WELCOME

- Well, LooLoo and I are going to have a lot of fun this year, let me tell you that. We are off to a great start. One of the things she didn’t mention is AS House, among other locations on campus, actually have a food pantry. We talk about the needs of the students and we have some that are actually hungry. Feel free to contribute to the food pantry. It is one of the great initiatives we have on campus for students.

- Thanks, LooLoo for your introduction, your enthusiasm and your thoughts and commitment to San Jose State and our students.

- Thanks very much to Academic Senate and Executive Committee Chair Michael Kimbarow who has personally reached out to me and helped me so much in my transition to San Jose State in my first couple weeks here. Thank you for your leadership and (I look forward) to our work together this year. I think we are going to have a great year.

- Welcome, everyone. It is an honor and privilege to serve you as the interim president of San Jose State.

- Ours is one of a very small number of large, urban public universities which are devoted to help prepare ordinary citizens to lead extraordinary lives.
In fact, only twenty public comprehensive universities like San Jose State enroll twenty thousand or more students. We’re dinosaurs. You know, it’s much easier to chase rankings and switch into a different mode. Of these, San Jose State is sixth largest. And among all four-year degree granting public universities, we are the twelfth most diverse.

I’ve spent my early days, the first two weeks, meeting many of you across campus and attending many events. I love the energy and vibe on this campus. And I am getting used to dodging the skateboards and I am impressed by how able they are to dodge me.

Your enthusiasm, the energy, your commitment, your passion for this university is visible, it’s palpable and it’s real. And I think we are all here because we are committed to these students that we love.

That enthusiasm extends to our alumni and community leaders that I’ve met with so far. From conversations with our alumni association board, San Jose Mayor Liccardo, NAACP President Rev. Jethro Moore, and others, they all speak of the enormous pride, personal investment and affection they feel for this university.

That’s no surprise – SJSU is a special place. We know it; we want everyone to know it.

Spartan Pride isn’t just a cliché. It’s real. It’s impressive to see all the people wearing their Spartan swag!
• Today, I want to shine a light on reasons we all have to be proud Spartans.

• And outline priorities on which we will focus this year.

GREAT LEGACY

• SJSU became the engine that powers Silicon Valley because of the vision and heart of those who came before us.

• Long before there was the “Silicon Valley” we know today, SJSU was educating and preparing the teachers, nurses, artists, and leaders in public and private enterprise who have served this region since it was better known for producing fruits and vegetables than silicon chips, microprocessors or software apps. We still produce those grads today.

• We have come a long way since being established as a “normal school” for training teachers. San Jose State is the oldest public university in the west. We are the founding campus of the CSU. The largest public university system in the world started here. This fall, 132,855 new students enrolled in the CSU system; 65,145 freshman, 49,066 transfer students and 18,644 graduate students.

• Our more than 260,000 alumni ARE our legacy. That’s amazing.

• Walking through this Student Union here reminds us of this.
• The beautiful murals of author Amy Tan, other alumni, and the late mezzo-soprano opera star Irene Dalis (DALLAS) are shining examples of what make us Spartans.

• Grit. Determination. Vision. Untapped potential, discovered here and applied to make a difference for our families, our communities, our world.

A LOOK BACK

• Those qualities led biology professor Julio Soto to be recognized in March by the White House for excellence in mentoring science students -- many from underrepresented communities.

• And those qualities led the Kellogg Foundation to honor SJSU among four land-grant universities nationally for excellence in community engagement, through ComUniverCity. I can’t tell you how much I’ve already heard about the work of Prof. Dayana Salazar, her faculty, staff and student team, and our partners at City Hall and throughout the community.

• Tenacity and vision also drive our associated students and particularly President LooLoo Amante and other student leaders to passionately advocate for our students and university in our community and in Sacramento. They are amazing!

• Advocacy from LooLoo, other student leaders and other people who care about this campus and other Calstate
Campuses resulted last year in over $1 million committed by the state to devote to student success.

