

Fall Welcome Address
President Don W. Kassing
August 21, 2006
Music Concert Hall

About a month ago I sent you an email and a letter telling you that I had been asked to stay an additional year. Staying an additional year was not something I was planning, but Chancellor Reed and I began a conversation in late spring and early summer about this institution and where we were. He expressed a strong interest in the institution being stable before we start a presidential search. The Chancellor has paid very close attention to what *we* – and I emphasize “we” – have gotten done in the last fifteen to eighteen months. He has reviewed our strategic planning work and supports and encourages it. He has paid close attention to our WASC self-study report and our WASC visit last March. He also knows we had a very good visit from the CSU team that came to review our plans and practices to improve our graduation rates.

The Chancellor is encouraged by the fundraising we have accomplished and by our plans for more aggressive efforts in the near future. His observations and the CSU Board’s are that we have some pretty interesting things going on here, and that we have responded very well to the challenges we faced over the last two years. There is a sense that we have “our own momentum.”

On a personal level, I felt our Vision 2010 work – our strategic planning process needed to get further along. We are making important progress, but I think we need a little more time together to move to action steps and create a platform of success that a new president and you can work from.

Another reason is our WASC visit in March of 2007. As many of you know, we have successfully completed the Capacity and Preparatory phase of the WASC re-accreditation process. We’re now in the final phase, the Educational Effectiveness Review that examines student learning and the information we use to assure that student learning meets our goals and standards. The Educational Effectiveness Report is organized around a Learning and Belonging model that a team developed. It’s divided into three major essays: Integrative Learning, Inclusive Excellence, and Community and Connections. Some of you, because of your particular expertise, have received a request from me to join the groups that are refining these essays. All of you will be invited to forums in February to discuss the issues.

I share with Carmen, as well as the WASC team, that it is important that we are stable and that WASC walks away confident and enthused about what we do here. Our WASC

visit last March reinforced that our direction and progress are good; an indicator that our work is real and is coming to fruition.

There are several other reasons I want to continue: I would like to be here to celebrate our 150th anniversary. I have a deep personal investment in this university and I want to be part of that milestone. I also believe people will look back on this time and say something else special happened at their university in 2007, not just the celebration of our sesquicentennial. I want to be part of that something special we can make happen in 2007.

We have just finished an external commissioned study of our readiness for a Capital Campaign and the report is encouraging. Our recent success in securing leadership level gifts shows the university has considerable potential to raise private funds. Consequently, I believe, as do others that we should begin the quiet or advanced gift phase of our first comprehensive campaign. The university anticipates raising a minimum of \$150 million over a five-to-seven year period to support a series of objectives developed through the our strategic planning process and a presidential vision statement that I have just recently shared with the deans and our Tower Foundation board. Fred Najjar has just submitted our 2005-06 fundraising results to the Chancellor's office, and we raised \$27.2 million last year. Congratulations Fred to you and your team, to the Deans and to Tom Bowen and his team. This is the highest one-year total we have ever had. In addition, Fred reports to me that we have raised 4 million dollars already towards next year.

The Tower Foundation board, in the last six months, thanks to the efforts of Don Lucas, who is the chair of the membership committee, has been quite successful in recruiting individuals with proven leadership skills and significant philanthropic capacity. For example, Peter Ueberroth, Tony Ridder and Ed Oates, one of the founders of Oracle, have just joined our Tower Foundation Board of Trustees. In addition there is considerable evidence that our alumni have positive feelings about their experience at our university. We are confident that our alumni and friends in the community and our partners in industry and private foundations will join us and embrace our future. Together, we can build on our 150-year legacy of service to this region, and gain the national recognition that the students, faculty, staff, and alumni of this university surely deserve.

Because we are thinking expansively, and are working toward an ambitious vision, we know we will outrun the state's ability to support our agenda. We have been increasing the amount of private support needed to achieve our goals. This coming year is a significant one in our history—our 150th anniversary—and a fitting one to take a

historic step. I know I can help a new president by getting this quiet or advanced phase started.

