

President John D. Welty

“Celebrating Our Successes Even As We Tackle Challenges” Spring Assembly - January 19, 2010

Good morning and welcome to the first assembly of 2010. I hope – as I’m sure all of you do – that this will be the first year of a decade of growth, progress and success for our university, our region, our state and nation.

As the 2009 year closed, I read and heard many people saying “good riddance” to the year and the first decade of this century. I know that there were many difficult days that we want to put out of our minds. However, not everything was negative. I want us to remember and celebrate the many things that have occurred that have helped our university achieved last year.

Let’s briefly review 2009. I hope that during the challenging months ahead, we can remember the good things we have accomplished – no matter what storms may swirl around us.

We opened the new Henry Madden Library last February. I think we all can agree that the library is the gem of the campus. We’ve had record numbers of patrons coming into the library. In fact, Dean Peter McDonald plans to welcome the 1 millionth patron here very shortly.

To celebrate the first year anniversary of the opening, we’re planning a “Happy Birthday Library” open house. Please watch for that announcement on Bulletin Board plan to participate in the activities.

In April, the university received the largest cash gift in our history, and the history of the CSU. The \$29.4 million dollar gift named the Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology and will help generations of students and faculty to participate expanded research and improved facilities.

The Jordan gift provided a tremendous boost to our Campaign for Fresno State. The campaign, whose public phase was launched in May, has set a goal of \$200 million dollars by the end of 2012 and we look forward to the many ways the money will help our university. Gifts from some 20,000 individuals totaled over \$144 million dollars.

Our students, faculty and staff have continued to achieve during 2009. Our volunteer work was recognized nationally with the Presidential Award for General Community Service. We were one of only three universities to earn the distinction nationally. Among our many projects this past year, our community distributed food to the needy residents of Firebaugh, collected funds for the American Red Cross and clothing for victims of the earthquake in Samoa. We helped our neighborhood at the Bulldog Pantry, and we helped our own colleagues with donations of turkeys and food during the holidays.

Already in 2010 members of the campus community are supporting relief efforts in Haiti.

I am so proud of all of you who volunteered to help others. Our efforts demonstrate Fresno State is an institution committed to helping others.

Chris Fiorentino, director of the Richter Center for Community Engagement and Service-Learning, says we're well on our way to achieving our 1-million hour goal to serve this community by our Centennial next year. In fact, we should reach that goal a year early!

Our hard-working faculty are receiving excellent leadership from our new Provost, Bill Covino. He is providing outstanding leadership, innovation and collegiality. Bill, it's great to have you as a member of our community

As always, our faculty have achieved on many fronts, gaining positive recognition for our university. One recent example is the work of Assistant Music Professor Thomas Loewenheim. Last month, he directed the Fresno State Symphony Orchestra and the Fresno Youth Philharmonic in a stellar performance of Mahler Symphony No. 1 that drew standing ovations and critical praise.

You just heard about the great work of Charles Arokiasamy.

Faculty members throughout the University are making contributions of this order, through their dedication to truly transformative teaching, research, scholarship, creative accomplishment, and community engagement. Later this spring, the Provost's Awards program will recognize a number of these outstanding achievements.

I am happy to report that our new Center for the Scholarly Advancement of Learning and Teaching – CSALT for short – is up and running under the direction of Associate Provost Ellen Junn. This re-incarnation of the former Center for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning will provide faculty – and ultimately our students – with fresh ideas and encouragement.

There's lots of information about CSALT initiatives at its Web site, csufresno.edu/csalt and I urge you to take a look at those activities. I'll speak more about this a little later.

Our student-athletes continue to excel on the playing field and in the classroom, with NCAA Academic Progress Rates rising to new heights across the board for the 2008-09 academic year. Eleven sport programs achieved perfect eligibility scores of 1,000.

Fresno State student-athletes accounted for 117 Academic All-WAC selections during this same period, and 67 earned recognition as members of the Dean's List.

In addition, last year Fresno State won its second WAC Commissioner's Cup, which recognizes the overall measure of excellence in athletics among WAC institutions. Two Bulldog teams won regular season WAC championships while another five claimed WAC tournament titles, and a total of 12 sport programs advanced to post-season competition.

Clearly, we have many, many positive things happening at our university. Unfortunately, these accomplishments are often overshadowed by the severe fiscal challenges that have been part of our daily lives this past year.

I thank all of you for your spirit of cooperation and innovation this past fall as we were forced to impose reductions in classes, services and our workforce.

