Good Morning. I want to welcome all of you to the start of the fall semester and a new school year.

It’s good to see the campus community back together after a very busy and challenging summer.

I hope you enjoyed the break, and that you were able to spend plenty of time with family and friends. Taking time to rest, relax, recharge and get ready for the coming year is important for all of us; especially in this environment.

I also want to welcome all the alumni, community members and friends of the University who have joined us today. To our guests, I want to say that your friendship is critical to this campus, and we truly appreciate your continued interest, support and enthusiasm.

On that note, I would like to welcome a number of people who are new to the campus.

First, I’d like to recognize five new faculty who have joined us as critical replacements for our programs.

Also, Edward Inch is the new dean of the College of Arts and Letters.

Dr. Inch most recently was a professor at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington, but many of you will remember him from his year as an ACE fellow at Sacramento State five years ago.

Jane Bruner is the new associate dean of the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, replacing Laurel Heffernen, who retired.

Dr. Bruner comes from CSU Stanislaus, and she earned her B.S. in Biological Sciences from Sacramento State.

Karen Davis-O’Hara is serving as the new associate dean in the College of Education. She steps in for Kathy Norman, who was selected as dean at CSU Stanislaus.

In Administration and Business Affairs, Ali Izadian has joined the university as the Associate Vice President for Facilities Services.

Dr. Izadian has been a part of the CSU, having worked at CSU Los Angeles and CSU Northridge. Most recently he was at Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles.
As we are saying hello to these new colleagues, we also must wish a fond farewell to the dean of our College of Continuing Education, Alice Tom.

She will be retiring after 17 years at Sacramento State.

Dean Tom has generously agreed to stay on until we find a replacement, which should happen early this semester.

During her time here, she has made CCE into one of the region’s most trusted resources for education and workforce development.

I will miss Dean Tom’s strong leadership and keen knowledge of the regional, state and international communities.

Thank you, Alice.

Before I continue, I want to express my appreciation to each and every one of you who are here this morning.

The difficulties we continue to face as a campus have been well-documented, but those of us here today have risen to every challenge and persevered through some very tough times for public higher education – all while maintaining a high degree of professionalism throughout all of the turmoil.

For that, as well as for the work you do to advance our educational mission and help our students, you all deserve a very big hand.

For this fall, we again set a record for applications from prospective students, with more than 32,500.

The students admitted from this group will be able to benefit from a number of key changes on campus.

Facilities Services, in conjunction with Academic Affairs and IRT, upgraded 12 classrooms over the summer with smart technology.

We are bringing Zip cars to campus under a program that allows for hourly rentals so students without a vehicle on campus can effectively share a car to run errands or pick up pizza.

Two safety initiatives under way include a project to enhance bicycle security, with the goal of reducing bike thefts to zero.

And we have installed more than 100 environmentally friendly light fixtures as part of our extensive review of campus safety needs.
The Sacramento State Leadership Initiative enjoyed a successful launch, with 150 students earning Leadership Certificates. This promising effort is run by the Office of Student Organizations & Leadership.

I’m also told that in addition to creating a much more welcoming dining experience, University Enterprises’ refurbishment of the dining commons will make the food there taste even better.

This is the beginning of my ninth year at Sacramento State, and for those of you counting, it has been 32 years since I began my first job as a faculty member at Fresno State in 1979.

During this time, I have seen literally thousands of students come through the CSU.

Let me offer some perspective here.

In my first semester of teaching at Fresno State, the total student headcount in the CSU was almost 310,000.

In 2009-10, it was nearly 410,000.

That growth is more than 32 percent.

But despite those hundreds of thousands of success stories, here I am, more than three decades after I began, talking about how we need to refocus on demonstrating our value to the people of California – because times have changed for all of us in higher education.

By now, we are all too familiar with the disturbing funding trends for public higher education in this state.

The state budget passed in June handed the CSU a cut of $650 million.

And the probability is high that we could be facing an additional $100 million in cuts if revenues to the state fall short of expectations.

If this cut comes to fruition, we will again need to hunker down and figure out how we will manage. By working together, we will be ready to deal with this eventuality with the steps we have already taken relative to our university budget.

This is a good opportunity to recognize the University Budget Advisory Committee.

The task of creating a spending plan under the recent conditions is considered by many to be a thankless job, but I want the members of UBAC to know that they have my utmost thanks for their diligent work.

The past few years have dealt us challenge after challenge, and the members of UBAC have used their experience and deep knowledge of our campus to provide well-reasoned recommendations.
I wish I could guarantee that the worst was behind us in terms of the budget, but the lessons that we have learned tell us otherwise.

We know that the lack of public support is placing a much greater burden on the students themselves.

Following the passage of the budget, the Board of Trustees was forced again to raise tuition fees so we can keep our doors open.

Full-time undergraduate tuition fees are now nearly $5,500. When I started teaching in Fresno, that number was $144.