Another reason I decided to stay is I have a strong senior team that believes in the transition we have begun. They share my belief that we must set up for those who follow us, a platform for even greater institutional success. They are unselfish people who look out the window—not in the mirror—and give credit to others. They are talented people who believe as I do that there is a bit more to do and that together we can do it best.

And finally there is you. I am staying longer because of you, our progress, and my continuing conviction that this is an extraordinary university with extraordinary people.

There's momentum here — an intensity about what we're achieving and where we're going. By staying another year, we have more of a window to work together, to achieve what we've set out to do, so a new president can come in and start building right away on what we've accomplished.

I know some of you have heard me say this, but let me share it with all of you. I have worked on four other campuses over the last 31 years. Two rural and two suburban and then here. I believe – I know – you couldn't have a better strategic location in the country than being in the Bay area, in the heart of Silicon Valley and finally, in downtown San José.

For 150 years, our university has partnered with businesses and local government in building this extraordinary region. In all sectors of the community – from artists to engineers, from educators to journalists, to business and political leaders – San José State's overall impact on Silicon Valley is second to none.

Perhaps you read a recent article in the Mercury News about First Act. First Act involves top corporate leaders and other civic leaders who are building a picture of the San José of the future. They see the vibrancy and potential of our city and its location. We are a vital part of that and have been part of their efforts to define a future for this city. Both the University and San José are changing, growing, and becoming more prominent. We intend to continue that partnership and be a major driver in that momentum.

About a month ago there was an article in the weekend edition of the Wall Street Journal entitled "The Most Inventive Towns in America." The unit of measure was the number of patents received in 2005. San José produced 3867 – more than double that of the next city. Of the top twenty cities, eleven are in the Bay area and most of them are

adjacent to us. Cities like Sunnyvale, Mountain View and Santa Clara. The eleven Bay area cities accounted for 63% of the patents within the cohort of the top twenty cities.

So you can argue that innovation is a defining characteristic of this region. Of the top 20 cities nationally with the most patents, nine are within 20 minutes of this campus. Being located in this kind of environment has both influenced us and inspired us at our university. King Library, the Campus Village, our new wireless campus, and the new Academic Success Center with its incubator classroom, which, by the way, will open in mid-September, are all examples of this inspiration and influence.

Last spring I had an opportunity to have dinner with Peter McPherson the president of NASULGC. Peter is the former president of Michigan State University and was a senior executive with Bank of America. Bruce Magid, dean of our College of Business and a former colleague of Peter's, arranged for Carmen and me to have dinner with Peter. Both Carmen and I benefited from his perspective on the state of higher education and his sense of the critical role we play in the changes in our country and around the world. Our discussion ranged from globalization to the responsibility we have to serve underrepresented students. Peter believes that this country needs another "50 Great Universities" to deal with the challenges this country faces and he believes we are one of those simply because of our location.

Over the last fifteen to eighteen months, we have started on a journey to become a "University of Choice." Let's reflect for a few moments on that work.

As you may recall, we've chosen to have a special focus each year on one of our shared values. This past year that value was student success. We are learning as an institution how to do a better job of helping our students succeed.

Enrollment efforts are a direct indicator of our commitment to student success. Our applications increased this fall by 14% overall. Our new freshmen applications were up 21% and we expect our overall enrollment to increase. In addition, we are implementing several new initiatives to enhance academic quality. These include developing new integrative learning opportunities, assessing student learning, and expanding a first-year experience for all freshmen and transfer students.

As we become more student-centered, our focus is on fostering students' learning and their sense of belonging to the university. We are enriching the student experience through programs that help build community and connections. We are working to get students more involved and to foster more student-faculty engagement.

Even our reading program ties into student success. If you haven't read *The Kite Runner*, get it now. It is a wonderful, moving book.

I want to thank Carmen and the strategic planning teams for their work on these important initiatives and for their creative and innovative ideas.

