

**Fall Welcome Address**  
**President Don W. Kassing**  
**August 24, 2010**  
**Morris E. Dailey Auditorium**

Thank you Michael. Thank you for that introduction and thank you for your remarks.  
Thank you for that wonderful welcome back. It is good to be back and it is great to see you all.

You know what? ..... you're a good looking bunch!

Besides looking so good you are clearly the best faculty, staff, and administrative team in the CSU.... Maybe in the world.

Let me welcome back, those of you that have been away for the summer and are just returning to campus. It is all happily familiar to me.

Over the last year, there have been a number of you appointed to new duties and responsibilities, some of you are new and some have been promoted. I want to thank you for joining our team and taking on these new responsibilities.

We do have one new Vice President who's been with us about week: Dr. Jason Laker, our new Vice President of Student Affairs, who comes to us from Queens University in Ontario.

Standing here today was not something I expected to be doing. But I want you to know it was an easy decision to return. Amy and I have a very deep affection for this university. We really care about what happens here.

We have enjoyed the last two years in Anthem, Arizona. Anthem is on the far north side of the "Valley of the Sun," what Phoenix likes to call itself. During the last two years we have had the opportunity to visit with high school and college friends who made their way to Arizona, as well as friends from San Jose. We were able to spend time with our children and grandchildren in Houston and Charleston, South Carolina. And of course we have had a lot of time with our son Jeff and his family who live in Anthem... just two miles from us.

Jeff and his wife Lindsey are on the faculty at ASU and keep me involved in conversation about their life at ASU.

I have been at home a lot more than Amy is used to and that has been interesting for both of us. I think I spent the first year negotiating with her as to who was in charge...

But if you ask her, she will tell you that the negotiations took much less time than that, and there was never any doubt about who is in charge!

Before we get into more serious topics, I want to tell you a story.

The story is about Keira, a bear, and her “papa.” It’s about a child’s imagination and a child’s ability to make the improbable, probable.

The little girl in the picture behind me is Kiera Contreras Kassing. Kiera lives in Missouri City, Texas. Missouri City is a suburb of Houston and is right next to Sugarland, Texas. Kiera is my youngest granddaughter. She was three years old in July... *and I am her favorite grandparent.*

About a month ago my son Jeff, his wife Lindsey, and my granddaughter Quinn were in Flagstaff with us, and we decided to visit a safari type park just 30 miles west of Flagstaff on Quinn’s 6<sup>th</sup> birthday. The park features North American wildlife. You move through the park by car on a gravel road and watch the animals from your car.

They had buffalo or North American bison, big horn sheep, even some white bison. But the area that was the most interesting was the enclosure that had the bears. The setting was pine forest with some clearings and a gravel road meandering through it.

In the bear enclosure they put apple slices and bread 10 to 15 feet off the road so that you can get an up-close look at the bears as they come out for a snack. You keep your windows rolled up.

We saw six large black bears. One was only about 15 feet from the car while it ate the apple slices and then climbed up a small nearby tree. It was very exciting for all of us, especially my granddaughter Quinn. It was a good day.

So... the next day I received a call from Kiera. We talk a couple times a week. Remember, I am her favorite grandparent.

So... I decided to tell her about our adventure to the safari park with her cousin Quinn. I felt like I needed to simplify our adventure to the safari park a bit.... so I began by saying to Kiera that we went to this animal park yesterday. I told her about seeing the buffalo, big horn sheep, and I saved the bears till last.

I began to tell her about seeing the bear eating the apple slices and being just a few feet away from the car... and she was very quiet for a second and then she asks, “Bears?” her voice raised a bit and I said, “Yes, bears.”

She is quiet again for a second and in the silence I can tell that she is turning this over in her mind. Finally she asks me, “Was the bear *by the slide*, papa?”

Her dad takes her to *her* park near their home, and it has a slide, a swing and gym bars... and I had just put a bear near *her slide* at *her park*.

That’s the power of a child’s imagination. The purity of thought and the absence of restrictions.

Today, I want to spend some time talking about imagination and the power of ideas -- in our own lives and in the life of the university.

A number of years ago, I ran across a discussion about how administrators, leaders, and really anyone in a supervisory role can affect the life of an idea.

For instance, if you come to me with an idea ... I could squash that idea in an instant —for any number of reasons. I don't know if your idea will turn out to be good idea or a bad one. I may not feel that I have the time, or the staff, or the funding, or room on my agenda for a new idea. What I do know is, I can kill your idea in an instant. However, each of us has the *responsibility to let ideas live*.

In the kind of environment we face today at our university, when resources are tight and uncertainty is in the air, ideas often tend to get tabled. But it's at these times when we need ideas and imagination the most. We need to bring our best ideas to life and re-imagine the university. We can fulfill our greatest ambitions if we think creatively and work collaboratively.

I recognize that there are many things that have changed since you and I were last together. The budget situation has caused difficult decisions, anxiety, and shared sacrifice among the faculty, staff and students alike. As for the staff.... you have taken on new burdens; you have provided services to sometimes-frustrated students and colleagues; and some of you have even had new roles thrust upon you. And faculty members.... you have shouldered new loads, led full classes, and made due with less support.

