

REMARKS – STUDENT SUCCESS SYMPOSIUM
President Mary A. Papazian
March 15, 2018

Good morning, everyone!

I am pleased to see so many faculty and staff—and a few students—here for our inaugural Student Success Symposium.

When we discuss student success, we often focus on graduation rates, the equity gap and other data points that can easily be measured. These numbers are important in assessing how well we are delivering on our promise of providing a four-year degree for incoming freshmen and a two-year degree for transfer students.

We have made some progress in improving our four-year graduation rates and our two-year transfer graduation rates. But we continue to struggle with closing the equity gap for our underrepresented minority students. We have a tremendous

amount of work to do in the coming year to meet our Graduation Initiative 2025 goals.

The work we do to improve these numbers has direct benefits for our students and our region.

For our students graduating on time means they start their careers with less debt; begin full-time employment earlier in their career and can become fully engaged citizens in our community.

For Silicon Valley, we provide a steady population of skilled employees. We have 1,000 students who complete degrees in health professions each year, a field that is particularly in demand of workers. We also graduate 3,600 science, engineering and business students each year, with 65 percent of those alumni residing in the Bay Area.

And the future is bright for our students in the humanities, social sciences and the arts, especially as our economy changes

dramatically during the 4th technological revolution with the impact of AI and automation on the future of work.

We are a key economic driver for our region and a path to social mobility for our graduates.

As we think about the work ahead, we must always remember: Behind each number or data point is a person, with dreams and aspirations. It is our duty to help each and everyone of our students and potential students achieve their goals—and to aid them in discovering their true potential.

As we listen to the guest speakers today, I encourage each of you to think about a student you know. What could we do individually and collectively to improve this student's experience at San Jose State University and this student's opportunities for success when they leave the university?

Some questions we might also consider are the following: What are we doing well? Where might we make changes, large and small, in our structures and curriculum to better support our

students in their aspirational goals? What can we learn from other institutions? Their experiences? Best practices based on data and evidence for success?

I also urge you to think not of the limitations we face but of the possibilities for creative, even disruptive change to ensure we are serving all of our students effectively and with excellence.

Before we move on to our first presenter, I would like to share the story of a recent graduate, Eulises Valdovinos [youLISS-ees] [vahl-do-VEE-nos].

When he was 12 years old and living in Mexico with his parents, Eulises returned to the United States to live with his oldest brother. Eulises never thought about going to college.

Many of his family members in Mexico didn't finish school beyond third grade. It wasn't until Eulises was a junior in high school that one of his teachers told him he needed to talk to a guidance counselor because, quote, he had "too much potential to waste."

Eulises enjoyed math and science, but he had no idea what he could do with those interests beyond high school. With the support of his counselor, his teachers, his brother, and even, from afar, his parents, Eulises began to look at college engineering programs, and to focus on the necessary coursework he would need to be accepted into a university.

Ultimately, and fortunately for us, Eulises enrolled at San José State. That he would be the first in his family to attend college is not unusual on our campus. A large percentage of our 30,000 students fit into that category.

Eulises majored in Industrial & Systems Engineering, and was honored as a President's Scholar, earning a 4.0 in at least two contiguous semesters. He graduated a year ago with a bachelor's degree. And in short order, he was hired by Oracle.

But Eulises's story doesn't end there. As a first-generation college student, Eulises wanted to make sure other students like him had the same guidance and support that he did.

So, just as Eulises's older brother helped him, Eulises began to mentor his younger brother. And soon he was mentoring other aspiring college students as well. In fact, by the time Eulises graduated from San José State, he was a peer advisor to more than 35 students in our MESA Engineering Program, which provides elementary, junior high, and high school students in the South Bay with hands-on learning opportunities in math, science, and engineering.

Each year we serve more than 30,000 students, and like Eulises, they each have their own personal story of how they came to be a San Jose State Spartan. It is up to us to ensure that like Eulises, not only do they complete their degrees, but their success story continues well after graduation.

As Dan Rather once wrote, "A college degree is the key to realizing the American dream, well worth the financial sacrifice because it is supposed to open the door to the world of opportunity."

For every step we take in improving student success, we are keeping that door wide open for our students.

I hope you all enjoy the day and I look forward to hearing all of your ideas on how we can work together to support our students.

Thank you.