So when I say that the funding trend is disturbing, that certainly illustrates my point.

Now, it is always important to note that a third of the increase in tuition fees is set aside for financial aid.

And there was some better news at the federal level, as the debt ceiling compromise preserved the PELL grant program. At least, for now.

We also continue to raise private donations on campus, with Advancement and Development bringing in more than $10 million in private gifts and securing 10 new endowments last year.

Additionally, the Hornet Bookstore is lowering the cost of textbooks through its Rent-A-Text program.

More than half of the textbook titles are available for rent, which can save students more than 50 percent on the cost of books.

But I want the students who are here with us today to know that even with the help we are providing, I am well aware of the difficulties the higher tuition fees place on you.

You are working at a job, or more than one job, while taking classes and also trying to find time for family obligations and a social life – and now the state is asking you to pay an even larger share of the cost of an education.

For this reason above all, we owe you our very best effort in providing a quality higher education.

And that is what I want to talk about today:

How we can work together to make Sacramento State a campus for the 21st century.

Friends and colleagues, we have done much in this area in recent months and years.

Here are just a few examples:
The College of Business Administration has launched a Business Honors Program that is
designed to attract both students and employers.

Psychology professors Caio Miguel and Becky Penrod are mentoring students who are
helping children with autism.

This fall, we anticipate that the campus Air Force ROTC detachment will be the largest in
the state. And a remarkably high percentage of the detachment’s recent alumni have been
selected for prestigious flying assignments.

Professor Jenny Stark was instrumental in getting 14 student-produced films to the screen at
the California NextGen Film Festival in April. I know, I was there.

And the local section of the American Society of Civil Engineers is recognizing Professor
Ben Fell and three of our Engineering students at its banquet next month.

We also are celebrating important milestones in some of our best initiatives that serve the
community.

The CAMP program will celebrate its 30th anniversary this fall, and the 65th Street Corridor
Project has been bringing hope to an underserved area of our city for 10 years.

Initiatives like these were critical to Sacramento State earning a Carnegie Community
Engagement Classification.

I mention these latest milestones, not only because they make a tremendous impact in the
community, but also because we are doing a much better job of telling the Sacramento State
story to the community.

In the current budget climate, we literally cannot afford to hide our successes.

We must tell everyone who wants to listen that we are making a difference in our region and
state, in the academic community, and across the globe.

And for those who don’t want to listen, or who want to cut our funding, or shut off access,
we need them to hear us most of all.

They need to hear about Nicole Anderson, a 2011 graduate and former student trustee who
on Saturday was commissioned into the U.S. Marine Corps and intends to pursue a career in
law. …

… or Montana Hodges, an alumna who is following up the publication of her book on
geology with a video on the “bone wars” between fossil collectors and scientists …

… or Professor James Rae, who is in China teaching on a Fulbright Scholarship.
To this end, University Marketing has redesigned the Sac State Magazine.

And we have ramped up our efforts on the web, and especially in social media.

The Public Affairs and Advocacy staff have been hard at work and because of their efforts, you can find us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr.

Our friends, followers and viewers are growing every day, and most importantly, we have received a lot of positive feedback from all of our audiences.

The message is getting out there.

There is a strong appetite for the Sacramento State story, and our ability to tell that story is vital to our success in the years to come.

I purposely addressed all the bad news at the outset of my speech, because like the beginning of any new semester, today should be about the future.

We moved quickly under Destination 2010, with new academic programs, a more welcoming campus and stronger community partnerships, and I hope we can maintain this wonderful momentum.

As we move forward, bad budgets are forcing us to be more focused and strategic.
We have to examine efficiencies and improvements through the same lens, because we have no other choice.

Let me be clear about one point.

When I talk about efficiencies, I know that people are still, and will always be, vitally important to higher education — and that means both faculty and staff.

There’s a commercial on TV right now for the car insurance company Geico.
The one I’m talking about isn’t the one with the gecko with the British accent.

It’s the one where a mother sends her child to a day care run by robots — because, in her words, “Robots work for free.”

The commercial then goes on to show the robots failing miserably at caring for the children.

It ends with the tagline, “There’s an easier way to save.”

This commercial struck me because in a lot of ways, we are being pressured to be more like robots in how we deliver higher education.

I do not believe that is the future of higher education.

The future of higher education is about being more efficient and providing more value to those we serve.
But that begins with human beings, and the decisions that human beings make to better the University.

I am confident that we are all well-positioned to emerge from the economic downturn stronger than ever, and that is a credit to our dedicated faculty and staff.

Across campus, colleges, departments and the Faculty Senate are reviewing and revising curricula, with an eye toward improving matriculation, progress to graduation, relevancy and quality.

One department chair told me that his son declared a major at a University of California campus … during the first quarter of his sophomore year.

Then he learned he still wouldn’t be able to finish in four years.

So the chair worked to ensure it wouldn’t happen in his department at Sacramento State.