I deeply appreciate the willingness of all to make sacrifices and work together during a time of great difficulty.

Fortunately, one-time federal funds to the CSU allowed us to reinstate some courses and faculty this spring, and we're getting reports from students that they are finding it a little bit easier to get the classes they need.

The Cabinet and I have been keeping a close eye on the budget throughout the year, and we've made adjustments as necessary. I believe that we have our budget stabilized for the current fiscal year. The governor has called a special emergency session to address the state budget shortfall which is estimated to be \$19.9 billion over the next 18 months. Since almost all of our Fresno State budget is already committed for this year, I do not anticipate that we will have to make more adjustments for the current year.

Now let me turn to the future. I am encouraged by the governor's proposed budget for higher education and his call for a constitutional amendment with an improved funding formula for higher education.

Under the Governor's initiative, no less than 10 percent of general fund dollars would be allocated to support public institutions of higher education; and no more than 7 percent of California's general fund would be allocated to support of the state prison system. These mandatory limits would begin in the 2014-15 fiscal year.

To begin reaching the Governor's goal, the amendment would require the state to begin shifting all taxpayer money deducted from the costs of operating state prisons to the budget to operate higher education beginning in the 2011-12 fiscal year, culminating with the final deadline of 2014-15.

Beginning in 2014, the Legislature would be able to apply other available resources to ensure that public institutions of higher education are fully funded at no less than 10 percent of the General Fund expenditures. To put this in context we are currently at 7.45% of the state general fund.

Obviously, this proposal will generate a great deal of debate. I am very encouraged that finally we will engage a public policy debate on higher education. This is a very important discussion which must be undertaken for the future of the state.

Let me turn to the immediate future. Gov. Schwarzenegger proposed to restore \$305 million to the California State University's 2010-11 budget, as well as provide an additional \$60.6 million for enrollment growth assuming that certain federal funding dollars flow to the state. This proposal is a start to restore support for public higher education, but we have a long way to go. That means that as we plan for fall we cannot assume that the proposed dollars will be a reality.

Obviously, with the unveiling of the governor's budget proposal, we know that California will continue to face major impacts because of the state's \$19.9 billion dollar deficit.

There's lots of uncertainties ahead. What I do know for certain is that the major issue we are facing is to reduce the size of our university by 9.5 percent.

Simply put, Fresno State must shrink back to the size it was in the fall of 2000.

With a smaller budget, we must reduce the number of students we serve and, correspondingly, the number of faculty and staff.

Perhaps the best way to look at it is this way: Just as the campus added students, faculty and staff when budget dollars increased during the last decade, so must we reduce the number of students, faculty and staff now that our budget dollars have decreased.

We have already started trimming the number of students admitted to Fresno State. Our fall enrollment last semester was down by about 1,000 students and in fall 2010 we expect to shrink another 2,000 students.

But reducing the size of the university is the reality we must face. And as we carefully consider the challenges and changes we face, we will do all we can to minimize the impact on our campus community and on our mission to educate students.

On February 5, I will convene a budget summit with our campus leadership. At that time I will outline a proposed plan for the 2010-11 budget consistent with the governor's proposal. I will ask for feedback and suggestions on that plan. After a review of suggestions which are made, we will then issue a tentative plan in early March.

I do want to let you know that our budget planning for 2010-11 does not contemplate continuation of the furlough program beyond the negotiated date of June 30, 2010.

I know that some people are questioning whether the CSU is doing enough to fight for the financial needs of our system. I can assure you that work is being done every day in Long Beach, Sacramento and on all 23 campuses to advocate for the CSU.

Our message is that the state needs and must reinvest in higher education. As Chancellor Reed said when addressing the Legislature recently, the future of California is tied to its students and the state needs to fund higher education in order to allow us to do our job.

This is a message that I ask every one of you to echo. We all must be ambassadors for the CSU. That means calling and writing our elected representatives in Sacramento to insist that they work to restore and enhance the funding the CSU needs to serve the students of California.

As we talk to friends in the community we must make our case in support of an educated work force. State support for CSU students has plummeted in the past decade. State funds per student have fallen from about \$11,000 per student to \$4,732. That is not a commitment to educating our youth. That is a failed promise.

We must not lose sight of the promise that higher education holds for students and our state. Just yesterday, we honored the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King and we should recall his "I have a dream" speech. He dreamed of a better future for all young people, and we know that higher education is a critical part of that better future.

Today, I am afraid we might look at the lack of commitment to higher education in California and say, "I have a nightmare ...". A nightmare that students who desire a college education will be turned away because the state reneged on its promise and its social contract.

