

Report to Community 2021

Remarks as Prepared

- Thank you, Scotty!
- And thank you all for attending today from your homes, offices, or wherever you might be tuning in from.
- I miss seeing you all in person but look forward to the day that can happen again.
- When I arrived here in the summer of 2019, I was excited to launch a listening and learning tour to get to know all of you.
- I could never have predicted that just seven months into my presidency, the ground beneath our feet would shift so dramatically.
- I know it hasn't been an easy time for anyone – and I want to bring voice to the fact that each of us has endured a year of disruptive national and global events.
- What we've all come to understand is that navigating life in the midst of a single crisis is challenging.
- But navigating amid concurrent crises is truly demanding and requires heroic, visionary and collaborative leadership from us all.
- I am grateful for the tremendous support of the California State University system, led by Chancellor Joseph Castro, for placing the CSU commitment to student success and health and safety at the forefront.
- I want to thank San Marcos Mayor Rebecca Jones for her partnership – I remember calling her in March when we first went virtual and she was so generous to offer her support.
- I've also been inspired by the leadership of our other regional mayors –Carlsbad's Matt Hall, Vista's Judy Ritter, Escondido's Paul McNamara and Oceanside's Esther Sanchez, who have been focused on serving the diverse needs of our region during this time.
- Our resilience as a region is a credit to the collaboration and work of these leaders.
- I'd like to add my congratulations to our Community Partner of the Year – the County of San Diego Health & Human Services Agency.
- County Supervisors Jim Desmond and Nathan Fletcher, Director Nick Macchione, Public Health Officer Dr. Wilma Wooten and the heroic healthcare and support staff - thank you for your tireless work in the fight against COVID-19.
- When we couldn't celebrate the grand opening of our Viasat Engineering Pavilion late last March, it was a great disappointment.
- While we still look forward to that opening, together we were able to temporarily pivot that space to become a County COVID-19 testing center while our engineering program is virtual for now.

- To date, the CSUSM testing location has served up to 2,500 individuals a day – one of the busiest centers in the County, playing a critical role in our collective efforts to slow the spread, while allowing us to better serve our own students and employees.
- And in this unprecedented battle to beat the pandemic, just this Sunday we partnered with the County and Tri-City Medical Center, Palomar Health, and UCSD Health to open a COVID-19 vaccination superstation at our Sports Center.
- This cross-system partnership between various sectors of health and higher education is truly a testament to the leadership of our region.
- And as an anchor institution of North County, contributing to the health and wellbeing of our region is a vital and foundational part of our mission.
- We are grateful for the opportunity to serve our community.
- Of course, every new university president expects there will be challenges when accepting the job.
- But navigating a global pandemic?
- And nobody warned me about an impending economic crisis!
- I can tell you with confidence neither were on my list!
- I've now spent over half of my tenure at CSUSM as president to a primarily "virtual campus!"
- When my old colleagues back East ask me how I like California, I have to tell them I haven't gotten out much further than my own neighborhood!
- I – like you – have never spent so much time in my own home in my entire life.
- So much is in flux, but the fundamental parts of our university are unchanged.
- Despite the difficulties of this time, we continue to get up every morning with the same sense of purpose and mission:
 - to be the engine of this region – partnering with YOU to solve our most pressing issues; and preparing our students to be the leaders of our changing future.

CSUSM's COVID Journey

- I started my tenure as president with a Listening & Learning tour, meeting with many of you in our community – as well as alumni, faculty, students, staff and other constituents who care deeply about Cal State San Marcos and where we go next.
- Unfortunately, that in-person listening tour was cut short due to COVID when, on March 11, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic.
- That same day, I announced to our campus community that we would begin the transition to remote delivery of classes.

