semester conducted almost entirely in a virtual format.
- But I know it hasn't been easy, and many of you have shared with me how hard the trials have been – and how difficult it can be to find the energy to move forward.

## Culture of Care

- With so many ups and downs, we are optimistic about the rollout of the vaccine, but currently find ourselves in the midst of a record-setting surge.
- To date, 2.9 million people in California have been infected.
- This emotional roller coaster – with the whirlwind of evolving information, ever-changing curve-flattening policies, and shifting hotspots – has been exhausting for all of us.

- For me, I was sitting on pins and needles waiting to get news that vaccines would roll into assisted living facilities.
- And I was thrilled to get the call that my parents in Houston would receive the vaccine on Dec. 30.
- As I breathed that sigh of relief, just a few days later on Jan. 1, I received a call from an old colleague who shared with me that one of my former bosses and a dear friend had passed away from COVID-related complications.
- It made me relate to the conversations I've had with so many of you as you have shared with me the pain and heartbreak of your own pandemic stories.
- I learned that someone lost a close friend... another lost a sister... another a father... and another lost five family members.
- For me, like so many of you, we are at a point in pandemic where it is no longer, "I know someone who knows someone who had COVID."
- In these moments, I realize it's a privilege to even think my parents could be in assisted living and receive the vaccine.
- Many are out there risking their lives each day and have yet to have the opportunity to be vaccinated.
- I want to especially thank our frontline workers – both those who have continued to ensure critical on-campus operations – as well those "essential" workers in our community – many of them our students working at retail or grocery stores and interning in healthcare settings.
- On campus, we also have had so many frontline heroes, including:
  - All our faculty and staff who helped make our limited number of person-to-person classes possible including:
    - Our custodians, facilities staff, and safety and health personnel...
    - Staff in distribution services, cashiers, accounts payable, housing and UPD...
    - And of course our faculty who taught the classes.
- In addition, our IITS staff guided us through a malware incident in late fall that led to our campus virtual infrastructure becoming more secure.
- I know it was one more thing on top of so many other urgent issues.
- For all of us, there is no escaping this journey that we are all on together.
- Even with all this – along with the other interconnected crises – I have seen how you have continued to push through all the hardship to stay true to our mission.
- A mission that continues to be a beacon of hope in these times.
- So many of us had a different winter break than what we normally experience – staying home rather than traveling and connecting with family members.
- I visited with my family on Christmas Day via Zoom.
- And with the multiple conversations happening, I felt like we were in a "Saturday Night Live" skit.

- But on a more serious note, staying home gave me ample time to think about what had happened in our world and how it has impacted our lives.
- And I pondered what I might say to you today as we begin 2021.
- I'm grateful and amazed for all that you have accomplished, but I feel like I have to give voice to the fact that these last 11 months have been exhausting.
- And if you are like me, sometimes it has been difficult to hold on to optimism.
- Over this last year, I have addressed you in forums, speeches and updates.
- Every time, it has seemed that there were difficult issues to address and few concrete answers – so much we did not know.
- For today, I attempted to reach for what I do know – the foundation of our values and mission.
- We knew all along that our mission was important – but it was brought home to me even further when, on Jan. 6, I sat watching the news in horror and disbelief as rioters stormed the Capitol.
- The day left me with many emotions.
- The hate that was on display – the many symbols that people were wearing and waving that represent anti-Semitism, white supremacy and the erosion of civil rights for so many – was horrifying to witness.
- It underlined for me yet again – as so many current events of this past year have confirmed for us all – that we must NEVER stop in our quest through education to stand up for all voices and all people.
- We know that these issues of racial injustice and systemic inequality have been there all along, but the interrelated pandemics have brought them to the surface with an unprecedented urgency that we cannot ignore.
- I watched the inauguration on Wednesday and was overcome with emotion to see leaders in our nation come together after all that has happened.
- There was a moment when Kamala Harris was sworn in by Justice Sotomayor – two trailblazing women of color – and it represented so much hope and a continuation of a journey in the fight for a more equitable future.
- Let me be clear, this is not about what political party any of us might be connected to.
- It's about recognizing and honoring equity and inclusion that we should ALL be striving for, not just in American life but in our world.
- To live our mission of higher education has never been more important.
- At the same time, I know that we are tired.
- So much has happened so fast: not even thinking about this past year but this past month.
- It's impossible to think that in our daily professional lives we should be able to flip a switch and ignore the trauma of our nation and world.
- We have to recognize our own humanity.
- Now more than ever, that "Culture of Care" that I've talked so much about since arriving in July 2019 is important.

