Convocation
Thursday, Aug. 23, 2012
Remarks by SDSU President Elliot Hirshman

Good morning. What a difference a year makes – to look out and see every face be a familiar face, a wonderful experience.

I want to thank Provost Marlin for all of the work she does for the university, supporting our faculty, staff and students, and also thank Bill and Rob for your remarks – very, very compelling and inspiring.

This morning we had an opportunity to visit with our honorees, and the totality of what they have done is truly extraordinary, and I want to join everyone on campus in congratulating them. I also want to thank – yes, please.

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I also want to acknowledge our staff members who helped planned today's events and help plan special events throughout the year. I ask you to please join me in applauding our staff members.

While we have faced significant challenges this year, we've also achieved significant successes. Those successes are really a testament to the innovation, the creativity, and the entrepreneurial spirit of our students, faculty and staff.

So I'd like to take some time and share some of our successes this year.

As a campus, we continue to make significant progress on our graduation and retention rates. Our freshman-to-sophomore retention rate, that critical measure of transition, is now at 90 percent, and it's equal across students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds – something we're very proud of. Moreover, it is approximately equal across all racial and ethnic groups.

Our internationalization initiatives also continue to gain momentum. This year we were ranked 22nd nationally in students studying abroad.

Another significant development: recognition by the Department of Education as a Hispanic-serving institution. This recognition reflects achievements from many, many members of our community over many, many years.

Let me mention some additional firsts.

We received our first engineering research center from NSF. Our Zahn Center supported its first student-led businesses, and Shannon Clark received our first Udall scholarship.

We also received approval for new majors in LGBT studies and sustainability and are launching our master's in information systems and our doctorate in physical therapy.

In addition to these firsts, our students, faculty and staff continue to achieve at the highest level.

Sandy Bernstein was appointed chair of a National Institute of Health study section, Joanne Ferraro's book, "Venice: The Floating City" received broad critical acclaim.

Karen Cadiero-Kaplan assumed a major leadership role at the California Department of Education, and Mark Freeman received a Fulbright scholarship to teach documentary film making in Jakarta. Mark is joined by staff members Adrianne Richart, faculty members Annalisa Berta and Margaret Field and four of our students in receiving Fulbright awards this year.

And Elliese Carmona, Levi Lentz, and Jose Alonso Navarro, all first-generation college students, received prestigious graduate fellowships to study at Harvard, MIT and Wisconsin. Let's give them a big hand for that.

An extraordinary year for discovery also.

University scholar Sarah Mattson of the Center for Behavioral Teratology identified the effects of prenatal alcohol on brain function.

Joy Phillips at the Donald P. Shiley BioScience Center identified a protein that can fight the flu.

Sadia Mohsin and Mark Sussman engineered stem cells that repair damaged hearts, and astronomers William Welsh and Jerome Orosz discovered planetary systems where planets orbit two sons.

Really extraordinary. These accomplishments illustrate why we say "Leadership Starts Here" at San Diego State University.

And the remarkable part of this is that these are only a small fraction of the campus achievement over the past year. So many points of pride – from hosting the Dalai Lama, to the success of our athletic teams, to helping a wounded veteran renovate his home, to donating 55,000 pounds of food to support San Diegans in need.

These achievements reflect the efforts, often under very difficult circumstances, of our entire community, and every student, faculty and staff member can – and should – be proud of these accomplishments. So give yourself a big hand for this.

In the coming year, we have to build on these accomplishments and meet significant challenges.
In meeting these challenges, as was mentioned by several of our speakers, we have to reaffirm the core values of our campus: the commitment to the quality of our educational and research programs, our innovation and creativity, that “can-do” spirit that makes things happen on this campus, the valued tradition of shared governance, and our deeply held belief that our students, faculty and staff are the core – the heart – of the university.

Most importantly, we have to bring these values together with a strategy for long-term success – a strategy for a new era and a new reality in both our state and our nation.

And today I’d like to share three aspects of this strategy for you to consider.

First, we must aggressively pursue financial stabilization and, ultimately, financial strength.

Since 2008, our state appropriation has been reduced from $221 million to $103 million; it’s a reduction of $118 million.

Now we must, whenever possible, continue to pursue cost reductions. But we can't accommodate a reduction of this magnitude solely by reducing costs.

We have to pursue multiple approaches for enhancing our resources. And the focus on multiple approaches is essential. Together, through multiple approaches, we can generate sufficient resources to meet our challenges and create a new financial model for the university.

This approach is already producing significant results.

For example, with support from our entire campus, we kicked off our first comprehensive fundraising campaign this year. We have raised over $72 million in the last year, and the campaign total is now, as of this morning, over $340 million.

Extraordinary work. The funds are having important impact on the campus already, supporting scholarships, faculty and staff positions, programmatic support and, in many cases, these funds are providing core operating funds for departments.

Bringing together multiple approaches for enhancing revenue, we can create a path to financial strength – strength that will allow us to support our core mission and control our own destiny.

As we enhance our financial position, we must invest our resources strategically.

And this is the second aspect of the strategy for long-term success. In a sentence, we have to focus our resources for results. We have to build on areas of strength and create even greater national and international distinction.

When you read in media reports, people often say that we have to do more with less. I have grave concerns about this perspective.

Instead, I hope we can do more with purpose.

There are extraordinary resources on this campus – resources in our students, our faculty and staff, resources in our history and our tradition. Using these resources, and working together, we can attain even greater distinction.

To facilitate and support these efforts, the university is going to begin a broad-based strategic planning process this fall. The process will consider the state of the university, relative to our educational research and service missions.

The process will be lead by a steering committee co-chaired by Provost Marlin and Vice President Roush. And the steering committee is going to coordinate the work of five task forces focusing on student success and academic excellence, research and creative endeavors, community engagement, diversity, and internationalization.

I’m excited about the process, and I’m confident that it will lead to good outcomes for our campus.

The third and final aspect of the strategy concerns how we tell the stories of our successes. We must raise awareness of our excellence. We must get the good news about this campus out and do it in ways that support both our financial and our strategic initiatives.

If we can do this, we can create a virtuous cycle. One in which financial strength can lead to programmatic strength, and awareness of excellence can lead to investment in excellence.

We're at a pivotal moment for this university, and there is a clear path forward.

By strengthening our financial position, investing our resources strategically, and raising awareness of excellence, we can continue our development as a leading public research university.

The history of the campus demonstrates that not only is this possible, it has already happened.

The period of the Great Depression was arguably the most challenging period in our nation's history. Consider for a moment what happened on this campus during that period.

In 1929, Abraham Nasatir was hired in our department of history. Over the next half century, he published 14 books, mentored countless students and became one of our most eminent historians.

In 1930, students, faculty and staff members, together, literally moved our campus to its current location. Books, furniture, and desks were loaded into trucks and carried to the new campus.

And in 1931, the cornerstone of the campus was laid.

The foundation for the successes that we enjoy today were laid during the depths of the Great Depression, and we can do the same this year.
As we begin the new year, no one can predict the short-term fluctuations of the economy, or California’s political fortunes.

What we can know with complete certainty is that, as in the past 115 years, the work we do together this year will advance our missions of education, research, and service and lay the foundation for our future success.

Thank you for everything you do for the university.

I am honored to be your president, and I look forward to a great year.

Thank you.

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>> andrea rollins: thank you, president hirshman.
We realize we covered a lot of ground this morning. The president’s remarks will be available on our website, our homepage at sdsu.edu.

And a sincere thank you to our guests, for sharing this morning with us.

As you leave viejas arena, we hope you will stop to
Meet and greet one another in I lot for some light refreshments.

Best wishes for a great year.

Thank you