- I am still in awe of the fact that our faculty were able to transition their courses online – with almost zero advance notice – in just four short days.
- Meanwhile, our staff worked at lightning speed to ensure that students would have access to the services and resources they would need in a virtual environment while also confronting immediate challenges related to health and safety.
- In just a matter of days our CSUSM family came together to meet the moment.
- Our IT team got hundreds of laptops and wireless hotspots into the hands of our students who otherwise would not have digital access.
- Our Faculty Center developed and launched training focused on online teaching, accessibility and equity, and student support structures.
- Our student services areas launched a web portal to serve as a digital “one-stop-shop” for students, connecting them to tutoring, academic support, advising and more.
- Our University Library launched a COVID-19 Community Memory Archive to collect the memories of this time from members of our region.
- Our Safety and Health team organized a collection of surplus PPE – including surgical and N-95 masks, face shields, nearly 50,000 pairs of gloves and four ventilators – and donated them to our healthcare partners across the region.
- And a final note of gratitude - our Advancement team - with the support from so many of you – raised over \$130,000 in emergency relief for our students.
- I want to thank our longtime supporters Carleen Kreider and Dick Lansing who co-chaired the initiative and helped accelerate our fundraising efforts with a \$25,000 matching gift.
- And this is just a highlight – people at every level went beyond the call of duty, raised their hands to volunteer and stepped up when the moment called for it.
- As spring semester came to close, we put our heads together to come up with a creative and safe way to celebrate our graduates.
- In only two weeks, we planned Graduates on Parade – an event inspired by the perseverance of our students that truly reflects our campus’ innovative spirit.
- One of the first graduation parade events of its kind – we were featured in Buzzfeed, Reuters and The New York Times, and garnered media attention around the world.
- To see the smiles and tears of joy on the faces of our grads was one of the biggest highlights of my career.
- Then, over the summer, we worked through ever-changing information to create a fall 2020 operation proposal – and our plan was the first in the CSU to be approved.
- Meanwhile, hundreds of our faculty participated in professional development to further adapt their courses to the virtual environment.

- One of our kinesiology professors – Dr. Tumay Tunur, who studies virtual reality, was even featured in Forbes for the way she incorporated more gamification into her teaching.
- Students have told Dr. Tunur that they appreciate this flexibility and have reported lower stress levels.
- During this time, we've forged connections in a socially distanced way through virtual meetings, conferences, book clubs, retreats, arts and cultural events.
- At times, I've reaped the benefits – like being able to attend a virtual alumni event in London without the long-haul flight!
- And at other times I have lamented our ultra-reliance on electricity!
- They forgot to tell me when I moved to California that backup generators due to public safety power outages are a must!
- But I've been unexpectedly grateful for the way that the online environment has provided a window into each other's homes and lives in ways that weren't possible before.
- I've enjoyed getting to peek into the personal lives of our employees and friends, meeting children, spouses and pets.
- In August, I even adopted a puppy – Bailey – who has made his presence known in Zoom meetings a few times!
- In fact, he jumped into my lap midway through a San Marcos Kiwanis presentation ... and then everyone brought their pets out!
- There are certainly positives of this time that we'll take with us into the future.
- But I won't pretend that this has been an easy time.
- Over this last year, we have endured multiple, intersecting crises simultaneously – health, economic and racial justice.
- These are the “pandemics within the pandemic.”
- In particular, we have come together to hold brave conversations about systemic racism in all its forms and how we can not only help address discrimination in the world but right here within our own community.
- In August, I shared action steps we would take – building on and further amplifying the work of many who have been engaged in moving social justice and diversity forward for many years on our campus.
- Those commitments are posted on the Office of the President website, and Interim Chief Diversity Officer Ranjeeta Basu and I will be sharing a progress report this month.
- I want to thank community partners Alma Sisco-Smith, Raye Clendening and Satia Austin from the North San Diego County Branch of the NAACP and the North County African

American Women's Association for meeting with me and sharing their thoughts with how we can further support our Black students, faculty, staff, alumni and community.