- We launched both FACES and the Staff Center this fall, and what organically emerged was a “Council of Care” that included the Cougar CARE Network.
- I want to thank Dr. Fredi Avalos and Dr. Laurie Stowell for leading the faculty learning community that first explored and developed the FACES initiative.
- I also want to thank Dr. Betina Scott for taking the lead on the launch.
- A big thank you as well to Vanessa Vincent and Mike Geck for bringing forward the idea for the Staff Center.
- And my appreciation goes out to our Interim Staff Center Director Susan O’Connor for all her efforts along with the tremendous support of the Staff Center Committee.
- To make both FACES and the Staff Center possible we had to reallocate resources, and we will keep looking at these programs because we know the needs of our faculty and staff are so important.
- In this time, I’ve really appreciated how they have come together to co-host “Our Space” events to provide space for community and the processing of events and feelings.
- In fact, there’s another one coming up later today at noon – I hope you can attend.

### **Inclusive Excellence**

- Our culture of care is interconnected with our efforts to be a more inclusive and welcoming campus for all members of our community – both of which connect to our guiding priority of people.
- During the fall, I was grateful to hear from our directors in the Student Life Centers for Identity, Inclusion and Empowerment who shared with me the impact of this time on the students they serve and the great work they are doing.
- The directors shared that virtual engagement has provided enhanced ways to connect with students that were never possible before, providing a more comprehensive portrait of everyday life outside of the physical campus.
- As a result, we have been able to tailor our support and response to the uniqueness of each student situation in more direct ways.
- I also met with faculty and students in December who shared with me the challenges our DACA and undocumented students have faced — and continue to face — as they navigate a broken immigration system.
- I remember the very real anxiety and dread of waiting for the U.S. Supreme Court decision related to the possible termination of the DACA program.
- What a wonderful relief to know that the program for now remains intact under President Biden’s new memorandum, as we continue to advocate for permanent protections by Congress.

- We know that our DREAMER Resource Office is serving an increasing number of students and has outgrown its current space.
- To support its ongoing work, I'm pleased to share that Vice President Lorena Checa has identified a way to expand its space on campus.
- In addition, to benefit the DREAMER Resource Office as well as other student support services and academic programs, we are reallocating a grant writer to the Office of Graduate Studies who will assist in the acquisition of new federal grants.
- In August, I shared action steps that we would take as a campus community to become a more inclusive, anti-racist university where everyone is respected, and all voices heard.
- In the coming weeks, Interim Chief Diversity Officer Ranjeeta Basu and I look forward to sharing an update on where we are with these commitments.
- I want to thank Drs. Sharon Elise, Lori Walkington and Mohamed Abumaye for their October presentation of "The New Jim Crow in Academia," featuring the results of a research study on the Black Experience at CSUSM.
- That was an important moment of listening and learning for our campus.
- In that same vein, I want to applaud Student Affairs leadership for the work they are doing in partnership with so many of you – including Dr. Andrew Spieldenner in the Department of Communication, Dr. Adam Petersen in Undergraduate Studies, and others who offered their expertise – in support of our Black Student Success Initiative – a program that will be similar to PASO.
- There have been many other important advances in our efforts – from launching our HBCU faculty-student exchange program this fall with Clark Atlanta University – to the kickoff of our taskforce that is looking at innovative policing models and how we might implement a Psychiatric Emergency Response Team.
- Furthermore, as part of our commitment to improving our campus climate for faculty of color, we launched our first Diversity and Inclusion cluster hire pilot initiative at the recommendation of our Faculty of Color workgroup.
- Currently we have 12 open faculty searches – of those, eight are part of this initiative, including two for Ethnic Studies and one for American Indian Studies.
- Related to that, I want to applaud the implementation of the Diversity and Equity course requirement this year as we also plan for the Ethnic Studies requirement that starts next year.
- Ethnic studies is vital to preparing our students for the world in which they will live, work and eventually lead.
- I want to highlight the work being done by Dr. Joely Proudfit and others in American Indian Studies, who conducted a survey that revealed that COVID has had a particularly damaging effect on American Indian students.
- Understanding this is the first step in addressing the health disparities.

