

Cal State San Marcos Convocation

Wednesday, August 22, 2007

10:00am

California Center for the Arts, Escondido

Good morning again! If I haven't had the opportunity to greet you personally, or if you just stood up to be recognized for being new this year, then you haven't heard me say yet how energized and excited I am to start this academic year with all of you.

And, while I have joked over the past three convocations about being one of the newest members of the campus community—I got to stand up and be recognized in 2004—imagine my surprise to learn this year that just about a third of you today are newer than me!

But with every Convocation, I am energized and excited by the opportunity to share breakfast with this extended university family.

I am energized and excited by the opportunity to admire the impressive list of last year's accomplishments that make up our Honor Roll of Achievements. As President, I get to see them first!—in literal, Power Point detail - just how much excellent work is being done at Cal State San Marcos. I take the opportunity afforded by Convocation to appreciate what each division brings forward as their list of achievements to share with all of us.

And, most importantly, I am energized and excited by the opportunity that Convocation gives me to paint this big picture of Cal State San Marcos in all its colors, complexities and challenges—before we all dive back into the daily work of making that big picture a reality.

I mentioned my surprise at recognizing that nearly a third of you have joined us since I gave my first Convocation address in 2004. For you, let me say—and remind the old timers who have been here more than three years!— what we accomplished together during that time.

In my first Convocation address, the most important message I had to bring was that we were going to approach our work together, as a team.

The following year, as a team, we laid out strategic priorities and painted our big picture in the colors of academic excellence, student life, campus climate, community partnerships, and educational equity. And, in order for the university to improve overall as an organization, I asked everyone to begin a shift from a department or division first mentality toward a “university first” approach to decision-making.

And then, last year, I told you that our time is now, to meet the future and to claim it as our legacy. What a legacy! The CSU now calls us one of the five “hot” campuses based on student demand. So, let me spend a few minutes telling you how we got to “hot” – because that wasn't what we were being called three years ago.

In the spring of 2004, as soon as I arrived, I appointed a transition team to look around, take the temperature of the campus and report to me what they found—the strengths, the weaknesses, and the victories resulting from those first 14 years of the university’s existence. The Transition Team took an extensive survey of campus climate, receiving over 500 detailed responses that gave us a self-study of who we were and who we wanted to be.

Who were we three years ago? Well, we didn’t quite know, but if you were one of those 500 responders, you had some clear ideas about what you wanted:

- You wanted to move from a “can’t do” to a “can-do” team.
- You wanted to move from a “we-versus-they” mentality to “us”.
- You wanted to move beyond silos to the big picture, and
- You wanted to move from a university that was considered a “hidden treasure” into a recognized, regional resource.

And how you wanted this to happen was through enlightened decision-making, a spirit of teamwork, student-centeredness, and engagement with the community—during a time I might add, of reduced state funding for higher education.

You weren’t asking for much!

The Transition Team concluded their exit report by hoping it was not wishful thinking when they wrote to you [quote] “Please join us in rolling up our sleeves and renewing our collective commitment to make Cal State San Marcos a place where all of us can realize dreams.” [end quote]

And then you did exactly that!

- We strengthened our commitment to our mission by serving students, by inclusive decision-making and by working as a team.
- We aligned our budget with our strategic priorities.
- We created or maintained strong and visible community relations through purposive outreach and we formalized community partnerships.
- We began to approach equity and diversity with task forces brought together around educational equity, H S I status, and Veterans’ needs.
- And, together with our tribal friends and our ASI leadership, we developed the Tukwut Courtyard as a gathering place for students of every tribe and nationality.
- We improved campus climate through both more communication and better communication.
- We held presidential forums with faculty, staff, and students every semester.
- We increased recognition of our outstanding faculty and staff.
- We started connecting with each other through our Campus Connect program
- We improved internal communications with information accessibility, budget transparency, more inclusive deliberations, and public rationale for decisions made.

- And we really began to make assessment and data part of our decision-making.

The temperature dial began to move to hot! This fall's freshman applications alone totaled over 9,500—more than our entire student body last year. And last year's class was already the largest we'd ever served. Admissions and Records always feels the heat of a hot campus first!