Students have seen costs rise and learned difficult lessons in patience, resourcefulness and fortitude just to navigate the education that we are here to provide. Times are difficult.

President Whitmore was careful to always emphasize the fact that this is *not* a temporary budget crisis, and he was right. We have been through a deep recession with lingering unemployment rates and slow economic growth. As a result, the state budget has been shrinking for several years. We are living in a new reality and we must continue to adapt to it. The state resource framework.... is simply smaller.

The *good news* is that for everything that has changed, there is much more that has *not changed*. Over the past few weeks, as I have been getting reacquainted with all of you, I have been heartened by the steadfast character you have all shown.

The passion for scholarship and knowledge, the commitment to teaching and serving students, the creative energy that make this community so extraordinary and so special. These are the reasons why, when Charlie Reed called me up and asked me to put my retirement on hold, there was no question in my mind. I chose to return because of my confidence in the people at our University.

People like our newest dean, Sheila Benenfield of the College of Social Sciences. Dean Benenfield said something recently that, for me, really captures the moment of opportunity that is before us today. She said:

“In good times, everyone wants something for themselves. We see the chance to grow our own programs, expand our own staff, upgrade our own equipment.

But in difficult times, by necessity, we are all in this together. We need to be *more creative* and *more cooperative*. We have to see the opportunities before us, and seize them. To tell you the truth, I would rather be dean now than during the best of times.”

Sheila, thank you for that insightful approach to the challenges we all face.

We have to be more creative, and more cooperative, and work in the best long-term interest of the university. We have to see opportunities and seize them.

So, what are the opportunities before us? Some of the ideas and projects I will talk about today are completely new. Many, however, from our diversity plan to the Student Union project, were set in motion before the budget crisis came about.

But now is our opportunity to re-imagine the university by allowing new ideas to come to life and by bringing new creative energy to the goals and initiatives we have long pursued.

Our actions and our strategies need to be about our differentiators. Things *we* can do that others can't. Things we can do better than other universities.

The key factor in climbing out of a recession is the generation of new ideas. We live in a region that confirms that certain places, with strong aggregations of talent clusters, key research institutions, and a climate conducive to change and risk-taking, account for a disproportionate share of valuable new ideas. At San Jose State, our people and the ideas they bring are our differentiators. Let me share some examples:

In Student Affairs, I'm pleased to welcome Dr. Jason Laker, our newest vice president. Jason has nearly 20 years of experience generating ideas in student and academic affairs. He has a strong commitment to diversity and the same values we worked so hard to formalize several years ago.

He is committed to bringing those ideas to life in concrete ways, through leadership development programs, student events and cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue. As he put it to me last week, “diversity is not an item on a to-do list, it is a lens through which we must always view all of our relationships and interactions.”

Jason also has some very promising ideas about making student experiences in the classroom and “student life” much more mutually enriching by bringing Student Affairs and Academic Affairs closer together.

I know this is something that is very important to Gerry Selter and his team in Academic Affairs.

Within Academic Affairs, Maureen Scharberg and her team are deep into our university's graduation and retention initiative. They're coordinating student advising and positioning the advising program to not only help students stay on track academically, but also to help them thrive by making connections with people, resources and opportunities that will power their success here on campus *and* in their lives beyond college. Maureen and her team's message to students is:

Seek out advising and support in order to "make every class count."

That is such an important message for all of us to think about, since ultimately, student success is the focus for all of us who work here:

"Make every class count"

And in your own interactions with students, make *every contact count*.

*Every conversation. Every glance. Every nod.*

*Because our students' potential for success is in our hands.*

Also in Academic Affairs, I want to mention that Provost Gerry Selter is leading our effort, necessitated by the changing landscape of higher education, to think very creatively about how this institution will grow and change in coming years. Faculty hiring must be more strategic than ever before, and Gerry has a difficult but exciting task of figuring out new models for hiring faculty and providing incentives for them to become more interdisciplinary and globally oriented.

Our student-centered mission, of course, is at the heart of what we do. And in this area big ideas abound thanks to our extraordinary faculty.

I could deliver an entire talk on all of the imaginative teaching that's happening here. Here are just a few examples:

- The exciting new Global Studies Online program in the College of Social Sciences will offer the *first online BA degree* at SJSU.
- A Biomedical Engineering program has been in development over the past few years. The program has not yet been formalized but it is already positioning our university to take the lead in supplying this important growing industry with talent.
- And as an example of a great interdisciplinary collaboration, Meteorology Associate Professor Eugene Cordero is working with Production Coordinator Barnaby Dallas and Animation Assistant Professor David Chi to create a series of short films on sustainability for teens.

Keep your eye out for a new character called “The Green Ninja,” who I’m told will be the sustainability movement’s answer to Smoky the Bear. This is the kind of student-centric collaboration that makes our university such a special place.

In regards to sustainability ... I know that last year, many of you took the Ecological Footprint Challenge, spearheaded by our own “Green Ninja,” Katherine Cushing, and I want to congratulate you on your success in reducing your environmental impact. This year, we continue to pursue big ideas, with a focus on energy. We are launching an exciting new project in collaboration with the city of San Jose called the “Green Wave.”