- They emphasized to me the importance of deep commitment and ongoing work and partnerships.
- I also want to thank Nancy Maldonado of the Chicano Federation for her time – highlighting the needs of our Latinx populations across our region and how we can partner together to create further synergies.
- She pointed out the differential impact of COVID-19 on Latinx women in the workforce, and how CSUSM might help address this gap.
- Universities are important forces of social change and, here at CSUSM, our commitment to racial and social justice is unwavering.
- There must be no doubt, Cal State San Marcos is a university of and for our region – and that means ALL aspects of personal identity are welcomed, celebrated and valued – from race to ethnicity to religion, ability, sexual and gender identity.
- This is a commitment you can count on me to lead in partnership with all of you.
- I don't think any of us in our lifetime have confronted a set of circumstances as broadly complex and demanding as the issues we are facing now.
- Yet, even in these difficult times – CSUSM continues to be a place of perseverance and resilience – lifting up individuals and communities.
- 2021 will no doubt be another year filled with uncertainty – but our mission and values will light our path forward, particularly as we consider how we might plan for a modified campus repopulation.
- Right now, we are working through various repopulation scenarios, keeping our four guiding principles at the forefront in all their planning:
 - Our people;
 - our students and their success;
 - our long-term sustainability as an organization;
 - and championing an innovative mind set for the future.
- These guiding principles are built upon the public promise that our founders made just over 30 years ago.
- Some of you know about my personal connection to CSUSM's first president – Dr. Bill Stacy.
- He was a mentor to me at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, the campus he went to lead as chancellor following his time here.

- He told me how much it meant to him to be a part of building this campus from the ground up, working side by side with faculty, staff and community leaders to ensure that our mission would be aligned with the needs of our region.
- And just recently, I enjoyed a conversation with a long-time university supporter who highlighted the mark that all our prior presidents have made. I have such appreciation for this legacy of leadership that has come before me.
- During that conversation, that individual shared that people were wondering what my legacy will be.
- For me, it's not about what "I" will be known for – it's about us and our hopes and dreams – which we will accomplish together.
- COVID-19 has permanently changed higher education across our nation.
- Like so many of you, we have faced difficult moments and budgetary setbacks – this year alone we faced a nearly \$18 million loss.
- In addition, we overcame other difficult moments – particularly related to fiscal stewardship and the misuse of public funds by a former employee.
- But I pledged to you last year that I would lead from the foundation of our shared values of intellectual engagement, community, integrity, innovation and inclusiveness.
- That's exactly what we have done.
- Regarding our budget – we proactively developed cost-saving scenarios and responsibly used a portion of our reserves.
- Regarding fiscal stewardship – we took immediate steps to implement new guardrails, improve processes and protocols.
- Despite these and other challenges that are sure to come our way, one thing you can know: I will not shy away from difficult moments; and we as a university community won't hesitate to confront them head on.
- While no organization nor leader is perfect – what I know is that we are a university that will not settle.
- Because this is a place that strives to continually improve and transform.
- This is a place that serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration for so many.
- This is a place dedicated to an inclusive post-pandemic recovery for our region, and
- Together we will lead the way forward.
- Many things are uncertain – but not CSUSM and our role in our community.
- We are here.
- We are leading the way with you.