- They continue to bring awareness and focus to the needs of our tribal communities and American Indian students.
- And as we consider the needs of those in our region, Dr. Renzo Lara, director of the Latinx Center, has been invited to sit on Assemblymember Boerner Hovath's 76<sup>th</sup> Assembly District Latino Community Leaders Network, which will look at the impacts of COVID-19 specifically on Latinx communities within the district.
- In addition, our National Latino Research Center's work with SANDAG and on the 2020 Census continues to ensure that our local leaders and decision makers have information that comes directly from the communities they serve.
- The NLRC and California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center are vital in helping us extend beyond our region at both the state and national levels.
- We know that institutional racism and social inequity are lived every day – whether on campus or in our region.
- While it is up to ALL of us to own the values of diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism and act on those values every day, I do look forward to hiring our next chief diversity officer who will help further drive and coalesce our campus' efforts.
- But I have to let Dr. Ranjeeta Basu know just how much I have appreciated her this year.
- Not only has she helped bring mindfulness to the forefront in this time, but she has hosted “Conversations with the CDO,” and led many initiatives with the dedicated support of Ariel Stevenson, Marilyn McWilliams and John Rawlins.
- They are helping bring together administrators and Academic Senate Executive Officers for a retreat focused on dismantling systemic bias in February.
- This is important for our leadership to have this lens, and there will be more opportunities for staff and faculty this year.
- In addition, a Campus Climate Survey Committee is preparing to launch a study; results of which will be widely shared so that we can continue to align and coordinate common efforts toward a more inclusive and equitable university.
- When I think of all the complex challenges in our world, I can't help but think that change begins within our own community.
- Thank you to every single one of you who has been part of that change – and continues to be.

### **Student Antigen Testing**

- Related to taking care of our people, in this moment of the pandemic – even while vaccines are rolling out – we have to leverage every available resource to protect the health and safety of our campus community.

- That's why, as we delay in-person courses until Feb. 15, we are implementing a mandatory antigen COVID-19 testing program this spring for all students who have an in-person class or are coming to campus for any approved reason.
- While antigen testing - also known as rapid testing - is not mandatory for our employees, we highly encourage participation by all faculty, staff and administrators who are teaching or working on campus this semester.
- As for me, I will be getting tested – it's too important not to.
- These tests are offered at no cost.
- And because antigen COVID-19 test results are returned in 15 minutes, we will be able to identify people who may not know they are positive and quickly help them get quarantined.
- This is key to slowing the spread while we wait for our turn to be vaccinated.
- But I do want to emphasize, even with this testing, we can't relax our health and safety standards – we must continue to practice the 3 Ws: washing our hands, watching our distance, and wearing a mask.

## **Vaccinations**

- These measures will greatly reduce the risk of transmission on campus as we look forward to the rollout of vaccines.
- As you probably read, the County of San Diego has opened several COVID-19 vaccination sites and is currently hosting vaccination events for individuals identified under Phase 1A.
- Some of our employees who work in Student Health as well as School of Nursing faculty and students are eligible during this current phase.
- So you might be wondering – when is my turn?
- Information is coming out quickly and it's a bit confusing, but what I understand right now is that everyone that works at Cal State San Marcos is in group 1B.
- We do not have an exact timeframe for when Phase 1B will begin, but the County has been optimistic about getting to this phase by the end of this month or early February.
- Since August, we have served as a County COVID-19 testing site.
- Over 130,000 individuals since have been tested on our campus... and during the holiday surge in December, the site saw nearly 2,200 people a day.
- Now, I'm proud to share with you that we have been asked to serve our region once again - this time by adding an anchor vaccination site for North County.
- It's an enormous point of pride for our campus to be a partner in this testing and vaccination effort.
- We are living our values as an anchor institution of our region – helping our community get vaccinated ... saving lives.

- I want to thank ALL our campus personnel who played a role in the planning, logistics and support.

## **Post-pandemic Planning**

- It's good to be entering this phase of the pandemic.
- While we know that we will not have a complete return to normalcy in the fall, five planning groups are beginning to convene to address topics and questions for how we plan to repopulate our campus.
- Right now we have more questions than answers, but it's important that these planning teams – which include representatives and subject matter experts from across campus – hear from you.
- The planning group chairs will be hosting a virtual listening session next Friday.
- They will NOT come with answers – what they want is to hear your ideas.
- We've never been through something like this before so your voice is so important.

