

# **A Culture of Innovation and Change**

## **Spring Address**

### **January 18, 2018**

Just after the New Year, Jody and I got stuck in an airport on our way back home to Sacramento.

The waiting area was crowded, filled with young men and young women dressed in camouflage military fatigues.

I remember wondering, how many of these kids couldn't afford to go to college and decided to go into the military instead of working at some low-paying job at a big-box store?

And how many of these young men and women didn't get into college because there were no slots available for them?

When we were finally able to board, Jody and I were both lucky enough to get aisle seats.

Beside me sat a young man, maybe 19 years old, also dressed in military fatigues.

He kept opening and closing a pocket that was on his sleeve — I can still hear the sound of the Velcro separating and then going back together.

He was taking out and then putting back three somewhat worn 2-by-3-inch photos of a young girl, a young girl who couldn't be more than 18 years old.

I tried not to stare, but I couldn't miss the way his fingers touched her face — true love.

I will never forget the sadness in his face, this man who had decided to serve his country, to serve us, to sacrifice for us, a man whom I hope will be able to use his GI bill someday to go college.

We who work at universities, especially we who work at Sac State, are performing sacred work — as I say in every graduation speech, education is sacred.

I believe that, when I was putting myself through college as a custodian, I was doing sacred work.

When I was working as an advisor, as a secretary, as a research assistant, I was doing sacred work.

When I was teaching a class, I was doing sacred work.

When I was helping develop a new policy in the Faculty Senate or helping establish a new academic program, I was doing sacred work.

And even though some of you will be skeptical, today I am still doing sacred work in the administration.

Every volunteer at the Golden 1 graduation last month was doing sacred work.

Every time a student graduates from Sac State, all of us in this room have accomplished and made possible something sacred, especially in this turbulent, troubled world where

we are once again worrying about nuclear war, where hospitals are dropping off homeless people on the streets, where there is bigotry, racism, homophobia, religious intolerance, where we are unbelievably contemplating trading students' futures for building walls, where people are reporting that vile, vulgar, and racist comments are being voiced openly in the White House.

I believe in Sacramento State. I believe in each and every one of you.

I believe in our mission. I believe that we are the Capital's University. I believe that we are transforming lives. I believe that we are preparing our students for leadership, service, and success.

I believe that our students will transform this aching world because of the care that they receive at Sac State, because of the excellent education that they receive, that we provide.

But we have much further to go.

As I said, our work is sacred, but it is also practical.

According to the Public Policy Institute of California, in 2030, California's economy will need more than 1.1 million graduates who have bachelor's degrees than the state's universities are projected to graduate over the next 12 years.

I am still in shock with how many qualified students we turn away every year; and, although we celebrate them at every graduation, I often wonder how many of those applicants end up in the military or in low-paying jobs, all because of an enrollment cap that shatters so many American dreams of obtaining a higher education degree.

California's Master Plan for Higher Education was crafted in 1960, and does not and cannot meet the needs of today's California.

The California State University system is supposed to admit the top third of high school graduates, yet because of space and budgetary constraints, 17 of the 23 campuses, including Sacramento State, cannot admit all the qualified students who want to enroll.

Did you know that California ranks at the bottom — 47<sup>th</sup> out of all states — in “share of recent high school graduates who enroll in four-year colleges or universities”?

I didn't know that shocking fact until I read it in the Public Policy Institute of California's latest briefs.

To make matters worse, the Governor's proposed budget next year only increases the CSU system's budget with a 2.7% increase to the system's general fund.

2.7% translates into a mere 1.4% increase in the system's total operating budget, which doesn't even cover inflation.

The proposal has \$10 million less than what his administration led the Chancellor's Office and Board of Trustees to believe that we were going to get just a few weeks ago.

The State of California is clearly divesting from its sacred responsibility to educate its populace.

The Master Plan must not only be revisited; it must also be modernized to make higher education available for all qualified students.

And the CSU system has to be fully funded so that we can meet the needs of our students and so that they can graduate without debt.

And I certainly don't want to go to a local store or a restaurant to be served by a young man or woman who is working there for minimum wage because they were denied admittance to Sac State.

I want to be surrounded by successful mothers and fathers, successful partners, successful professionals proud to be *Made at Sac State*.

That's a big legislative agenda.

In the meantime, we must focus on ourselves, on providing an excellent education, on graduating our students.

And I am very proud that Sacramento State has been very focused in the two and a half years that I have been honored to serve here, to serve you.

We have added 75 scholarships and awarded \$1.25 million for scholarships.

Thanks to the generosity of our donors and the hard work of our Foundation Board, our endowment grew this year from \$46.3 million to \$59.1 million.

Our total gift commitments grew \$8 million over last year, and \$11 million over the year before that.