- As I've shared with many of you, I had the tremendous benefit of growing up on a college campus.
- My parents both worked at Tennessee Tech – my father a professor of history, my mother provided administrative support to the School of Engineering.
- Their parents had immigrated to Canada and my father grew up on a farm, dreaming of going to college.
- I give so much credit to my parents for giving me the privilege of growing up in this environment.
- Their success triggered a generational ripple effect on our family.
- I would not be a university president today had it not been for their hard work and commitment to education for myself and my sisters.
- That's what I want for all of our region's students – and that's why I am a part of Cal State San Marcos, a university known for its commitment to educational opportunity.
- Higher education has always been an escalator of social mobility but there continues to be a clear divide in who has access to an education and who does not.
- And the many crises of this time have only further widened that divide.
- 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.
- According to a September 2019 report by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, only six of 50 state flagship universities nationally meet an affordability benchmark for low-income students.
- Higher education is a launching pad toward higher economic status, and regional public universities like Cal State San Marcos are truly the proud vehicles of lower and middle-class social mobility.
- In fact, I am proud to share that we were recently ranked 28th nationally out of almost 1,500 colleges and universities in the Social Mobility Index – which measures the extent to which a university educates more economically disadvantaged students at lower tuition and graduates them into good paying jobs.
- We jumped up eight spots in that ranking in just the last year.
- In addition, we've eliminated the equity gap in graduation rates for our low-income and underrepresented minority students.
- So, why is this important? And, why should you care?
- At a November 2020 virtual conference focused on innovating for a diverse and inclusive workforce – hosted by our newly launched Innovation Hub – the San Diego Regional EDC shared eye-opening data that reveals we are now at a critical crossroads between our past and future.

- By 2030, North County will need 20,000 additional skilled workers for top innovation occupations.
- And 42 percent of all new jobs will require a degree or credential.
- But, across our County only 39% of people aged 25 or older have graduated from a college or university with at least a bachelor's degree.
- Of those, people of color are disproportionately underrepresented.
- But not here at Cal State San Marcos.
- We play a critical role in offering the people of our region access to social mobility via an affordable, quality education.
- Today, more than 55% percent of our students are first generation.
- About 42% are Hispanic or Latinx.
- We have the highest per capita number of American Indian students in the CSU.
- And over 10 percent are veterans or military affiliated.
- To welcome all these students is an honor and a tremendous responsibility.
- And when they graduate, over 80 percent of them stay here to work and contribute across all major regional economic sectors – a higher percentage than any other university in the area.
- From the southern tip of San Diego all the way to Southwest Riverside County, we proudly serve a region where so many students are not place-bound, but place-committed.
- Students who come from here and want to stay here, contributing to the betterment of their families, neighborhoods, and communities.
- They are our health-care workers...our K-12 teachers...our elected officials...our first responders...our engineers...our artists...our entrepreneurs.
- And many of them are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response and recovery.
- Alumni like Aaron Stirling, a nurse practitioner who works in the emergency room of a rural hospital in Imperial County.
- Aaron received his bachelor's in nursing in 2012 and then went on to earn his doctorate of Nursing Practice from USD.
- Now he's part of a team that responds to patients first arriving to the hospital with COVID-19.
- And alumni like Temet McMichael, an American Indian student who graduated in 2012 with a bachelor's in biochemistry.
- He went on to earn his Ph.D. in microbial pathogenesis from The Ohio State University.
- Today, Temet is an Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer for the CDC.

- His work focuses on tracking the disease and helping facilitate testing for healthcare workers, first responders and many others.
- Other alumni are working to confront other social challenges:
- Erik Caldwell, from the Class of 2004, is the City of San Diego's Chief Sustainability Officer, leading an ambitious effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- And Tiffaney Boyd, from the Class of 2016, serves as a legislative assistant and deputy press secretary to California Secretary of State Shirley Weber.
- But here at CSUSM we are exploring a broader definition of student success.
- And one measure I've heard many times, is how our alumni contribute to and better our community.
- And while we naturally can't take all the credit, we often point to their personal and professional achievements as perfect examples to why access to higher education matters.
- It's not just that college grads earn 84 percent more on average than nongrads over a lifetime.
- Or that college-educated professionals are more likely to be employed, in better health, or more civically engaged.
- It's much more than that – especially for us here at CSUSM where our student population and academic programs prepare students to lead in fields where diversity is so needed.
- In 2019, the San Diego Workforce Partnership conducted a survey and identified 72 priority occupations that will experience growth in San Diego.
- Some of those occupations include software developers, engineers, nurses, biological scientists, K-12 teachers, speech-language pathologists, and social workers.
- These occupations align with many of the programs we've developed in recent years with direct industry input.
- Programs like engineering – which launched in 2018 thanks to the foundational support of Viasat and was recently recognized as a preferred provider of software and engineering talent by the San Diego Regional EDC.
- And, I'll share as a point of pride: within a week of our transition to virtual learning our electrical engineering program was able to switch into a laboratory-at-home mode.
- Students conducted laboratory practices in their own residences without disruption, and because they had the tools available to them at home, they were even able to complete extra projects.
- Based on this success, more project-based learning practices are planned for the upcoming fall.