Since 2004, our students of color have increased dramatically—by 33%. The Orientation video that you've just seen, produced by Student Life and Leadership, shows what the numbers just tell: this is a campus teeming with students, student life, and diversity. That's hot!

And all those students are growing younger each year. That's not just our perception as we grow older—we've got the data to prove it. Nearly 75% of the new undergraduates last fall were under the age of 22-1/2. That's hot!

And even with that kind of freshmen applications, nearly 46% of our new undergraduates this fall — over 1,000 students — are transfers from our community college partners. That's hot!

In just three years, we've graduated over 7,000 alumni—more than 37% of the 19,000 alumni who make up our living legacy to the region. That's a lot of smiling and shaking hands and reading names at the Del Mar Fairgrounds. That's hot!

Since 2004, we have raised over \$15 million dollars in private funds, over half a million dollars in federal appropriations, and our faculty and staff have generated close to \$30 million dollars in research grants and contracts. That's hot!

In the last three years, we have built Markstein Hall, sought and received funding to build the Center for Children and Families, and received a large donation to construct the McMahan House. We are finishing a 70,000 square foot remodel of Craven Hall which created Cougar Central next to Tukwut Courtyard. That's hot!

This has to be the only campus in the CSU where the idea of a systemwide strategic planning meeting was not met with eye rolling or feigned interest, but with a Field House full of faculty and staff saying, "How can we help?"

This has to be the only campus in the CSU that lives its strategic priorities as much as it lives its mission. This has to be the only CSU campus that thinks strategic priorities are hot!

We know who we are and what we do. We know what our big picture looks like—a place of engagement, a vibrant community, a student-centered learning environment. How do we know? Of the hundreds of accomplishments scrolling across the Honor Roll of Achievements from the past year alone, we received important validation about ourselves through, our Carnegie classification, our WASC accreditation, and the dramatic increases in enrollment.

The Carnegie Foundation named us a community engaged institution in December. To receive this, we submitted a portfolio of evidence that sought to demonstrate the alignment between our mission, our culture and leadership, and our community engagement. Our portfolio was not one of feel-good measures, but of data-driven proof:

- 19 partnerships reaching across San Diego, Southwest Riverside, and Orange Counties, that included nearly 200 regular and adjunct faculty and 150 staff members—partnerships that served over 6,000 high school, community college, and our own students;
- partnerships that were formalized in memorandums of understanding with two public school districts, with a Native American tribe, with a residential foster care academy; and

- partnerships with all of the region's Chambers of Commerce and economic development corporations.

The Carnegie Foundation could have given us our classification through curricular engagement—educating on and through community-identified needs, deepening students' civic and academic learning, enhancing community well-being, and enriching the scholarship of the institution.

The Carnegie Foundation could have given us our classification through Outreach and Partnerships—by proving and providing resources for community use and to our mutual benefit; and through collaborative beneficial research or application in economic development or communal capacity building.

The Carnegie Foundation applauded us as a community-engaged institution in both categories. We are one of only 62 institutions in the nation to achieve this classification in both categories – that's hot!

Let me applaud you for the outstanding outreach to our communities and the partnerships that have developed as a result!

And then there was WASC, what some folks on campus call their favorite four letter word. This past year, the campus engaged in a WASC development series that fueled discussions around our academic infrastructure and preparedness. Our Capacity and Preparedness Review Report—what the writing team called, “What We Did On Winter Break”—laid out our case for educational effectiveness.

Our capacity visit engaged us as a campus community. The WASC team applauded the significant steps we had taken to address diversity and inclusiveness, and in responding to and modeling the diversity of the region.

They applauded the significant increase in our capacity to support assessment from departmental to institutional levels. They commended our support of faculty development. They encouraged our progress in developing student co-curricular and academic educational objectives. They commented on our inclusive, transparent budgetary process which is tied to our strategic priorities. And they applauded our good progress in a planning model that supports effective decision making and resource alignment.