The governor's proposal for a Constitutional amendment to lock in an improved funding formula for higher education is one that deserves our support. We need to help make that a reality and to work through the details that are essential.

This is the time for vocal and sustained advocacy by all of us on behalf of higher education. The future of our state is dependent upon an educated population. We should be producing more well-educated students for the workforce, not fewer.

I urge you to join me in advocating for the CSU as we go forward.

And in the meantime, as the governor and Legislature wrestle with the budget issues, we will continue to move forward on our campus, doing the good work that is a hallmark of our university.

One of the initiatives I would like to highlight today is the new Center for the Scholarly Advancement of Learning and Teaching that I mentioned earlier. The Center was launched in October with Associate Provost Junn as its interim director.

Three of its notable initiatives are:

- Improving Student Writing
- Enhancing Student Information Literacy, and
- Faculty Learning Communities.

Today I would like to briefly discuss the Improving Student Writing Initiative. It's a three-part project that is a campus-wide effort to address a critical need of our students – the need to improve writing.

I am so pleased that so far, we have 152 faculty members participating -- clear proof of the interest and motivation of our dedicated faculty who are trying to learn new techniques to improve student writing. It's very gratifying to see how eager and enthusiastic faculty are to help students. In fact 140 members of the faculty spent Saturday at a workshop.

The faculty participating will be working with 6,500 to 7,000 students in this pilot, and we are hopeful that we will learn valuable information that will be further refined for use in subsequent semesters.

There's still time for more faculty to get involved – whether you are tenured, tenure-track, or part-time. Please check the Web site or contact Ellen for more information.

As part of the CSU's effort to improve graduation rates, we've developed a plan for increasing the six-year graduate rate for first-time freshmen and transfer students by six percentage points by fall of 2015. An additional goal is to reduce the graduation rate gap between traditionally represented students and under-represented groups by one half.

The Student Success Task Force, co-chaired by Provost Covino and Vice President Oliaro has developed a plan for our campus, which will involve new and revitalized initiatives, focusing primarily on this year's entering students.

Along with our efforts to improve student writing, these initiatives will include a mandatory academic success workshop for students with low GPAs this past fall, renewed implementation of our Mentoring Institute, increased emphasis on academic advising and expanded support for faculty-student collaboration on research projects.

These are the efforts to keep our students connected, focused, and engaged -- key elements for their continuing success. Through the spring and beyond, the Student Success Task Force will be seeking your advice and help, as they continue to identify, prioritize, and implement ideas for increasing retention and graduation rates.

Also ahead, I will work with the strategic planning committee this semester to develop the process we will use to update our strategic plan for the next 3-4 years. We will begin this work in earnest next fall.

Additionally, the campus will be appointing a WASC Steering Committee in preparation for our upcoming WASC re-accreditation review. We will be engaging and seeking involvement from all sectors of the campus community as we prepare for our Capacity Performance Review proposal scheduled for submission in October 15, 2010. Please watch for information and invitations from Associate Provost Junn for faculty, staff and administrators to become involved in our re-accreditation process later this spring semester.

We will also complete a reorganization of our information technology functions this spring. The plan which has been discussed with the information and education technology coordinating council and several other groups will seek to improve our delivery of services to the campus and solidify the many changes which we have made in the past several years and it will result in some monetary savings as well.

And finally, amidst a year that undoubtedly will be a challenge for all of us, there is a wonderful bright spot that we simply cannot let slip by without fanfare – our Centennial celebration.

Even during difficult days, it is important for the campus community to come together and recognize and celebrate this milestone. We will launch Centennial year activities at Vintage Days this spring, and will cap them off at the 2011 Commencement when the 100th class of Fresno State graduates will move the tassels on their caps – and maybe throw their caps in the air.

The Centennial connects us to our roots as Fresno Normal School, and it also reminds us that no matter what the circumstances over these last almost 100 years, Fresno State has been THE place where dreams and opportunities have been given to students seeking a better life have been fulfilled.

Now, more than ever, we must continue our hard work – despite the adversities that we face – to allow more hopes and dreams to come true. That is the work of educators – and I consider every person on this campus an educator.

The students are counting on us. The people in our region are counting on us to provide an educated workforce.

The Latin inscription on the seal of California State University, Fresno translates as "Receive the light that you may give it forth." I intend to do everything to make sure the light at Fresno State shines bright and is passed to this generation and those to come. I ask that you join me in this work recognizing that sacrifices will be necessary and it is so important for our future.

Thank you.