- But because of the demand, our engineering programs have already reached capacity.
- We want to support more students in reaching their career goals and grow this amazing pipeline of diverse engineers.
- Another program meeting the needs of our region is our Master of Science in Cybersecurity – recently designated by the National Security Agency and Department of Homeland Security as a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Education.
- This designation places us among an elite group of colleges and universities for addressing the critical shortage of cybersecurity professionals.
- We are now developing the curriculum for a bachelor's degree program in this subject with an eye on enrolling our first cohort this fall.
- And, to address our changing climate which is impacting not only our region but our world with a slew of effects including wildfires – we've added another new program, a minor in environmental studies.
- This program is an ideal companion to many of our degrees, ensuring that we have leaders who can meet the new and growing challenges ahead with an equity/social justice mindset.

Student Success

- As we build these in-demand programs, we need to ensure we are setting up our students for success in and out of the classroom – supporting them from orientation day to graduation day.
- Last year on my Listening and Learning Tour, our faculty and staff told me about the unmatched work being done to offer our students wrap-around learning and holistic services.
- You've probably heard of programs like TRIO – which supports low-income and first-generation students.
- In fall, 96% of their students persisted into spring semester – no small feat considering how difficult this time has been on our students.
- We also have programs like Project Rebound, which supports formerly incarcerated students; ACE Scholars Services that serves former foster youth, as well as our College Assistance Migrant Program, which supports the children of migrant farmworkers.
- Each of these innovative programs have played a key role in supporting special populations with unique needs, helping them integrate into our campus community.

- Moving forward, we want to take the services that these niche programs offer and expand them so that every student can be reached at every point along their academic journey.
- Thanks to the tremendous support of our new Provost – Dr. Carl Kemnitz who joined us last summer from San Jose State – as well as Dr. Lorena Checa, our Vice President of Student Affairs, and so many members of our Academic Affairs and Student Affairs leadership teams, we quickly mobilized to create a more comprehensive approach to our first-year student experience.
- That approach includes a new student success coaching program led by Dr. Valita Jones – which focuses on building individualized relationships with students and ensuring they have graduation in mind from the very beginning.
- What made this possible was the willingness and innovation of our employees to take on different roles during the pandemic.
- For example, staff who usually plan events went through a training program and now help students plan their futures.
- The goal of student coaching is to support students at the start of their CSUSM journey and then transition them into college-level internships, faculty and career mentoring programs, hands-on learning opportunities and undergraduate research.
- Because we know that when a student can envision a path from their studies to their future they are more likely to succeed.

Community-Engaged Learning

- For example, both our College of Business Administration and our College of Humanities Arts Behavioral and Social Sciences have mentoring programs that match students with professionals based on their goals.
- Through group and one-on-one interactions, students receive coaching on professional etiquette, interview skills and job-search strategies, enhancing their career readiness.
- Our Foundation Board Director Steve Wagner is one of the founding volunteers of the program.
- In addition to mentoring students, in pre-COVID days he even generously hosted networking receptions for mentors and mentees at his brewery – Stone Brewing Co.
- Steve recently shared with me how meaningful this experience has been for him and how he continues to stay in touch with his mentees even after they graduate.
- I have no doubt our students are benefiting not only from Steve’s wisdom but the experience of our many other volunteer professionals – without whom these programs would not be possible.
- In addition, our faculty are teacher-scholars who involve our students in their research and creative activities.