The commission letter commended us, and I quote “The University is to be commended on the development of a budgetary structure that is based upon a shared vision and shared priorities...and a university first philosophy.” [end quote]

That's hot! Let me applaud you for the outstanding work you have done over these past three years, as recognized and encouraged by the accreditation visit!

And, finally, we received our validation by becoming the university of choice for the largest number of students we have ever served—nearly 9,000 students showed up at our doors last fall—a 16% increase over the previous year alone. Every faculty member who stood in front of a packed classroom, every advisor, every librarian, every IITS staff—and certainly all of the student help desk!—everybody in Parking Services, everybody in facilities, anybody who even tried to drive up Craven Drive last fall knew that our time had come as the institution of first choice. And every one of you made it work for each other, for our students, and with that university first perspective. That's hot!

Even the San Diego Union Tribune affirmed our “giant strides” with—not a rose, but an entire “bouquet” for moving from an emerging campus to a giant in North County. That's hot!

The Transition Team's wish for a place where we could realize our dreams, has, indeed, begun to become a reality.

Let me applaud you for your outstanding patience and good will, and for your part in making this campus such a welcoming and supportive place for our students.

This morning's review of our progress and the many proofs of our successes bring us to today. Now we look at ourselves and see a maturing campus. We are a growing campus—a hot spot for higher education. And the next three years will be exciting—not just growing, but growing up.

If our time is now—and it is!—and if we're one of the hot campuses of the CSU—and we are!—are we where we want to be? As my children used to say while sitting in the back seat of the car on a long drive: are we there yet?

No, we aren't. Not yet. We have earned important confirmations that we are ready, willing, and able to go the distance in the classrooms and with our community partners. But how do we take the next steps? How do we know what it will look like in Cougar Country, and how will we know if we're there yet?

Last year, I gave you my vision of where I hope we will be for our twentieth anniversary celebration and I said:

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

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

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

2010...just three short years from now! What are some of my own bold and audacious goals that will make this vision a reality by then? With the similar boldness of the Transition Team, and with your help, I will say:

We will be the region's driving force by leading initiatives and partnering to meet community needs

- Through increasing MOUs by at least five public school partners and native tribes
- Through multiple efforts and partnerships to raise the region's educational attainment levels
- Through expanding community outreach and visibility through a maturing of our Chamber Champion program, our University Council outreach, and our Native Advisory Council
- Through messaging to assure that our region knows that education is important for both personal gain and for the region's viability and vitality
- Through strengthening and broadening our civic engagement and service learning opportunities, and
- Through outreach via traditional venues of degree and credential offerings as well as through extended education and leadership development.

Our graduates will reflect the region and be empowered to lead it because we will have

- increased our retention rates to 82% for first time freshmen
- increased the diversity of all of our campus groups
- achieved HSI status
- completed a new Social and Behavior Sciences building; begun more student housing for at least another 600 beds, begun planning our Humanities building and designing a Student Union

- increased our faculty and staff to over 1,200 with 40 programs of study
- moved toward NCAA status with basketball and volleyball and the facilities for athletes to compete and spectators to enjoy, and
- we will have a student enrollment of 11,000 while serving an extended learning community of another 10,000 lifelong learners, professional, and continuing education students.

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

- by doing all of the above as well as
- by raising an additional 30 million dollars for student scholarships, faculty development, learning facilities and for student life
- by retaining a “university first” approach and
- by promising for every day from now until 2010 to “commit to equity, embrace diversity”.

So by 2010 we will see a matured place of educational opportunity, a best place to work and study that continues to be a hot spot for cultural and community engagement.

We’re hot today but we’re not done. Just as we have done for the last three years, we will proceed for the next three years toward our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, promoting educational equity, academic excellence, student life, campus climate and community engagement.

Admittedly I have laid out some bold and audacious goals. But you made this a “hot” place to work and to study, you embraced teamwork, university first and our time is now. So, I’m confident we’ll achieve them. It will continue to be a busy time between now and when I address you in 2010. I’m asking you to you to turn up the heat!

Because of you – your dedication – and your achievements – Cal State San Marcos is HOT, and it’s going to get even HOTTER!