Good morning.

Thank you for coming today, and welcome to the beginning of the Spring Semester 2015.

It’s good to see everyone back on campus.

I hope that you all had a nice holiday break. I also want to welcome all the parents, alumni, community members and friends of the University in the audience today.

As most of you know, my address to you this morning as the President of this University will be my last official report to this gathering of faculty, staff, students, alumni and community members.

As I have often said, I’m proud of what we have achieved together over the past 12 years. But I will talk more about that later. For now, we all have another semester before us, and much to do and strive to achieve.

This semester, we have two prominent new hires to introduce. Provost Fraka Harmsen recently announced the hiring of two new deans.

As of February 2nd, Dr. Pierre Balthazard will assume the position of the dean of the College of Business Administration.

And a month later, on March 2nd, Ms. Amy Kautzman will be our new dean of the University Library.

Thank you, Provost Harmsen, for adding two more highly skilled individuals to our University’s academic talent pool. I’m certain the entire University community will benefit from the new insight and perspective Dr. Balthazard and Ms. Kautzman bring to our campus. I’m sure we are all looking forward to meeting and interacting with both of them.

And for those who haven’t yet had the opportunity to meet him, let me introduce one more dean that joined our campus last semester: Lorenzo Smith, dean of the College of Engineering and Computer Science.

Again, welcome aboard.
Speaking of additions to our campus, in the past two years, we have added and welcomed nearly 90 new faculty members.

We should all take pride in this academic growth. After years of not being able to hire new and replacement faculty, we are finally making strides that will make a difference. It is, after all, about our students, and this exemplifies our commitment to our goal of providing access to a quality education.

Taking full advantage of our increasing faculty and staff are 1,575 undergraduates and about 225 graduate and credential students that will be joining us this Spring Semester. The total student headcount for this spring is likely to exceed 27,000. Our annualized student enrollment, however, will be within our campus goal and will slightly exceed 29,000 students.

I’d also like to report that we have received almost 35,000 undergraduate applications for admission for Fall 2015, up over 4 percent from last year.

Interest from students in the Bay Area and Southern California continues to increase. What we set as a goal many years ago has been achieved: Sacramento State has become a highly desired destination campus.

As we all know, the Governor’s budget and the funding of higher education has been an issue in the media these days. While the fight with UC over potential tuition increases does not include the CSU, we still are a long way from being fully funded. While the Sacramento Bee reported recently that applications for the CSU and Sacramento State are up as much as 5 percent, the Governor is holding the line in funding for the California State University.

But overall, I have to say the budget is as sound and stable as it has ever been during my tenure here at Sacramento State. 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 and all of you that has allowed us to weather the drastic reductions of the past several years.

Thanks to the Governor and the passage of Proposition 30, we still have another year of a 4 percent increase in our budget for 2015-16 and an additional 4 percent increase for the following year.

Unlike three or four years ago, the CSU system and Sac State are closer to reaching a financial position that will allow us to plan and reach our goals for the immediate future.

Thus far, the Governor has fulfilled the promise he made to the CSU. This will allow us to continue to provide an exceptional educational setting for our students as well as maintain and grow a workforce that will continue to influence the region and state of California.

As always, my usual caveat applies here: The budget can go through many incarnations between now and the end of the summer.
But what is important for us to consider is that the Governor has once again emphasized that it is not business as usual. Whether it’s funding healthcare, state prisons or social programs, the funding of public education is still under scrutiny.

A year ago, the Governor said, and I quote: “The state must continue to rebuild its universities’ budget, but only in a manner that is sustainable over the long term.”

Here at Sac State, with your help, we are working on the issue of sustainability on many fronts. While we have been meeting our enrollment targets, we are also looking at our programs and the issues associated with providing the best quality along with the best use of our resources. In fact, yesterday a group of us from across the campus met to discuss how we can deliver our academic and support programs in a way to better assist our students in making more rapid progress toward their degrees. Our campus’s Graduation Initiative has to be at the forefront of what we will do over the next several years. Not only is the state of California calling for more efficiency, but also the rating system proposed by the Obama Administration is certainly going to impact us directly. The Graduation Initiative is part of our Strategic Plan and is integral to the major areas encompassed by the plan.

