



Remarks by President Joseph I. Castro
2015 Fall Assembly of Faculty and Staff

Good morning and welcome! It's nice to see everyone back and ready for another exceptional academic year.

Thank you, Kevin for that kind introduction this morning! I appreciate your outstanding leadership of the Academic Senate and look forward to continuing our work together this year. I also want to thank Staff Assembly Chair, Katie Williamson, for her excellent service on behalf of our staff. And, last but not least, welcome to Abby Hudson, our new ASI President. I'm delighted to work with you and your team to ensure that our students are engaged and well served over the coming year.

Today, we are joined by the newest member of the President's Cabinet. I am pleased to introduce you to Orlando Leon, our new Chief Information Officer. Orlando will lead our information technology staff and services. He reports directly to me and will work to create and support a responsive, university-wide information technology vision.

Orlando served at Stanford and at UCSF before joining us. He is technically very strong (how many people do you know with 3 MIT degrees?), but most importantly, he is a bold leader who is passionate about our mission and works effectively with others. Welcome, Orlando!

It is hard for me to believe that two years have passed since my first Fall Assembly address. Time flies when you are having fun! I have greatly appreciated your hard work and dedicated service.

This fall, Fresno State begins its 105th year. We have evolved from a Normal School with 33 students – 31 women and 2 men – and 11 part-time and one full-time faculty, to a major comprehensive university serving over 23,000 students from the Central Valley and around the world.

As we begin this morning, I invite you to think about why you decided to work in higher education, and specifically at Fresno State. Based on my discussions with so many of you, I believe that you are here because of our primary mission – to educate the next generation of leaders for our region and beyond. I purposely use the term "educate" because we each play a

significant role in supporting our teaching, applied research and community service areas of focus.

What could be more inspiring than the idea that we are working together to prepare our students to be the next generation of leaders? When you consider the educational and economic challenges of our region, the meaning and impact of our work reaches levels that I have not experienced at any other university. Our role as a university is to undertake bold approaches that enable our students to achieve their full potential.

So, what is the state of Fresno State as we begin our 105th year? I am pleased to report that our university is stronger than ever – a place of growing discovery, diversity and distinction.

We are attracting an increasing number of talented and diverse student applicants. In fact, our applications have increased at a rate that is twice the CSU average. This is tremendous news! Our students are also graduating in a more timely way. We are investing more in our dedicated faculty and staff, which will enable us to recruit and retain talented and diverse professionals throughout our organization. And, very importantly, we are working quickly and effectively to improve our physical and technological infrastructure.

Today, I would like to highlight our progress and next important steps in four areas of focus -- (1) Student Success; (2) Support for Faculty and Staff; (3) Diversity and Inclusion and (4) Enhanced Infrastructure.

I want to begin with student success because this continues to be the highest priority for me personally and for our campus. Our students are the hardest working, most diverse, and passionate that I have ever known in my career. They bring many special talents to our campus. Our job is to challenge and support them with a quality educational experience that leads them to graduation in a timely way and distinction in their chosen career.

While there are many possible metrics of student success, I would like to spotlight one today -- our graduation rate. I am pleased to announce that our 6-year graduation rate is projected to increase to nearly 58% this year. That is more than a 9 percentage point increase from our baseline of 48.1%, and about a 5 percentage point increase in the 6-year graduation rate reported at this time last year. This is good news for our students, our campus and our community. Congratulations to each and every one of you!! Our eventual goal is to achieve a 70% graduation rate by 2023. We are well on our way!

Because statistics only tell part of the story, I want to introduce you to one of our exceptional recent graduates. Yesenia Thompson was born in Mexico and grew up in Lindsay before coming to Fresno State. She was the first person in her family to attend college.

As Yesenia earned both her bachelor's degree and her master of science degree in Biology, she was challenged to discover her passion and set a path for her career goals. And at

Commencement in May, she was awarded the University Graduate Medal. This picture of Yesenia as she learned she received the award is priceless. It symbolizes the excellence and success that we speak of every day at Fresno State.