- Student also served the community tangibly by raising nearly $177,000 last year benefiting more than 100 charities, and they contributed over 23,000 hours of community service. And that’s just students, let only faculty and staff, many who are deeply committed to the community and nonprofit organizations that serve the community.

- Our students’ talent and drive bring employers to San Jose State.

- Last year, we added 5,000 new employers in the Career Center. We had more than 70,000 job postings – more than two for every student.

- It is no surprise, then, that we are the number-one supplier of graduates to Silicon Valley above any other university in the United States of America. How about that? What’s interesting to us is San Jose State knows that, but other people were surprised. Why are they surprised? Of course we are the number-one supplier.

- There are other accomplishments as well.

- The university’s accreditation was reaffirmed for seven years. A team of campus faculty and staff worked very hard on this initiative for many years to result in this successful result. They deserve our thanks.
- However, the accreditation team also identified things we need to work on – including stabilizing leadership. We’ve had a bit of a turn over here.

- We enter this year with a strong new, exciting leadership team. Three of us are brand new on the cabinet so I want to take a minute to acknowledge this group. I want to reassure you we have a very good chemistry. We’ll challenge each other. We are going to work together and with you to pull this university forward, make it shine and advance it. So we have Provost Andy Feinstein; VP for Student Affairs Reggie Blaylock; VP for University Advancement Paul Lanning; Interim VP for Administration and Finance Josee Larochelle; Athletic Director Gene Bleymaier; and Chief of Staff Stacy Gleixner.

- So we want to hear from you. We want to hear your input. We are going to work hard and do our best for you. But we need to hear from you. Reach out to us – reach out to me. I encourage you to provide input on the presidential search. They are forming a committee and that committee will be visiting campus soon this fall. There will be opportunities for campus input in open forums at the early stages of the search. It will move forward on a strong timetable. There are four presidential searches. Sonoma and San Jose State will be first up, followed by Channel Islands and Chico.

- This campus made a major commitment to diversity and inclusion. I am pleased to say funding was established and the first (hire) is arriving soon. We have a new Title IX coordinator, Diana Harris Epps, starting later this month. We are moving forward to commence
a national search for a vice president and chief diversity officer who will report to the president. The work last year of the President’s Commission on Diversity was excellent and it will continue. This is an ongoing, continuing conversation on this campus and much work remains to be done. That committee will continue to work this year and I look forward to working with them on an ongoing basis.

- The campus has been in the midst of a building boom with so much more to do, but we’ve accomplished some things so far. A totally renovated Yosh Uchida Hall opened in Fall 2014 and the finishing touches are being completed in Spartan Complex East, which reopened.

- And the Student Union – we are in the new part – and it’s going to be done soon.

- A beautiful new Student Wellness Center did open this fall. I just toured it and if you haven’t been there, it’s amazing. Please stop by.

- The university has also made big strides in community engagement. An agreement was reached and soon we will be operating the Hammer Theatre in conjunction with the city, which will be great for the university and the community.

- Before moving on to the year ahead, I want to share one more example of Spartan Pride.
Many of you know Professor Gus Lease, who is up front here. He’s taught music at San Jose State for 66 years.

He was just profiled on the front page of the *San Jose Mercury News*. He personifies what makes our faculty special. In Gus’s own words, from this story: “I whistle just walking to my car… I’m always happy when I go to class.”

**LOOK FORWARD**

I’ve been on the job just two weeks. But I already know that I made the right choice coming to San Jose State. I embrace our mission:

In collaboration with nearby industries and communities, SJSU faculty and staff are dedicated to achieving the university’s mission as a responsive institution of the state of California: To enrich the lives of its students, to transmit knowledge to its students along with the necessary skills for applying it in the service of our society and to expand the base knowledge through research and scholarship.

And I embrace our challenges, which are many, beginning with steps we must take to improve our academic spaces, infrastructure and technology. We must step up fundraising and plan the next comprehensive campaign.