- Even during COVID-19, this commitment doesn't change.
- Just take, for example, Dr. Arun Sethuraman, assistant professor of biological sciences, who runs a population genetics research lab on campus.
- Under his mentorship, several of our students have been studying four species of ladybugs and wasps – working to understand how their unique physiological traits influence behaviors.
- In March, when our physical campus shutdown, one of our graduate students moved the entire greenhouse operation into her mom's garage, allowing experimentation to continue.
- Recently, the students presented their research results at a virtual biotechnology symposium, and two research manuscripts will follow.
- I also loved learning about how education professor Dr. Sinem Siyahhan, found a way to execute her upper division technology course online even though it usually includes a large service-learning component in local schools.
- During this time, she was able to run a virtual program across 25 schools in our region, giving our undergraduates the opportunity to not only learn STEM activities but teach them to K-12 children.
- And in one more terrific example of community-engaged learning, Lucy HG Soloman from art media and design – guided seven undergraduates majoring in education, art and physics in the assembly and distribution of 500 STEM art kits for school-age children, in partnership with the San Diego New Children's Museum.
- Dr. Siyahhan and Solomon's work represents just a sliver of all that our faculty are doing across our disciplines to equip K-12 students with access to what we call "STEAM" curriculum – Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics – preparing them with the knowledge they need to be successful innovators and problem solvers in today's complex world.
- And from what I've seen, the sort of learning experiences we offer here at CSUSM – are second to none.
- Which is so important because we know engaged learning – is one of the most significant ways students develop skills and command of material.
- This is key for our students' and their personal growth and social mobility – and it's key for the economic, social and cultural growth of our entire region.

Community Engagement/Partnership

- As a community engaged university – we are dedicated to strengthening and diversifying our region's economic, cultural, and social offerings.
- And during this pandemic – we've doubled down on our mission-driven priority to contribute to the welfare and wellbeing of the communities we serve.

- Our college of business created the CSUSM Business Response, Recovery and Resource Program with the goal of finding ways to help local businesses impacted by COVID-19.
- Our California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center led a survey with several nonprofits, finding deep educational inequities for American Indian students.
- This is key data that will allow policymakers and educators better serve our American Indian K-12 students.
- 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.
- Three of our faculty members – Drs. Konane Martinz, Richard Armenta and Laurette McGuire – are lending their expertise in health inequities to a San Diego County COVID-19 data subcommittee, which provides guidance related to health disparities impacting local underserved communities.
- And Dr. Bonnie Bade, professor of anthropology, is part of a team of social science researchers who conducted in-depth interviews with California farmworkers, documenting how the pandemic has exacerbated vulnerabilities within our food system.
- This data will inform efforts to change the trajectory of COVID for rural and immigrant communities.
- Crises can be a mirror for organizations, reflecting their character and values in how they respond.
- We at CSUSM embody an innovative, resourceful spirit – and it permeates throughout our learning organization.
- It is amazing to see how we continue to harness our research, scholarship and commitment to community for the greater good – even during a pandemic.
- And moving forward, we want to build even greater, mutually beneficial partnerships with you.
- In August, I announced the reorganization of our Division of Community Engagement, bringing it into the Office of the President with Dr. Patricia Prado-Olmos at the helm.
- Over the years, our Community Engagement efforts have broadened in scope and impact – culminating in our ranking number 27 nationally in community outreach by Great Value Colleges, which particularly noted our tribal engagement initiative as a standout.
- With this foundation laid, our next steps is the creation of a new economic development committee chaired by Dr. Prado-Olmos and Dr. Jim Hamerly, dean of our College of Business Administration.
- This committee will take a universal campus-wide look at how we further our commitment to our region's inclusive growth & economic recovery through education, research and innovation at the intersection of inclusion.