The great news is that Yesenia has a new job. She is a cancer research associate at the City of Hope in the Los Angeles area. She understandably was not able to be here today, but please join me in congratulating Yesenia on this well-deserved honor!

I would also like to give you a brief update on the DISCOVERe Program. As you may recall, we launched the program last year with over 1,000 students. We found that the program led to significantly lower textbook costs, higher engagement and more academic success. Today, I am pleased to announce that DISCOVERe has grown to serve 5,000 students with 132 faculty from across the university participating this fall.

I want to thank the Fresno State Foundation Board of Governors for their strong financial support for this program. They have invested over 1 million dollars for tablet scholarships for our students. I would also like to thank the students, faculty, and staff who have come together heroically to launch this important initiative.

Finally, in the area of student success, I am pleased to share with you that our Food Security Initiative launched in January is off to a very impactful start. Since opening in late November 2014, the Student Cupboard has served over 800 students with over 35,000 pounds of food.

The Student Cupboard recently moved to its new location in Industrial Technology Building room 144, which provides a larger facility and grocery store layout. Additionally, to better serve our students, the hours have doubled and in the fall the cupboard will be open 30 hours over 6 days each week.

This fall, we also will launch the Catered Cupboard portion of the Fresno State Mobile app, which will reduce food waste on campus and provide meals for our students.

Our Food Security efforts are critical. Our students cannot succeed if they are not adequately nourished. Thanks to our campus colleagues and our many generous friends in the community, we are better able to support student needs.

Our students can only succeed if they are supported by talented faculty and staff who serve with distinction. In turn, it is imperative that our campus support you in your mission to serve our students effectively.

The work of our faculty and staff is gaining national and international attention and because of you, our students enjoy learning opportunities that result in graduates who are ready for careers or advanced degrees.

Today, I would like to highlight the contributions of four individuals who are representative of the extraordinary Fresno State community. They are faculty members Dr. Thomas Loewenheim and Dr. Jenelle Pitt, staff member Jeff Colvin and manager Frances Pena.

Dr. Thomas Loewenheim is Head of Strings, Professor of Cello, and Conductor of the University Orchestra. His students and peers praise him as an exceptional teacher who inspires his students to reach new heights of artistic achievement.

He has established two instructionally related annual events – the International Cello Festival and the Fresno Opera and Orchestra Summer Academy – both which provide students the chance to learn from and work alongside world-class artists.

Under Dr. Lowenheim's direction, the Fresno State Symphony Orchestra was invited to perform at the 2015 Annual California All State Music Educators Conference – the first such honor extended to the ensemble in more than three decades.

Dr. Lowenheim's professional accomplishments are no less impressive. In addition to his outstanding work as the Music Director of the Youth Orchestra of Fresno, he is often invited to guest conduct for other student honor orchestras. Dr. Lowenheim also has performed his cello in solo and chamber recitals in various venues throughout the state and is regularly sought as a clinician and master teacher for a variety of music festivals and institutions throughout California, Hong Kong, Jerusalem and Haifa.

In addition to his numerous contributions to the work and activities of the Music Department, College of Arts and Humanities, and the University, Dr. Lowenheim has helped attract substantial gifts in support of the orchestral strings program.

Thank you Thomas, for your excellent work!

Dr. Jenelle Pitt, an associate professor of Counselor Education and Rehabilitation, is a recognized scholar in the field of rehabilitation counseling. She received the national Rehabilitation Educator of the Year Award from the National Council on Rehabilitation Education, and other prestigious recognizing her accomplishments. She has presented at 26 national or state conferences over her career.

As program coordinator, she manages grants and contracts. She also serves on the Kremen School of Education's International Education Committee and is actively involved at the university level. Among her notable University work is her service as president of Researchers and Critical Educators and a member of the President's Commission on Human Relations and Equity.

Dr. Pitt is the recipient of the Provost's Promising New Faculty Award, the Outstanding Faculty Award from the Black Faculty and Staff Association at Fresno State, and the Unsung Hero Rosa

Parks Award from the Center for Women and Culture, now the called Cross Cultural and Gender Center.