In addition, I want to thank the Student Affairs Division and the Academic Senate for the dialogue they began last year on academic integrity. Integrity is one of our shared values at the university and their efforts to address academic dishonesty in the classroom are one example of how we can live this value. Chancellor Reed is strongly supportive of this work. I ask that you talk with Senate and Student Affairs leaders and make academic integrity a priority.

The value we have chosen to emphasize this year is our value of diversity. Diversity is one of those words used so often that we begin to read past it. Our university has long been known for having a student body that reflects the marvelous racial and ethnic diversity of the area and increasingly, we are attracting students of different ages, life experiences, and socio-economic backgrounds. We know that we are well positioned to meet the evolving educational needs of a rapidly changing regional landscape, and we have accepted the responsibility to prepare our students to succeed in the global marketplace and in life. But this is just a starting point

Let me share with you how we've been talking about diversity in our strategic planning workshops, work sessions, and retreats. Our numbers are important, of course. Many universities would love to have the diversity we have. It creates an intellectual environment where all groups of students can succeed. But continually supporting that environment, even with our diversity, takes awareness and work. It takes a long-term philosophy of inclusion.

As I mentioned earlier, one of our major essays for the spring WASC visit is on Inclusive Excellence. Our work has been influenced by our exposure to an AAC&U project that explored how colleges and universities can fully utilize diversity as a resource to achieve academic excellence for all students.

One of the ways we can improve student learning and achieve inclusive excellence is by investing in faculty, by continuing to support faculty as the front line in a student-centered institution that values outcomes. We know the tangible measurement of our work is our students' success here and ultimately, their performance in the working world and in life. We'll also continue to ensure that new faculty members represent the best teachers/scholars in their respective fields.

Another way we approach inclusive excellence is by paying attention to our students' experiences outside of class. We want this to be an exciting and fun place to go to college, with excellent student life programming and close engagement with the faculty. We are creating a campus where both residential and commuting students can share in every aspect of university life. There will be multiple discussions this year about how we can create a culture of inclusive excellence. Get engaged and help us make the most of our amazing diversity.

Tying in to this effort is the work of the Campus Climate Committee. This group conducted a campus survey last spring which has some very preliminary, but encouraging results to report:

1. Students generally perceive the climate within their major areas to be safe and respectful, and feel that our university is helping them to live and work in a diverse world.
2. Much of the campus overall feels that the climate at our university is respectful. Respondents also feel that it's important to develop a sense of community among students, staff and faculty, and help students learn how to bring about positive change.

I'd like to thank this committee of faculty, staff, and student volunteers for their hard work. You can see how it dovetails with commitment to inclusive excellence. We look forward to the committee's full analysis of results later this year and the start of valuable longitudinal research on Campus Climate.

Before we conclude, I would like to remind you of tomorrow's convocation at 10:00 am on the lawn outside the library. It is part of our welcome week activities to get our students off to the very best start. So join us tomorrow and celebrate their first week on campus. I have covered a range of topics today and there is certainly more detail that I could provide, but I want to respect the time parameters we established for today. As tempting as it is for me, I have told no stories today so we have a chance to finish on time. I do want you to leave today knowing that I really appreciate the work that is being done on campus. It is good work and in many cases it is very good work.

"It is our time" is a phrase I've used often in different settings on campus. It is our time and it is a time to lead. It is a time for each of us individually to lead. We are in charge of ourselves, in charge of shaping the future of our university. I believe wholeheartedly that we are capable of being one of the "Next 50 Great Universities" as Peter McPherson predicts for us.

I urge you to get involved with this important work of moving the university ahead: our strategic planning, the 150th anniversary, and the start of an exciting comprehensive campaign. We will look back on this time with pride. Be part of it. If you are a manager, we need your people. Keep them informed and engaged. We need every creative idea, every careful analysis, every thoughtful critique. We need you.

Let's go out and make this, our 150th anniversary year, a year to remember. A year that people will point to with pride. A year when people will say, "Something happened at San José State!"