## **Budget**

- Another complex and evolving topic is the state of our campus budget.
- The governor released some very good news on Jan. 8.
- He did not propose cutting the CSU's budget.
- In fact, he added \$144 million in new recurring funding and \$225 million in one-time funding.
- One-time funding means there is no guarantee that it will be funded again in the future.
- Recurring funding adds to our "base" or what we hope to count on year over year.
- So, the question is, what does this mean for us now?
- We likely won't have our allocation from the Chancellor's Office until March.
- Even then, the state budget process isn't completed until mid-June so the budget can take effect July 1.
- Even though we don't know all the specifics, this is very good news and a ray of light shining through the fog of COVID.
- If the governor had announced a cut a few weeks ago, we would be starting off this calendar year with a much different kind of conversation.
- But I do want to underscore that the governor's proposal didn't fully restore the cut that we received last year.
- And some of it is designated for specific uses, such as deferred maintenance, professional development, student mental health and technology needs.

- You might recall our budget plan this year shores up previously unfunded initiatives - such as faculty retention, tenure and promotion; disability services and previously one-time funded staff positions all of which connect back to our priority of people.
- We also allocated to other important items like ethnic studies, enrollment and student success efforts.
- As a reminder, you can see this year's budget plan on the Budget Communications website.
- While the governor's budget proposal does not solve all our issues, it does keep our priorities of people, the success of our students and the long-term sustainability of our institution on track.
- As long as the governor's proposal holds, I do not foresee the need for layoffs and I'm hopeful to be able to give our divisions some new one-time funds for key priorities.
- As we plan ahead, some expenses will continue to be higher than usual.
- There will be costs related to new technology in learning and working spaces; COVID-19 student testing; and ongoing health and safety measures.
- The impact on our self-support units such as housing, parking, and food services will also continue to some extent.
- However, we can look forward to new federal higher education emergency relief funding – a portion of which will go directly to our students as it did last time in the form of emergency relief.
- The remainder will allow us to defray coronavirus expenses that we've already incurred, as well as technology costs and faculty training.
- We are working through the parameters and still waiting for our allocation.
- I will provide updates when we have a better understanding of our budget and the process of rolling out that much needed relief to our students.
- In addition, you saw the email about open candidate sessions for our next VP of Finance and Administrative Services.
- I hope you will be able to attend and provide your feedback.

## **Student Success**

- Let me move to another pillar now – student success, which connects to important themes we've been talking about this morning – our culture of care, our commitment to inclusive excellence, and how we move forward in 2021.
- We ALL have a role to play in ensuring our students succeed and thrive both inside and outside the classroom and across the student life cycle continuum.
- At the start of that continuum is students gaining access to our university.
- We know that this year COVID has exacerbated the issue of who has access to higher education, impacting students' current and future plans in significant ways.

- We've learned that students haven't had the opportunity to meet with high school guidance counselors, nor have they had the same support in filling out financial aid forms and applications – not to mention all the issues that COVID has introduced to their home lives.
- Even before COVID, higher education was facing strong headwinds with a shrinking population of high school graduates.
- The pandemic has just accelerated this trend.
- At this point in time, our applications are behind what they were last year... so we are going to be continuing to work collaboratively on outreach and engagement, removing barriers and doing everything we can to help students apply and find their way here.
- And once they are here, we will be laser focused on supporting them every step of the way to graduation.
- I remember last year on my Listening and Learning Tour, I heard about the wonderful work being done to support students with unmatched wrap-around learning and holistic services.
- What we do is a gold standard, particularly for special populations and in our community engaged learning such as service learning, undergraduate research, internships, and faculty mentorship.
- What was pointed out to me on that tour was that while everyone is dedicated to student success, it's not always a seamless process.
- Sometimes our first-year students fall through the cracks and, once again, COVID-19 has only exacerbated these cracks.
- So many of you quickly mobilized to create a more comprehensive approach to our first-year student experience.
- Our new student success coaching program was a big part of that.
- Early data tells us for students that engaged in the coaching program, fall to spring retention is 92% compared to 84%.
- I want to celebrate the 21 coaches trained from 11 different departments across campus.
- Not only are they newly trained care navigators, linking students to support programs and resources, and helping them form a sense of belonging... but we were able to retain our employees from areas hard hit by the pandemic such as Events & Conference Services.
- And I would be remiss if I didn't highlight the many other student-focused efforts that have been implemented during the time of COVID – including staff and faculty from across campus pulling together to call thousands of students who had an application in progress or needed help registering.
- I also want to add that through the great work of the Student Success and Retention Committee we are aligning all our student success efforts on campus to serve our students.
- The next step is to continue to look at reforming processes and policies, simplifying academic planning, integrating career planning from day one, and further supporting our faculty in their efforts with community-engaged learning.