Sacramento is clearly committed to Sacramento State, and the community believes in what we are accomplishing.

How much does the community believe in Sacramento State?

When the City and the Greater Sacramento Economic Council submitted its proposal to have Amazon locate its new headquarters in Sacramento, Sacramento State was front and center in the proposal.

They proudly pointed out that Sacramento ranks in the top 10 "Momentum Markets" because of the retention of graduates from Sacramento State and UC Davis (in that order).

Forbes Magazine also believes in us.

Here's what they have to say about Sacramento's bid for Amazon, "With more than 30,000 students — and more than 220,000 alumni who today call the Sacramento area home — Sacramento State has created a very large pool from which Amazon could draw. Sacramento State, because of the sheer size of its student/alumni footprint, may provide the largest talent pool in the region."

I'm sorry, Forbes, "may"? Definitely "does."

And please, Forbes, let's add "largest qualified and innovative talent pool in the region."

Yes, I believe in Sac State.

In the previous four Fall and Spring Addresses that I have delivered (and this will be the last Spring Address — I want to switch to a Town Hall/listening format every spring from now on where people can voice their hopes, dreams, and concerns), in the four addresses, I have announced many initiatives — so how are we doing?

1. Hire a Graduation Czar to coordinate and consolidate our graduation initiatives — check: We hired Jim Dragna, and 66% of our first-year students enrolled for 15 credits, 66% up from the teens in the past, 66% who have the chance to Finish in Four. Of course, even though Jim is colloquially a Czar, we would never have reached these numbers without all the divisions coming together to ensure the success of our students.
2. Implement the Keys to Degrees, the Graduation Ecosystem, including SmartPlanner, Platinum Analytics and Ad Astra — check
3. Rethink remedial education — check
4. Eliminate the multiple data center duplication and create a central data warehouse with a common data dictionary — a partial vheck
5. Establish Finish in Four and Done in Two campaigns — check
6. Promote transparency and collaboration in budget decision-making — check. We not only opened up the budget process on the front end; this fall, we also held our second annual financial review where we showed where every dollar was spent.
7. Create a Diversity Office, hire a permanent Diversity Executive Director, establish a permanent Diversity Council — another check.
8. Promote safety — a work in progress check. We still have a long way to go, but we are moving forward with safety committees, a chemical hygiene plan, training, and hiring a Laboratory Safety Officer.

Would anyone who worked on any of these initiatives please stand so that we can thank you?  
I could go on and on.

But let's be honest — I have not mentioned nor have I put a check by the biggest or maybe the most audacious initiative that I have announced since my arrival — becoming a Hate-Free Campus.

I can assure you that the call to become a Hate-Free Campus was not a rhetorical or symbolic call, not a mere gesture.

But while I am an idealist, I am also a pragmatist.

Some have told me that I laid out an impossible dream — I don't think so.  
But I also don't think that we will be Hate-Free tomorrow or even  
the next day.

Hate, as we have seen too often, comes from outside, often from outside our campus.  
Racism and intolerance are learned behaviors that predate someone stepping onto  
campus.

But that does not mean that each and every one of us cannot and should not  
work on creating a hate-free environment as well as hate-free hearts.

Being hate-free is a very personal act as well as a collective act.

Becoming hate-free is especially sacred work, though  
unbelievably difficult work.

We will succeed, and we will do so because of the culture of Sacramento State.

During the last two and a half years, I have watched Sac State's culture mature.

Sacramento State has always been student-centered, and it will always be  
student-centered.

The California Master Plan for Higher Education may be broken, but our  
mission to serve students, to help students rise up economically, to serve  
underrepresented minorities, to close the achievement gap, and to  
create California's workforce, to educate society, will never change.

What has changed at Sac State in recent years is that we have embraced change and, in many  
cases, the need to change.

No one — well, virtually no one — says anymore when asked why we are doing  
something, "Because we have always done it this way."

We want the best for our students and for our University, so we are willing to  
reexamine practices and adopt and adapt new practices. And we are succeeding.

Our four-year and six-year graduation rates have increased by 35.2% and  
2.1%. For transfers, their four-year and six-year graduation rates  
increased by 28.4% and 2.6%.

What I see in our culture that has allowed us to make these numbers, these improvements,  
possible is innovation taking hold and guiding us.

Let me give you a list of some of the innovations this year:

1. For the first time in a very long time, we are proposing to add new academic  
programs — eight in all, four graduate and four undergraduate programs,  
including one called a Master of Arts in Maker Education. (I have no idea  
what that program is — but I am proud that it is coming forward.)
2. The Center for Inclusion, Equity and Diversity received a grant of \$200,000 to  
work on improving the diversity of the faculty at Sac State.

