

ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE MASTER
PLAN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA

Informational Hearing November 1, 2017
San Jose, CA

WELCOME REMARKS:
SJSU PRESIDENT MARY A. PAPA ZIAN

Mr. Chair, committee members, staff, and guests.

On behalf of our campus community, it is an honor and pleasure to welcome you to San José State University.

It is fitting that a legislative hearing focused on California's higher education master plan would be held on the campus where the California State University was founded 160 years ago.

Having evolved from the state's founding "Normal School" for teacher training to a vibrant metropolitan university supplying much of the talent fueling the world's epicenter of innovation, San José State, California's first public university, is a worthy backdrop for this conversation.

I am a proud product and beneficiary of California's long-envied public higher education system.

I followed my parents to UCLA, earning undergraduate and graduate degrees in English literature before launching my academic career.

Of course, several members of this select committee—including two members of the South Bay delegation—also are products of this system.

Assemblymember Low—a proud Spartan—earned his political science degree here. Assemblymember Kalra is a graduate of the UC. Each has taught here.

My point is, this committee’s membership brings valuable personal perspective to this very important topic.

And the focus of today’s hearing—the relevance of a higher education master plan conceived nearly 70 years ago to the workforce needs of a contemporary, constantly evolving economy—is an especially apt topic to take up at Silicon Valley’s *only* public university.

When the master plan was commissioned, San José State was a “state college” serving just over 13,000 students in a city of 204,000, less than four percent of whom were persons of color.

Today, we are a vibrant metropolitan university serving 35,000 students in America’s tenth-largest city. We also are one of this nation’s most diverse public universities.

And among our city’s more than one million residents, well over half are persons of color.

Last year, the aggregate number of bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees conferred by our campus was close to our *total enrollment* in 1960.

Many campuses across the state have similar stories. In the meantime, this valley—as we all know—has been transformed into a living laboratory of relentless innovation and ever-accelerating change.

And it has not simply been a binary shift from agriculture to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). The very nature of work—influenced by technology but also encompassing myriad other factors—has shifted beneath our feet.

As I repeatedly have said since arriving here nearly a year and a half year ago, we are at a critical inflection point.

And it is against this backdrop that a thoughtful examination of our master plan for higher education not only is worthwhile; it is essential.

So, since I am a scholar at heart, I hope you will indulge me a few rhetorical questions to start your day. I'll limit myself to three.

The original master plan established firm segmental boundaries that may have made sense in their time. These lines—defining each segment's role in fulfilling the triad mission of teaching, research and public service—long have been blurred.

For example, comprehensive universities like ours, long serving as undergraduate and masters' degree-granting institutions, today offer subject-specific doctoral programs. All of our universities engage in meaningful research, teaching, community and public service, and educate both undergraduate and graduate students for a democracy.

At the same time, the role of our community colleges has never been more critical than it is today in ensuring affordable access to higher education for all Californians at a time when education beyond high school is more critical than ever for the long-term health and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

So, first: Do these firm distinctions, including eligibility standards for admission to our four-year degree granting systems, still make sense in the ways that served us so well these past sixty years or do they need to be adjusted to reflect the needs of a changing 21st century economy?

Second: are we thinking sufficiently about the role of our private, independent institutions in the contemporary higher education landscape?

And third: do the core assumptions that informed the master plan's creation nearly sixty years ago enhance, or inhibit, the potential of today's students and campuses to fulfill their promise?

There are many other questions to ask and issues to consider. We know you are approaching your work thoughtfully and methodically, as you should.

So, as you begin today's hearing, please know that we are here to collaborate with and support you. Again, welcome to San José State.