- This is so important because we know engaged learning is one of the most significant ways students can develop skills and command of material, but it engages students in their own learning, leading to graduates who are able to think critically, communicate and collaborate with a respect for different perspectives, backgrounds and beliefs, ready to lead in our world.
- I'm grateful for the leadership of Tere Mendoza, Interim Vice President of University Advancement, along with our Foundation Board and entire Advancement team.
- They are moving forward a fundraising initiative that will further boost our student success work.
- Our new VP of Advancement will further champion these efforts when they are in place – the search committee is kicking off next week.
- While we need to invest resources toward this effort, Advancement – in partnership with so many of you – will be cultivating the support of our region's leaders and donors who understand the value in investing in us because they know an investment here leads to a more educated region that strengthens our knowledge economy, promotes social mobility and a more informed society.
- Furthermore, we know that educational attainment and social mobility are tightly connected – college graduates earn 84 percent more on average than nongrads over a lifetime.
- But, of course, we know it's not just about earning power and economic mobility.
- Our university is a place that shapes the knowledge, skills and values of our future leaders.
- At CSUSM, we ARE our region's higher education anchor, with the majority of students coming to us from the local area and staying local after graduation – a higher percentage than any other university in the area.
- They are our health-care workers...our K-12 teachers...our elected officials...our first responders...our engineers...our artists...our entrepreneurs.
- Today, more than 55% percent of our students are first generation.
- Over 20% are adult learners, age 25 or older.
- And over 10 percent are veterans or military-affiliated, who have served their country and are now ready to take advantage of higher education.
- To welcome all these students is an honor and a tremendous responsibility.
- Extended Learning plays an important role in this as well.
- I want to warmly welcome Dr. Godfrey Gibbison – our new dean of Extended Learning – who just joined us on Monday from the College of Charleston.
- Dr. Gibbison brings tremendous strategic and operational leadership experience and I know has already hit the ground running to work with you and build on EL's mission to be a place of innovation, responding to our regional educational needs – particularly now as we aim to serve our community in post COVID recovery.
- Last year I acknowledged we had been through a difficult moment with significant attention focused on not only fiscal stewardship but on the new MOU.

- I committed to several action steps and while we didn't get as far as we wanted, we did bring in an external EL consultant and hired a new dean.
- With his arrival, he will partner with our provost and Academic Senate's Budget and Long-Range Planning Committee to establish a taskforce that will focus on making revisions to our MOU with your input.
- While there is much more to come, one of the things that we know is that Extended Learning is an integral part of our university and the way we move forward together is important for ALL of us to thrive.
- And finally, as we look to support the economic recovery of our region by graduating students ready to lead and solve our most critical issues, I want to thank Chief Community Engagement Officer Patricia Prado-Olmos and College of Business Administration Dean Jim Hamerly for chairing a new Economic Development Committee.
- This committee, which will be comprised of faculty and staff experts, will take a universal campus-wide look at how we further our commitment to our region's economic health through education, research and innovation at the intersection of inclusion.
- This initiative will amplify the good work so many of you are doing.
- I'm excited to share that this spring, we will partner with the San Diego Regional EDC, MiraCosta College and the San Diego Community College District to offer a summit focused on supporting a resilient and inclusive economic recovery.

## **Innovation**

- These past 11 months, as we navigated the unpredictability of COVID-19 and all the interrelated pandemics, I've talked a lot about our three guiding principles:
  - our people,
  - our students' success,
  - and our long-term sustainability as an organization.
- And this morning, I've covered those topics broadly as I shared updates related to:
  - our culture of care and ongoing work to be a more anti-racist and inclusive organization;
  - our budget;
  - student success;
  - and how we'll continue to put health and safety at the forefront.
- As we look ahead, let's add a fourth guiding principle: championing an innovative mind set for the future.