We have a great cohesive leadership team, talking collaboratively about how to accomplish these goals, how to tackle these challenges. Feel free to share your thoughts with us as we can tackle these challenges and solve them.
• This year, we will be singularly focused first on three things.

• First: Student Success.

• Second: Student Success.

• And third: Student Success.

• The Calstate system affirmed this during a July retreat at which trustees, the Chancellor and his leadership team and all 23 campus presidents agreed: It is all about the students.

• Students are why we are here. And working for our students is what makes me excited to be here.

• We must improve student graduation rates. Ten years ago, our six-year rate was 42 percent. Five years ago, it was 48 percent. Since then, it has risen to 54 percent.

• The trend suggests we can do this. So we have set a new target of 60 percent, which exceeds the goal set for us by the Calstate system.

• We want every student to leave with a degree, but know 60 percent is an ambitious target. Our transfer students do not count in that target and will never count

• How will we get there?

• First, by helping students get into the classes they need. Class sections have been added - 2,500
additional seats in all – in an effort to reduce bottlenecks.

- Second, by helping new students be better prepared to succeed academically. Early efforts to improve remedial English skills among new students look encouraging. I want to acknowledge Dean Lisa Vollendorf and her team.

- Third, by improving learning spaces. This summer, nearly 100 classrooms got new or updated furnishings. Seating in five large lecture halls was upgraded. Technology was updated in 36 classrooms, and similar work began in ten others. This work needs to continue, and it will continue.

- Fourth, by investing in student learning outside the classroom. Student Affairs will invest $250,000 to match student clubs and organizations this academic year.

- On Tuesday I strolled Tower Lawn during the Fall Student Organization Fair. Nearly half of the more than 400 official student orgs were there - ranging from the Salsa Club to Engineering Without Borders. I also purchased some sugar cookies from Nursing Club and lemonade from Associated Students.

- Ensuring student success demands a commitment to the faculty who teach our students, and the staff who support them.
That commitment is in place. We added 58 new tenure-track faculty this year, and plan to add at least 65 more next year. That’s 123 new tenure-track faculty positions over two years.

Recognizing that there are staff salary inequities, campus leadership last year created and implemented a two-year program to begin addressing lagging staff salaries.

As I said a moment ago, everything we do ultimately will be rooted in helping students succeed. That requires both immediate intervention and long term planning.

Accordingly, I’ve asked Provost Andy Feinstein and Student Affairs VP Reggie Blaylock to collaborate on a comprehensive student success plan that crosses division and unit “divides” and has measurable, attainable goals.

But a comprehensive approach to student success and ensuring all students who come here have a great student experience involves everyone, from every corner of campus.

That means tending to simple, yet important things - like looking out for each other. If you spot a safety concern, please tell someone. We want it to be a safe and supportive learning environment.

It also involves long-term strategic planning. Campus leaders are thinking about, in conjunction with Academic Senate, how to move forward from the Vision
2017 plan to a timetable and process to update that and start our future.

- This will involve active engagement with the campus community to develop the timetable this year.

- A strategic plan for San Jose State University must address long overdue, badly needed capital improvements.

- Our advancement division is aggressively working on a plan of how we can get others outside and our alumni to help support us with that plan.

- And, of course, the presidential search will be moving forward.

- It will be a busy year. And it will be a GREAT year.

- And have you noticed the new SJSU banners flying around. This is part of our new branding campaign. Watch for more coming out to just raise the flag and say, “We are here.”

- Admission to Spartan athletic events is free (for faculty, students and staff.) We have our first football game tonight at 7. Also we are very excited our first water polo match in 34 years will be commencing and is fully supported by donated funds. That will be at noon on Saturday in the Aquatic Center. That is the power of philanthropy. We can do this and we can do it together.

- Thank you for all you do. It takes a community. We have a great one. We have a fantastic university.
• Spartan Up!