- Dr. Prado-Olmos also serves on the San Diego Regional EDC Inclusive Growth Initiative taskforce and she'll be helping us organize a summit focused on supporting a resilient and inclusive economic recovery in partnership with the EDC, MiraCosta College and the San Diego Community College District.
- We are proud to be part of this work because “inclusive growth” and creating equitable economic opportunities across all segments of our society – is exactly aligned with our mission to be a higher education engine of social mobility and social change.
- Just three short weeks ago, we welcomed a new dean of Extended Learning, Dr. Godfrey Gibbison, who joins us from the College of Charleston.
- He will be focused on helping us meet our region's increasing need for flexible, relevant professional and continuing education programs for career advancement and transition.
- When I met with the Innovate 78 mayors in November, they emphasized the need for opportunities for individuals to reinvent their professional careers – especially in the post-COVID recovery.
- In addition, we are excited to further support our region's military-affiliated population who face their own unique challenges when transitioning from service to college.
- And, as we work to create more streamlined pathways for students from our community colleges to CSUSM, I'm grateful for the partnership of MiraCosta College President Sunny Cooke, Palomar College Interim President Jack Kahn, and M-S-J-C President Roger Shultz.
- I also want to thank my San Diego colleague university presidents and chancellors: SDSU President Adela De La Torre, USD President Jim Harris, UCSD Chancellor Pradeep Khosla, and Point Loma's President Bob Brower.
- During this time, their partnership and support as we've navigated this time together has been amazing – sharing information, resources and ideas.
- When we all work together – higher education, industries, government and the private sector – our students and communities reap the benefits for generations to come.

Innovation

- And we know that collaboration boosts innovation – something that is key for transformative action in times such as these.
- So often, higher education has been called out for not evolving quickly enough to meet the most pressing needs – often relying on the value proposition of tradition.
- But CSUSM was founded to be a new, different kind of university...

- And today, we are taking that commitment to the next level, evolving into an innovation ecosystem that is both deep and broad.
- Last year I shared how excited we were to launch a brand-new innovation hub that would bring resources, education, and support across the disciplines together for students, faculty and our community.
- But little did I know that two weeks after its grand opening that it would be a virtual hub!
- Thanks to the determination of our founding faculty directors, Dr. Sam Clarke, assistant professor of entrepreneurship, and Dr. Chuck De Leone, professor of physics, not only did we get the hub off the ground but we:
 - Appointed a new director, Jill Litschewski.
 - started a quarterly innovation challenge that has already led to two new non-profits;
 - launched a student innovation incubator;
 - and began offering ongoing online tech talks.
- And this spring, the hub will be piloting a program where a team of students will develop concepts and technologies for the Department of Defense.
- Innovation centers aren't unique to universities.
- But a hub at a campus like ours – focused on the intersection of inclusive excellence and social change – positioned as a gateway to our region, is truly unique.
- Beyond the hub, we're nurturing an innovation mindset – a way of thinking where creativity, effort and passion come together to solve not just the problems we have right now – but the challenges of tomorrow.
- For example, in the fall we launched an internal creative innovation challenge, calling on our faculty and staff to submit ideas that support student success.
- Meanwhile, our University Library is conceptualizing a “makerspace” – a collaborative space that provides tools that allow members of our community to enter with an idea and leave with a prototype or project.
- And with the support of biology professors Betsy Read and Al Kern, we've implemented a pilot project in which our industry partners are invited to lease campus lab space with the goal of CSUSM students and faculty having an opportunity to participate.
- Volition America, a cancer diagnostics company, is our inaugural partner and we're so pleased to have them be part of our campus community.
- And as we think about innovation, I am continually impressed by all the ways our faculty experts are tackling research and other scholarly pursuits that seek to improve quality of life, elevate the human condition and deliver sought-after answers to the most pressing questions.
- For example:

- Dr. Kimber Quinney, from the department of history, studies the intersection of social media and elections around the world.
 - Dr. Deborah Morton, from our public health department, is an epidemiologist whose expertise lies in understanding chronic diseases like diabetes.
 - And Dr. Nima Zaerpour, in our College of Business Administration, is focused on how innovations such as robotics, automation and 3D printing can be integrated into supply chain systems.
 - And Dr. Gerardo Dominguez, from physics, has received grant funding to research nanoplastics in our oceans and waterways, helping regulators understand and address the risk to both humans and wildlife.
- I could go on – since coming to Cal State San Marcos I have been privileged to meet so many outstanding faculty.
 - Not only are they teachers at heart, but they are pushing the boundaries of knowledge for a better tomorrow.

Strategic Planning

- Today, we face so many challenges.
- Especially right now it would be easy to stay in reactionary mode and never make real forward progress.
- But together, we must venture ahead, with a new road map in place.
- That's why, this past fall semester, we launched a new strategic planning process which will build on our commitments and achievements to create the Cal State San Marcos of the next 30 years.
- Some of you have already provided us with your thoughts and ideas – and if you haven't already, I hope you will attend one of the upcoming forums or send me your hopes and dreams for Cal State San Marcos.
- Because this isn't just about me and my vision – it's about US and where we want to go together.

Conclusion

- I often say that our students are the change we need to see in the world.
- And I want to close today with one final story that illustrates this point – and the roll that we ALL play in nurturing our future leaders.
- I had the chance to get to know Kayla Nguyen this year.

- Kayla is a first-generation college student, currently in her final year, studying biotechnology.
- Following high school, she enrolled at Miramar College – but ended up taking a break to juggle three jobs and take care of her mother, who was diagnosed with a severe autoimmune disorder.
- Fortunately, Kayla found her way back to community college and was introduced to CSUSM through our Bridges to Stem Cell Research program – a year-long internship that we offer in partnership with Miramar and MiraCosta colleges.
- After transferring to CSUSM, and thanks to amazing faculty mentorship, she gained additional research and internship experience at UCSD and Johnson & Johnson.
- Now, through our TRIO McNair Scholars Program, which prepares low-income and first-gen students for graduate school, she’s applying to Ph.D. programs.
- Inspired by her mother’s condition, Kayla hopes to one day discover a cure for rheumatoid arthritis.
- I give so much credit to Kayla – her grit, determination, and commitment to her academic journey is inspiring.
- We have to make sure that other students with Kayla’s talent have the same opportunity.
- It takes a village to support student success – from creating educational pathways with our higher education partners, to partnering with industry to offer internships, to our faculty who provided the caring mentorship.
- And, on a personal note, getting to meet and interact with Kayla, inspired me to be a better president.
- She reminded me how fortunate I am to be a part of such a purposeful profession that has led me right here to Cal State San Marcos – where students often teach me more than I could ever teach them.
- When I think about Kayla, I want to make sure that every student can be afforded the same opportunities for learning and growing, so that we help them on their trajectory toward their best and greatest life.
- This morning, I know so many of you are still getting to know me.
- When the COVID-19 timeline allows, I can’t wait to get out from behind this computer screen and into our community again.
- And when the time comes, I’ll be counting on you to help me get reintroduced!
- But until we get the chance, I never want you to doubt who I am as a leader, or what I am absolutely committed to:

- leading the way forward in student success and social mobility, that ripples across generations;
 - standing up for social justice & equity on our campus and in our community until everyone knows that CSUSM is the place for them;
 - building bridges across industries and sectors to move our region forward in economic growth and inclusive recovery;
 - and championing innovation so that faculty and students can bring ideas and research to life, solving our most pressing issues.
- Even in these difficult times, I am proud and grateful to be the president of this amazing university, grounded in the public good... forging new pathways, new partnerships and new progress.
 - So much in our world may be uncertain... but not Cal State San Marcos.
 - We are here.
 - We are charting the course.
 - And, with you, we are leading the way.