President points to a bright future in his final Spring Address

Video of the address

President Alexander Gonzalez, in a final and heartfelt University-wide address to the Sacramento State campus, today called on faculty and staff to build on the achievements of the past 12 years to better serve students and the community.

“This is an incredible university in a very diverse community. We need to ask ourselves: What can we do better?” Gonzalez said in his 2015 Spring Address. “What can we do to help our students be more successful? How do we engage the community? How do we convince the community to support us? For us to be successful, it’s going to take the commitment of faculty, staff and administration, as well as the community.”

Gonzalez spoke to an audience of more than 350 people, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, friends of Sac State, and his wife, Gloria. He will retire at the end of the current academic year. The California State University Board of Trustees is expected to name his successor this spring. Gonzalez plans to return to Sac State as a member of the faculty.

In his address, Gonzalez spoke at length about Sacramento State’s bright future, including a proposed campus Master Plan – currently in the environmental impact report process – a newly adopted Strategic Plan, and the University’s efforts to address student success and deepen community engagement.

To that end, Gonzalez announced that Sacramento State will create an Institute for Water, Energy, Sustainability and Technology, also known as iWEST, a hub for the fusion of science and policy in the Sacramento region and California.

“Since I arrived here nearly 12 years ago, I’ve attempted to engage the University and integrate it with the greater community for everyone’s benefit,” Gonzalez said. “I heard from numerous alumni and regional business leaders that Sacramento State seemed to be aloof, if not out of touch, with the local community. I believe we have made major strides so that this is no longer the case.”

Gonzalez said the Master Plan will create a true partnership between Sacramento State and the community. “That’s something we should all be very proud of,” he said.

The Master Plan will add more housing on or near the campus for students, faculty and staff, as well as additional bike lanes, all with the goal of reducing the University’s carbon footprint. The CSU Board of Trustees is expected to approve the plan in May.

Among other highlights of the president’s 35-minute speech:
• The Center for International Programs and Global Engagement, expected to open by this fall, will be committed to positioning the University as more globally oriented and internationally connected.
• Sac State has added nearly 90 new faculty members over the last two years.
• Groundbreaking for a 416-bed residence hall next to the American River is anticipated for September. It will house approximately 2,000 students in “a unique village setting” and could be ready for the Fall 2017 semester.
• Associated Students Inc. (ASI) plans to open an on-campus food bank to help students who face financial difficulties and need help to put food on the table.
• A new, strong branding and identity campaign will promote the University with focused messages and a consistent look.
• Sac State received $300,000 from the Keck Foundation to fund a three-stage program to develop, integrate, link and evaluate scientific research in the Department of Biological Sciences.
• The Department of Foreign Languages, in partnership with CSU San Bernardino, was awarded $310,000 from the Department of Education to strengthen foreign language in the healthcare professions.

“I hope the next president will recognize that what has been achieved here has been accomplished by the faculty, staff, students, administration and the community. And with that insight, I hope the new president will take Sacramento State to the next level. I believe the building blocks are in place to do just that,” Gonzalez said.

He said the state’s funding for higher education will give the CSU a 4 percent budget increase for 2015-16 and an additional 4 percent increase the following academic year.

“Overall, I have to say the budget is as sound and stable as it has ever been during my tenure here at Sacramento State,” Gonzalez said. “In large part, it is because of the approach we have taken on this campus and the good work of the University Budget Advisory Committee (UBAC) and all of you. That has allowed us to weather the drastic reductions of the past several years.”

As for the future, Gonzalez noted that Latinos and Asian Americans are the state’s fastest-growing populations. He questioned whether attending college “will be limited to those who can afford it, or will access still be a part of the state’s commitment to future generations of Californians?”

At the conclusion of his talk, the president went off script to answer the question he said he’s been hearing a lot these days: What will you miss most about Sacramento State?
“It’s you, the people that make up this University,” Gonzalez said. “When Gloria and I moved here from San Diego, people said, ‘How can you leave San Diego?’ When we came up here, in a very short time, we learned that people make the difference. This is going to be our home. I may run across you in Costco.

“We are going to be a part of this community,” he said. “I’m going to stay involved with the University. And if I can make a difference, I will.”

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