He worked with his faculty colleagues to revamp the curriculum and provide students with a path to graduation in four years – even if they transfer from community college without declaring a major.

This will save our students money, make the major more attractive, and open up seats sooner for new cohorts.

The College of Education has been especially proactive in this area, with Dean Vanessa Sheared and faculty working together on a comprehensive reorganization of the college.

They are moving away from departments in favor of branch areas for undergraduate, graduate and credential education.

These efforts are, and will continue to be, essential as we respond to the nationwide emphasis on graduation rates and closing the achievement gap.

The graduation initiative launched by the Chancellor’s Office has given us the opportunity to take a hard look at what we do, and we should all be very proud of the progress we have made.

Sacramento State’s plan is possibly the most comprehensive in the system, and the decision was made early on to have a student-centered focus.

We are looking at all aspects of instruction, support services, and student engagement.

And we are involving a wide spectrum of individuals in the discussion.

We want to be able to assure students and the public that Sacramento State is a place where students will succeed.
Our ability to deliver on this assurance will go a long way toward determining our fate as an institution of public higher education.

So far, the results are encouraging, and some pieces have already been implemented.

With help from ASI, we produced a guide that listed all of the University’s retention resources in one document, along with checklists for student success, academic advising and graduation requirements.

This guide was given to all freshmen and transfer students, and made available on the student web portal.

The Graduation Initiative Steering Committee also launched a retention tracking tool that tracks all tutoring, advising, and retention contacts across campus departments and program centers.

Rather than spend a lot of money on purchasing software for this tool, we brought in our IRT department to create our own program that is tailored to our needs.

This technology, along with a commitment to identifying and quantifying the reasons students drop out, is an important aspect of the committee’s work to improve our retention rate.

Already we are seeing the benefits.

Among freshmen who began in 2009, the retention gap between underrepresented minorities and non-underrepresented minorities has fallen to a level that is not statistically significant.

We also exceeded our annual benchmark goal for transfer graduation in 2011.

There is still much work to be done with the Graduation Initiative, but we are off to a running start.

I hope everyone at Sacramento State can become engaged in this important endeavor.

Now, in recognition of those who have worked very hard on this initiative, I’d like to take a moment to celebrate our achievements to this point.

So if you are part of the Steering Committee, if you have contributed to the ongoing efforts in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, or if you provided feedback at one of our forums or via email, will you please stand, while we give you a big hand.

Now, even as we focus on how we do things inside the University, we must remain mindful about what goes on beyond the boundaries of our campus.

This summer, we signed agreements with universities in Taiwan and South Korea to begin exploring academic and student initiatives.
Far too many of our students do not view studying abroad as a viable option, despite all of the enriching benefits.

In the other direction, having international students come here fosters a deeper level of cultural understanding on our own campus.

This leads to greater international networking, and lifelong relationships that span the globe.

Increasing our global presence is one way to promote these values, and if there are overseas universities eager to partner with us, we owe it to our students to seize the opportunity.

Likewise, the College of Business Administration is finalizing a plan to begin an MBA program in Singapore.

Closer to home, we signed an agreement with SMUD over the summer to formalize our commitment to developing energy efficiency technology through the California Smart Grid Center at Sacramento State.

We are also working with the City of Sacramento as the project to extend Ramona Avenue moves forward.

This will have a tremendous impact on us, as it will provide a direct link to the city’s proposed innovation technology village in the area south of campus.

And I’d like to remind everyone that we are following up on the success of last year’s University Convocation with another event on October 20.

The faculty members on the Convocation Committee, along with University Advancement, have done a tremendous job once again.

This year, our keynote speaker will be the author of the current One Book selection, Michele Norris.

I’m sure many of you recognize her as the co-host of NPR’s All Things Considered.

Before I close, I want to make one final point about the future.

What hangs in the balance right now is not just what happens with the state budget – even though it is hard to think about anything else.

At stake is the kind of campus we will have in the years to come.

Whether we will be attractive to students.

Whether we will successfully defend the value of the liberal arts and of critical thinking.
And whether the public will see us as a worthwhile investment, or merely as a quaint memory of how higher education used to be done.

Friends and colleagues, this is up to us.

And I believe we cannot wait for the economy, or the state, or anyone else, to bail us out.

The future rests with us, and us alone.

It rests in the hands and the ambitions of the Sacramento State family.

I know that we all believe that higher education is at its best when people interact with people, in classrooms and labs, in residence hall rooms, and around study tables.

It is this personal interaction that makes Sacramento State a true university, one that delivers the entire student experience – and treats students not as commodities, but as future leaders who will shape the course of our society.

As educators, we share a common devotion to improving the lives of our students, and in the end, their success is our success.

Thank you for your dedication to our students, in and out of the classroom.

Thank you for working to help this University develop its potential, and thank you for all that you do each day.

I look forward to another great school year.

Thank you very much.