Let me say that I was impressed by the level of the discussion we had and the willingness of the participants to look at what I see as the fundamental operation of this campus; or as I like to say, “what we do and how we do it.” I’m looking forward to the continued deliberations and the development of a clear set of actions we can take as a campus to help improve the graduation and degree completion rates of our students. I think all of us here would agree that our students come first and they deserve the best. Within that context, the Board of Trustees and Chancellor have set a target for how much each campus can grow its student population for next year in line with available funding. As a result, we will continue to be careful in terms of our enrollment and admit only those students we can serve effectively. For those reasons, we are projecting continued slow growth in future student enrollment.

Yes, there are more eligible students applying than we can accept, but whomever we accept, we need to ensure that they will receive not only a quality education but also one that is timely and efficient.

Let me shift to some examples of what we are doing at Sac State to achieve those goals.

Last October, the Department of Physical Therapy held a grand opening of their new state-of-the-art facility in Folsom Hall.

The department welcomed its third cohort of doctoral students to the program, bringing the new doctoral program to full enrollment.

Another big milestone in the life of the College of Health and Human Services and the University occurred at the Winter Commencement when, for the first time, a cohort of Physical Therapy Doctoral students participated in the ceremony.
On many fronts, both within our campus community and the outside world, many individuals and organizations are creating new sources of funding and services to enhance the campus experience for our students.

Last fall, the University Foundation held its third annual Endowment Update breakfast, celebrating the foundation’s one-year return on endowment of 13.1 percent. From those earnings, 4 percent or more than $800,000 was used to fund student scholarships and campus programs.

The University Foundation now has more than $37 million in assets – up more than $6 million from last year.

The University was also a recent recipient of a $300,000 grant from the prestigious Keck Foundation. This grant is funding the Sustainable Interdisciplinary Research to Inspire Undergraduate Success Project, which is a three-stage program to develop, integrate, link and evaluate scientific research within the curriculum across 12 existing lab courses in the Department of Biological Sciences.

With this grant, students conduct scientific research about a real-world problem. In this instance, as part of our continual outreach to our surrounding community, our faculty and students are exploring the human impact on the American River ecosystem.

The University’s second annual Giving Tuesday, last December, raised more than $71,000 from 267 donors to 80 separate programs, departments and scholarships. That’s a 30 percent increase in gifts given during a 36-hour period.

That’s something worth applauding.

The College of Arts & Letters has also received two major grants worth noting.

Dr. Bernice Bass de Martinez and Dr. Maria Mayberry of Foreign Languages, in partnership with CSU San Bernardino, were awarded $309,810 by the U.S. Department of Education’s Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Languages program to strengthen and improve foreign language in the health care professions.

The CSU Commission for the Extended University awarded a $95,740 grant to a three-campus partnership that includes Sacramento, Long Beach and Los Angeles to build a training academy that serves the Workforce Development Community across the state.

This program will serve front-line staff, managers and executives in California’s Workforce Development Industry.

Student Affairs and Academic Affairs have collaborated on a series of Student Success grants and have been awarded $220,000 to support new initiatives and programs targeted at student success.

As I have often said, access is critical, but if it doesn’t lead to success, we are not serving our students.
Our Veterans Success Center recently received a check from Wells Fargo’s “It Feels Good to Give” ATM pilot project. This unique pilot program honored customers who celebrated notable anniversaries for doing business with Wells Fargo this year.

When making an ATM transaction, customers saw a brief message on their screen asking them to choose one of four nonprofits where a small donation would be made to celebrate their anniversary.

From this program, the Veterans Success Center received $8,750. This was in addition to the $50,000 grant already provided by Wells Fargo to the center earlier this year.

To further support students in need, Student Affairs, working with Advancement and UEI, recently established an Emergency Grant Fund to help students who experience sudden, short-term financial emergencies.

Last semester, students working with the Alumni Association held a Dance-A-Thon that raised more than $14,000 for the fund.

Today, students in need can be referred to Student Affairs. And by the way, donations will always be accepted through University Advancement.

And finally, as part of student support, ASI is working on opening an on-campus food bank to assist students who have run into financial difficulty and need help to simply put food on the table.

Our students are receiving support from a variety of sources. Thank you, everyone, for your efforts and achievements in this endeavor.

As I mentioned earlier, this will probably be the last time I will address you as President at this type of gathering. So it’s a good time to reflect on the past as well as look toward the future.