This project will train over 100 San Jose State students to conduct energy audits, and then turn them loose to help city employees and the university community to reduce energy consumption and utility bills.

In the area of information technology, most if not all of you are aware of the recent change in the leadership in this area. I am pleased that Bill Nance has been willing to add the role of Interim vice president of information technology and chief information officer to his portfolio of responsibilities.

We will begin our search for a new vice president and CIO immediately, and I can guarantee you that this will be an area where imagination and big ideas will be absolutely essential.

In the meantime, Bill will be overseeing the continued implementation of several ideas initiated in the last year, including the campuswide rollout of a new email system from Google; and a redesign of the SJSU website, in collaboration with Public Affairs and others throughout the university, including tapping into our excellent student talent to help create the best website in the CSU.

Another big I.T. idea that’s coming to fruition in partnership with Administration and Finance and Enrollment Services, is a project called Workflow Automation. This is an enormous undertaking to turn incoming paper documents into electronic records.

It will allow us to improve efficiencies and processing time, significantly reduce processing errors, and get a little closer to our sustainability goals as we eliminate the production and storage of many thousands of paper folders and documents.

Possibly the most tangible example of re-imagining the university that I will talk about today is the expansion and renovation of the Student Union. The need to transform the well-worn, gloomy student center has been talked about by students for years. I want to thank you in advance for your patience and understanding as we move forward with this construction project.

The new Student Union will bring students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the community together. Imagine a welcoming, open, light-filled, high-tech facility that will provide a variety of new healthy eateries; a faculty/staff lounge with outside seating; and enough room to host your department’s regional and national conferences. The location will be buzzing with student activity, with a student resource center and all the campus life departments; a small indoor theater; and space for Associated Students, the voice of our student body.

I'd like to acknowledge the extraordinary leadership of Cathy Busalacchi who has done such a wonderful job managing the project as the idea becomes a reality.

I know there may be some that think that this is an ambitious project in the midst of this economic climate, but times like this bring opportunities of lower bond rates and lower construction costs, that we must take advantage of.

In three years, the new Student Union in the heart of campus will compliment the Martin Luther King Jr. Library and the Campus Village, redefining our University again as a vibrant, exciting, urban campus.

Which brings me to another area where we absolutely must re-imagine the university:.... the budget. It's a difficult topic, both because many of us are still reeling from the effects of the recent budget crisis, and because of the uncertainty that drags on every year as the legislature delays in passing a state budget. The good news is that San Jose State has been doing a lot of responsible planning.

We have reduced enrollment and employment to match our funding, and we're in good shape for the coming year.

President Whitmore and his team deserve a great deal of credit for making some difficult decisions. Today I can tell you that, led by Rose Lee, who is the best finance officer in the CSU, the university's finances are sound.

Yes, the budget situation is difficult, but we will be able to serve our students and meet our mission for many years to come. Certainly each and every one of us must continue to imagine new ideas for making our dollars go further and spending our resources responsibly.

Now let us imagine a future where we will have a sizeable endowment, self-supported academic programs, and creative new approaches to generating revenue through online education.

There are more avenues where we can be entrepreneurial and bold. Those ideas will come from you, because this is a place populated by smart and talented people. We have the ability to generate new ideas and to turn those ideas into reality.

Fred Najjar and his staff in University Advancement have imagined the future, and this fall the campus will launch the *public phase* of SJSU's first-ever *comprehensive fundraising campaign*. But increasing private support for our mission cannot be the job of the fundraisers alone.

It cannot be the job of the fundraisers alone.

We must *all* imagine a more entrepreneurial future, one in which we embrace a culture of philanthropy, actively engage public and private partners, and showcase the tremendous impact that our university has on the lives of students and on Silicon Valley.

These are just a few examples of what it can mean to “let ideas live.” As I said before, it is far easier to kill an idea than to test it, nurture it, and turn it into a reality. Let us accept the responsibility to let ideas live.

Six years ago on August 23, 2004 – in another time of uncertainty, I said to you: “I’d like people to remember this time with admiration for how we handled ourselves when faced with the unexpected. I hope our actions in the coming days and weeks and months will inspire potential presidential candidates to say, “This is a group of people I’d like to join up with. This is a university I’d be excited to lead.”

“We tend to think of presidents as the voice of an institution, and clearly that is one of their roles. But I think the university really is a place of a thousand voices.

I ask you to join me in sending a message to all those who have interactions with the university – that our ship is steady and on course, that we have a great crew, and we are moving ahead with confidence, commitment and great imagination.

Demonstrating this confidence and showcasing our ideas is especially important during this time, when the public may be wondering how the university is coping. We need to tell them our story. We must remind them of our amazing record of serving our students and serving this region. We must demonstrate our potential to do much more.

This is our institution. Let’s take good care of it. Let’s be especially good stewards at this time. I ask all of you to step up and help us create another successful academic year.

This is *our time* to re-imagine the university.  
This is *our opportunity* to lead and to embrace ideas.  
This is the *moment* to recall our central mission  
to enrich the lives of our students,  
and to imagine our paths to a successful future.