3. The College of Arts and Letters received a \$25,000 Creative Economy Project grant from the City of Sacramento.
4. The College of Engineering and Computer Science celebrated its first official ribbon-cutting ceremony for a named laboratory, the Clark Pacific Concrete Lab in Santa Clara Hall, as the College pursues \$2 million in donations to renovate all of its labs.
5. The College of Education held the inaugural ReinventEd, a competition for innovations in education, and the College received a series of grants over \$3 million to allow students to graduate in four years with a teaching credential and to address the shortage of teachers, especially underrepresented teachers, bilingual teachers, and special education teachers.
6. The Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders (formerly Speech Pathology and Audiology) has moved to newly renovated facilities in Folsom Hall with state-of-the art therapy rooms, teaching and research labs, and community clinic space.
7. The College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics launched RISE — the Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement — a program powered by a \$1 million NIH grant to increase the number of underrepresented students who will complete doctorates in biomedical research fields.
8. The International Programs and Global Engagement added six exchange programs with universities in France, Taiwan, China, Japan, and Korea, which increased the University's study abroad capacity by over 33%.
9. The Research Office was renamed the Office of Research, Innovation, and Economic Development, and this year ORIED (as it likes to be called) from July 1 to Dec. 31 processed \$23.5 million in grant and contract submissions.
10. And most remarkably the Library is transforming itself — creating a Family Study Room, preparing to add a maker space, expanding Financial Literacy operations, and housing the Carlsen Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

Transformation, Innovation, and Change along with becoming a Hate-Free Campus are at the heart of who we are and what Sacramento State's mission is.

Still, I must admit that many have complained to me about a disease called "Task Forceitis" — they said that we were killing them with so many task forces.

But frankly, improving our graduation rates so dramatically, improving our advising so dramatically (especially through technology and SmartPlanner), adding so many new sections so that our students get the classes that they need

and don't have to crash classes, etc., etc., etc. — strengthening our Hornet Family and making them safer has been worth it.

Let me repeat: We are involved in a sacred cause.

Sacramento State is ready to become strategic, rather than bludgeoning problems with Task Forces.

My message today is that we are ready, ready to be strategic, to write a strategic plan centered around innovation.

Why? Because our student-centered culture has embraced change and innovation.

Most presidents, when first appointed, tear up the shrink-wrapped strategic plans hidden on the bookshelves in their new offices, and then they write new strategic plans.

I knew that we weren't ready for a new strategic plan when I read the 2014-20 strategic plan as part of my interviews.

There are great goals in the plan.

And there are interesting initiatives supporting those goals.

But there are virtually no metrics, which is an obvious indication that the plan was written so that everyone was able to include their favorite initiatives, instead of writing the plan to be focused on achieving the goals.

And there are few risks.

Doubling the number of scholarships, eliminating the achievement gap, focusing on four-year graduation rates while not ignoring those students who cannot possibly graduate in four years, adding new academic programs that address our technologically changing, global society, diversifying our faculty to match more closely our student body, boldly announcing that our goal is to eliminate forever the achievement gaps in retention and graduation rates among all of our students — those are risks.

The next Strategic Plan must not only be innovative to meet those goals of whom we want to be, rather than whom we simply are.

The new Strategic Plan must embrace innovation, and our mission must not only be focused on transforming our students, but also on transforming them in the most innovative ways possible.

We are innovative. Sac State, Sac State faculty, Sac State staff, Sac State students are innovative. We are willing to take risks, and we know that we will succeed.

Please name me any other CSU institution where Latino students are graduating at a higher rate than Anglo students.

Yes, this year, on the six-year graduation rate measure, our Latino student graduated at a .5% higher rate than our Caucasian students.

The new Strategic Plan may include some of what we are doing — we should never throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water

But we need a Strategic Plan that will reward creative thinking, will support risk taking, and will accept failure because failure often is the first step toward success.

We need a Strategic Plan that empowers our faculty, staff, and students to redefine the possible.

We need a Strategic Plan that lives up to our motto.

The writing of this plan will and must be inclusive.

All voices must be heard.

We cannot and will not rush the plan — there is too much at stake; our students' future is at stake.

So, for the coming year, let's come together; let's think creatively.

Let's continue transforming lives

Let's be innovative.

Let's find creative solutions to the wicked problems that surround us in this aching society.

Let's lead the state. Let's lead the region. Let's lead the nation.

Let's live up to our sacred mission.

Let's ensure that all Californians have an opportunity for a higher education, and that no Californian only has the option of either a low-paying job or joining the military.

Through innovation and change, let's ensure there is hope.

Thank you for being here today. Thank you for your time. Thank you for your wisdom and input.

We will be back with a plan on how we will write our new plan.

We will keep you informed, and I am asking for your help.

Be safe; let's create a Hate-Free Campus, and let's redefine the possible together.

Sac State is No. 1. Stingers Up!