Since I arrived here nearly 12 years ago, I’ve attempted to engage the University and integrate it with the greater community for the benefit of everyone.

In addition to the hundreds of ways our students, faculty and staff interact with our region every day, together we have moved the campus forward on a number of fronts. For example, we formed, launched and achieved Destination 2010, established UBAC so that there is now budget transparency, proposed and will soon approve a new long-term Master Plan for the University, and developed a new six-point Strategic Plan.

We could not have achieved this without the buy-in and support of everyone here today.

The Strategic Plan is currently being implemented, and each of the colleges and divisions is developing plans that will be commensurate with the University’s plan.
In Academic Affairs, for example, already two major initiatives are underway under the leadership of the provost.

Sacramento State is creating iWEST, the Institute for Water, Energy, Sustainability and Technology, as a hub for the fusion of science and policy to focus on the state and region’s water, energy and sustainability issues. From aging infrastructure to population growth to climate, we face a complex set of problems that threaten the future of California’s economy and environment. iWEST brings together the power of interdisciplinary science through an integrated research and educational platform, utilizing a range of emerging technologies to inform policy, education, outreach and behavioral change. iWEST is designed to create and foster an environment of inquiry, of action-oriented problem-solving, and engaged research that advances public awareness of the complex relationships behind water, energy and sustainability questions. A national search for an executive director to lead the institute will begin this Spring Semester.

In an effort to advance and facilitate international engagement at Sacramento State, a new Center for International Programs and Global Engagement has been established and will be housed in a new facility in the library. The Center for International Programs and Global Engagement is committed to positioning the University as more globally oriented and internationally connected. The new Strategic Plan places growth of international students, and an increase in the number of Sacramento State students who study abroad, as a major goal of the educational effectiveness mission of this University. Both domestic and international students and faculty will be able to take advantage of a variety of services ranging from internationalizing the curriculum to study-abroad options. The new center is slated to be open and fully functioning by Fall 2015.

While I believe our Strategic Plan will serve the campus well for the next several years, I believe our new Master Plan will serve us well into the future.

The Master Plan succinctly defines the purpose and mission of Sacramento State, why we are here and why we will continue to be an integral part of the fabric of the greater Sacramento region.

I would like to thank Vice President Mike Lee and his staff, the entire Sacramento State community, and the city and county of Sacramento at large for their work on this project.

This was an incredibly comprehensive process. We wanted to not only provide a framework for continued educational excellence for our students – always our first goal – but we also wanted to reach out and embrace the community, our neighbors.

When I arrived, I heard from numerous alumni and regional business leaders that Sacramento State seemed 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.

The Master Plan will make that partnership between Sacramento State and the community a reality. That’s something we should all be proud of.
The Master Plan is currently going through the local EIR process, to make sure our neighbors are okay with the impact it will have on the surrounding area.

I’m confident they will be.

We are proposing more housing, additional bike lanes, signage and lockers. By the way, in the past couple of years, we have gone from one secure bike compound with 300 spaces to three compounds with 700 spaces.

So we definitely have the attention of students finding ways to get out of their cars.

UTAPS reports that bicycle usage on campus has increased significantly. A formal study on the topic will take place this Spring Semester.

One of the tenets of the Master Plan is to reduce our carbon footprint – meaning fewer commuter vehicles each day – and become a more sustainable community.

We also want to gradually turn the University into a more residential environment. That means providing more housing opportunities for students, faculty and staff on or near campus.

Not only do we need to create a cohesive and sustainable community, we also need to embrace the current community that surrounds us.

While the Master Plan is still a couple of months away from final approval, there is one piece of this document that will soon become a reality.

Our new north housing village residence hall will be the first time that we are taking advantage fully of our location next to the American River.

This new structure will add 416 beds for students living on campus, for a total of around 2,000.

The schematics have been approved, and I will take the final plan to the Board of Trustees in March. Once formally approved, and financing is secured, we hope to be able to break ground this September.

But this is only one piece of the plan. We anticipate that the Board of Trustees will approve the entire Master Plan in May.

To help get the message out to the campus community about the Master Plan and how it will create a “unique village setting” in the middle of our shared neighborhood, we will be launching a new Branding and Identity project.

This comprehensive effort by our marketing team will enable everyone at Sacramento State to promote a strong University identity through focused messages and consistent looks for promotional and other materials.
Also on the internal and external public relations front, we will see a redesigned Sac State home page launched by June 1st.