Thank you, Dr. Pitt, for your excellent work!

Next, will Jeff Colvin please rise. Jeff is Equipment Systems Specialist who also handles Video Conferencing for Technology Services.

I've just learned that like me, Jeff was born in Hanford, but he was raised a few miles away in Riverdale. After serving in the Air Force and working for Community Medical Centers, Jeff began his career at Fresno State as a Distance Learning Technician in 2004.

A year ago Jeff accepted substantial new responsibilities and played an important role in ensuring we have the right classroom technology in place to support DISCOVERe and student success. Jeff puts in many extra hours to make sure classroom upgrades are planned and executed successfully and always has the interests of Fresno State students and faculty foremost in his mind as he does his work.

Jeff is known for the outstanding attitude that he brings to his work. His respect for his colleagues and his commitment to finding the best solutions for our students are unwavering. His dedication to delivering results, even when it has meant long hours on nights and weekends, is exceptional.

Thank you so much, Jeff, for your dedication. Our community is better because of it.

And last but certainly not least, I want to recognize Frances Pena.

Frances has been instrumental in the success of thousands of Valley students and families over her career by helping them navigate the college admission process. Her astute guidance of our counselors – teamed with school district and community college personnel – has helped change the lives of many students and their families.

A Fresno State alumnae, Frances was hired in 1979 to work for the Recruiting Students Via Parents Program (RSVP), one of three CSU-funded programs to reach out to Hispanic families. The RSVP program served as a model program that helped established a system-wide initiative to reach out to underrepresented and disadvantage students.

For the last 27 years Frances has been Fresno State's outreach director. She has developed partnerships with school districts in our region, continues to connect and strengthen our relationship with community groups and organizations, is involved in raising money for scholarships and has been an active member of the Alumni Association.

She has been instrumental in helping our campus grow and become the diverse community that we are today. Recently, she has been focused on implementing system-wide initiatives to reach out to underserved communities and establishing a Dream Outreach Center on campus.

Thank you Frances for your dedication to students and their success!

In my first Fall Assembly Address two years ago, I promised you that I would prioritize investment in recruiting and retaining talented and diverse faculty and staff. We have done that continuously over the past two years through new compensation and professional development programs.

For example, our largest new investment of funds in the last fiscal year was in faculty and staff compensation, including new campus salary equity programs. There is no question that we were **BOLD** in this area!

Our salary equity programs alone totaled about **2 million dollars** in additional annual increases in salaries and benefits for those in our campus community whose salaries had fallen behind in recent years. This was among the largest investments of its kind in the CSU System.

While these are significant investments, more work remains to be done in this area. Today, I am pleased to announce that we will invest an additional 1 million dollars to implement a **second** campus salary equity program this year. Our new equity program will have comparable-sized investments to address inequities for faculty and staff.

With respect to our faculty, the Provost and I look forward to working with the CFA to prioritize addressing salary inequities among tenure-track professors.

There is no question that Fresno State's success depends upon an engaged and supported faculty and staff. We will continue to prioritize support for you and, in return, I ask that you continue to prioritize support for our students.

One of our campus' core strengths is diversity and inclusion. This is one of those areas where each of us can feel it and see it through our own personal perspective. The most important thing as your President is for everyone to thrive at Fresno State. In order for us to achieve this worthwhile goal, we must work diligently every day to listen carefully to each other, and extend respect even when we disagree.

The changing demographics of our nation and our community have helped us recognize that our students, faculty and staff should better reflect the overall diversity of those we serve. The administration has worked hard to do this through appointments of senior leaders. The Provost and I would like to accelerate our efforts to enhance the diversity of our faculty by attracting and retaining the most talented and diverse professionals. In doing so, we enhance the learning for our students and working environment for each other as we gain valuable exposure to diverse perspectives, hone skills to be more effective in multicultural and global environments, and welcome new opportunities to foster a sense of belonging that allow all of us to be successful and thrive.