- We know that higher education faces many more challenges today than ever before, and while our university is young and relatively nimble compared to many others, change and innovation at the intersection of diversity and inclusion must be the backdrop against which we operate.
- Innovation isn't just about applying new technology or acquiring new products, it is about how creativity, effort and passion come together as a mindset to solve not just the problems we have right now – but the challenges of tomorrow.
- During my Listening and Learning Tour, I heard you talk a lot about the need for process improvement and applying innovation to solving issues related to streamlining our work and always keeping the end user in mind – whether that is our students, our employees or our community partners.
- We launched a Creative Innovation Challenge and we received almost 40 submissions including:
  - an idea for an Inclusive Sustainability Institute;
  - a revamped onboarding program for new faculty and staff that would create a more collaborative culture;
  - a proposal to align efforts to support students, faculty and staff with disabilities and/or care giving responsibilities; and
  - a new approach to managing calendars that could increase productivity and job satisfaction.
- We'll be helping many of these ideas move forward toward implementation and I want to thank everyone who submitted their proposals.
- As we think about our innovation ecosystem, our new Innovation Hub is positioned to be at the center of many of our efforts, partnering with our region to connect our students, faculty and staff in mutually beneficial outcomes with a focus on social innovations.
- The Hub is sponsoring quarterly innovation challenges for our students and the summer challenge, which focused on helping K-12 schools find solutions to the impacts of the pandemic, resulted in two new nonprofits.
- And the Hub's Student Incubator, in collaboration with our San Marcos Chamber of Commerce as well as Union Cowork, provided mentoring and resources to several students who are founding members of a start-up.
- Moving forward, as part of our innovation initiative, we are looking at launching a new innovation fellows program.
- Innovation fellows would serve in part as ambassadors for their colleges and divisions as well as multipliers by sharing information and mentoring our next generation of innovators and change makers.
- Meanwhile our Library has a Makerspace Conceptualization Group that is envisioning a makerspace that would be accessible and open to the campus community to support class assignments integrating maker pedagogy.

- This idea is still in the early stages and would need external funding support, but it's very exciting to see the momentum around innovation grow.
- Innovation is a theme that connects to all our guiding principles.
- And in these times of economic, social, environmental and technological change and disruption, we've got to seize this moment and embrace innovation at the intersection of social change.
- This is one of the best ways we will be able to deliver on our promise of access, with the current and future needs of our students in mind.

## **Strategic Planning**

- As we look to the future and our next 30 years, I want to emphasize that you ALL play a critical role in dreaming what the future of Cal State San Marcos will look like.
- This isn't about abandoning our current mission or values but about seizing this unique moment in time to invest and build on our strengths and innovate for the future with the success of our students and vibrancy of our region in mind.
- The steering committee kicked off the process in fall and I want to thank them for their ongoing efforts this spring along with co-chairs Interim CDO Ranjeeta Basu and Provost Carl Kemnitz.
- I hope you will be able to attend the virtual Strategic Planning Townhall on February 1 at noon to share your thoughts and ideas about where we go next.
- In addition, a campus-wide survey will provide another opportunity for input.
- Just like the Listening and Learning Tour, your input is necessary and important because this isn't just about me and my vision – but all of us and how we lead the way in the next 30 years.

## **Close**

- Let me circle back to the inauguration once more – because, regardless of candidate or party, inaugurations represent new beginnings and new opportunities.
- As Roy Blunt, Republican U.S. Senator from Missouri, related Wednesday morning from the podium, “[This] is not a moment of division but a moment of unification.”
- “...And we must always work to be better than we have been.”
- This is especially true now, as we begin this journey of 2021 with so much uncertainty before us.
- President Biden said in his remarks, “...Will we master this rare and difficult hour? Will we meet our obligation and pass along a new and better world to our children? I believe we must.”
- And if those words don't describe this moment in time, and our vital role in higher education – our public promise to our region – then I don't know what does.

- I remember in late February, when COVID was just beginning to make its presence known, someone remarked to me, “If we have to go remote – I don’t know how we will do it.”
- But we DID do it – in only a matter of days.
- You have overcome so much this year.
- You have made the impossible possible.
- And we didn’t stop there – we kept going.
- We figured out how to adapt.
- We made mistakes and we weren’t always perfect, but we got through those difficult moments because we knew our students and our colleagues needed us.
- I am so proud of all that you did.
- The incredible 22-year-old poet Amanda Gorman said in her Inauguration poem:  
• “There is always light.  
• Only if we’re brave enough to see it.  
• Only if we’re brave enough to be it.”
- There has never been a more important time, for us to be brave enough to be the light.
- And to help create the path forward for our university, our students and our community.
- It will be very hard work in the coming months as we determine what comes next.
- But I’ve seen your talent, your commitment, your resilience.
- I know TOGETHER we will be that light.
- Thank you so much.
- I wish you good health and I can’t wait to see what we achieve together in 2021.