The redesign is in response to user expectations and technological improvements, and will result in a cleaner, easier-to-navigate set of web pages that will also be highly effective for use with mobile devices. Things have clearly changed for us at Sacramento State. Not just with the use of technology but in a myriad of ways. I’m proud to say I’ve been part of this change.

I’m proud to have served this campus for the past eleven and one-half years as President. And I’ve also been involved in public higher education in California for more than 35 years.

But while it has been a privilege, an honor and a pleasure, as the outgoing President, I believe I have earned a brief moment to leave you with some thoughts for you to consider for the future. These are focused on access, the state’s changing demographics and the core curriculum.

The state of California and the entire country are entering a critical period for higher education. We have to consider what higher education is going to look like for the next generation of students.

This is not the California of 1960 when the California Master Plan for Public Education was conceived and implemented.

Back then, if you met the requirements and had the capacity, you could attend, and most likely for free. Now, all these years later, not everyone can meet those requirements, and it’s certainly no longer free. The real question, of course, is, who will be able to take advantage of public higher education in the future?

Will attendance be limited to those who can afford it, or will access still be part of the state’s commitment to future generations of Californians?

We also have to take a hard look at the state’s changing demographics.

I know immigration reform is a hot topic, but it doesn’t make much difference. If you look at what’s happening right now, every other child being born in California is a Latino baby.

And these are not children of illegal immigrants; these are the children of parents who are citizens or are living here legally. In fact, just a couple of weeks ago, the UC released their figures on applications they received for admission, and for the first time ever, Latinos made up the largest group.

For the foreseeable future, the fastest-growing populations in California are going to be Latinos and Asians. That’s what California is going to look like in the next 20 years.

In a very short time, the children that have been born in the past few years are going to be the students accepted into the CSU system and here at Sac State.
I hope they are going to be prepared to come here and be successful. We’re fortunate at Sacramento State that we are already very diverse and have been working optimally at meeting the needs of our students. If I’m still around, I hope to see the next wave of students become our successful graduates. That will only happen if we continue to work with our schools and communities to ensure their success.

That’s an issue that we need to address today and into the future.

Finally, the current state of higher education in this country is trending more and more toward workforce development as the focus for undergraduate education. We can see it with the rise of the for-profit institutions and the government’s focus on “gainful employment.” In large measure, this move has been a reaction to financial aid and student debt issues. But I think what is also occurring is that there is a move away from the basic foundation of American higher education. That is, the role of the liberal arts as the core of undergraduate education.

Like all other campuses in the CSU, we have maintained the liberal arts as the foundation of our curriculum. It is embodied as General Education.

As a university, we have to maintain a balance.

We are not strictly here for workforce development; we still have to look at the liberal arts as the core foundation of what we do.

The university educational experience helps an individual lead a better life. It teaches creativity, how to evaluate situations and how to discriminate what is ethically right and what is wrong.

One doesn’t develop that type of intellectual awareness by only focusing on learning skills that will help secure a good job.

And that’s why I think we have to take a really hard look at what we do and how we do it. We have to ask ourselves, programmatically, are we doing the best we can? Do our foundational courses provide a coherent pattern and pathway to develop our students intellectually as well as help them develop life skills to prepare them for the future?

Today, we have a GE program that really needs to be examined and made relevant in response to the changes we are seeing in higher education. I think if we respond to this challenge, Sacramento State and our students will be the better for it.

As I enter my final semester as President, I’d like to think this is a good time for all of us to pause and think about the next steps we can take to secure the future of Sacramento State. This is an incredible university in a very diverse community. We need to ask ourselves, what can we do to be even better?

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, administration as well as the community.

We are the university in the capital of the most important state in the country. And I believe there is still much more we can do to be the most distinctive and important campus in this state.

In a couple of months, a new president will be announced, and the waiting and anticipation will be over.

Hopefully, the next president will recognize that what has been achieved here has been accomplished collectively 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.

I hope everyone here today and throughout the University and community will embrace my successor and work with her or him. You can rest assured that I will do everything I can do to make the transition as smooth as possible and that I will continue to focus all my effort on serving you and Sacramento State. And even after I step down, my plan is to retreat to the faculty, so I’m not going away entirely.

Again, thanks for being here this morning, and have a great semester.