Diversity and inclusion efforts at Fresno State are the responsibility of all of us. I am pleased, however, to have a talented and energetic President's Commission on Human Relations and Equity. The Commission plans to sponsor a number of programs this year. I invite you to join me at the Fall Forum on Inclusion, Respect and Equity on Tuesday, September 15, where we will explore the theme, "Intersectionality: Where You and I Meet."

Thank you to Dean Jody Hironaka-Juteau and Professor Ken Magdaleno and Director Francine Oputa for their leadership of the PCHRE!

As you may know, I was raised by my grandparents and mother. A core lesson that my grandfather ingrained in me as a young boy was to think about the long-term. As a university beginning its 105th year, our institution has lived a long time and we must take steps to ensure success in serving the next generations of students for years to come.

This is an area that is both challenging and exciting. I am excited by the progress we have made on our electrical infrastructure project, renovating teaching and learning and athletic spaces, replacing several old elevators, repairing roads and buildings, and in constructing new buildings.

From Campus Pointe to our new Physical Therapy and Intercollegiate Athletics Building to the Jordan Agricultural Research Center scheduled to open early next year and to our bold plans to renovate Bulldog Stadium, this is clearly an exciting time in our history.

Today, I am also pleased to announce plans for a new student union and faculty center at Fresno State. This building will be a new hub for innovation, support and renewal. Our current student union is almost 50 years old and was built for a much smaller student population than we have today. We also have an exciting opportunity to develop a new center that will bring together our services and support for faculty. In the coming months, I will invite your input on this exciting new facility.

We also have a significant amount of work to do before we fully address our deferred maintenance issues. This will take some time. However, I am committed to moving as quickly and efficiently as possible to renovate and rebuild our campus so that you can do your important work with the infrastructure you need and our students deserve.

As I mentioned last spring, I ask for your continued patience during the infrastructure construction project. I know the work sometimes presents inconveniences as we travel across the campus, but the results will be worth it in the long run!

Vice President Debbie Astone and AVP Bob Boyd and their team have done an exemplary job. Please join me in thanking them for their leadership! Together, we will make more visible progress in this area during the upcoming year.

As I begin my third year of service as your President, I remain as excited and energized as I was on my first day in office. I have served at a number of excellent universities in my career. Not one of them had then or has now the extraordinary potential that Fresno State has today.

It is this potential that the women and men of the Central Valley saw in the months and years leading up to September 1911 when Fresno State was first established. It is the same potential that has brought us to work together today.

So, as we begin this new academic year, I ask you to reflect on why you are here and to join me in reaffirming your commitment to help take Fresno State to even higher levels of success.

This fall, we have the opportunity to develop a new, bolder strategic plan for Fresno State. The Cabinet worked over the summer on a framework and we will share that with the entire campus in coming weeks and ask for your input.

It is very important that all of you participate in the upcoming open sessions where we will discuss the strategic plan. Every voice matters and every one matters. Please watch for campus announcements of these sessions. This is your opportunity to help shape Fresno State's exciting and bold future!

Why is it important for all of us to participate? This is our time to build a campus that is better and stronger than ever before. It is our time to continue thinking, acting and leading boldly in service to our students. When we do, I am confident that great things will continue to happen and our entire region will benefit.

Our work together TRANSFORMS the lives of individuals, families and communities. This very mission is motivation to do our best every day.

Fresno State has been a valuable asset for our region and state for over a century. It can and will be even more valuable in the coming decades as the Central Valley plays an increasingly important role in our nation.

Our region needs and deserves the very best leaders and developing leaders is what Fresno State does best! Our core strength drives entrepreneurship, innovation and life-long learning, helping to make our Valley a vital place to live and the world our graduates touch...even stronger. Thank you for serving with me over these past two years! I am grateful to be here with you.

Because of our talented students, our extraordinarily supportive alumni and friends, and YOUR passionate commitment to your work, our future is very bright!

I will now be pleased to answer your questions.