

All-University Convocation 8.25.16

Remarks of SDSU President Elliot Hirshman:

Good morning, everyone.

One of the best things about being president of San Diego State University is the opportunity to recognize the excellence of our community.

Two weeks ago, I had the pleasure of presenting the Zuma Awards for staff excellence. The winners are here today in our front row, and it is my privilege to recognize their achievements. I would like to ask our Zuma Awardees to stand when I call their name. And I know this is challenging, please hold your applause until we have introduced everyone.

In the auxiliary category, our winner is Jennifer Esquivel Parker, assistant director of government affairs and programming for Associated Students.

In the manager category, our honoree is Jessica Rentto, associate vice president for administration in our division of Business and Financial Affairs.

The team category awardees are Hidahis Mesa, Arthur Pasternak and Lingjun Anna He of Enrollment Services.

In the innovation category, we recognize Edward Legaspi, who is an information technology consultant in Enterprise Technology Services.

In the staff-to-staff mentoring category, our winner is Joan Goodwin, head of the circulation desk in Library and Information Access.

And our final honoree – for community service – is Rosemarie Busalacchi, administrative support coordinator in our School of Nursing.

OK, everyone who has been really excited, here we go, give them a round of applause.

(Applause)

Now it's my pleasure to introduce our first speaker – chair of the University Senate – Marcie Bober-Michel.

(Remarks from University Senate Chair Marcie Bober-Michel, Associated Students President Jamie Miller and Provost Chukuka S. Enwemeka and

presentation of the 2016 Faculty Monty Awards. President Hirshman's Convocation remarks follow.)

Thank you, Provost Enwemeka. And thank you for your leadership of our academic programs. Thank you also to Marcie and Jamie – I was going to say I look forward to working with you in our tradition of shared governance, but we've already been working this morning on our shared governance. We're off and running.

Very glad that Alan Dulgeroff could join us today. Our 300,000 alumni are central to the Aztec family, and we appreciate their extraordinary support.

The videos were just incredibly inspiring. I want to congratulate all of our awardees and ask you to please join me in recognizing them.

(Applause)

I also want to thank our staff who planned and executed the series of events today. It's really an extraordinary challenge to bring all of this together. Please join me in recognizing our staff members.

(Applause)

Convocation is a time to reflect on our past and to consider the opportunities ahead. We are now beginning the fifth year of our strategic plan, "Building on Excellence."

The "Building on Excellence" philosophy is a very simple one: We identify areas of excellence, and then we all work collaboratively across the divisions of the university to achieve even greater excellence in these areas.

And over the last several years, we have seen the power of this philosophy in action as our efforts have garnered national and international recognition. We had an amazing year and I would like to celebrate just a few of our accomplishments. I apologize in advance – as I do every year – that I can only cover a small fraction of the excellence on our campus.

First, our six-year graduation rate was a record 74 percent, and our transfer graduation rate was 86 percent.

(Applause)

This extraordinary progress reflects the concerted efforts of thousands of faculty and staff across the entire university.

Many, many programs have contributed to this success – our Commuter Student Center, the Provost’s Advising Initiative, the Aztec Scholars Initiative, our Sexual Violence Prevention Campaign, our partnership with the San Diego Housing Commission, our new Women’s Resource Center, our newly remodeled Pride Center, our Math Center, our Writing Center, our Emergency Crisis Response Team, our wait list implementation team, and our cashier’s advising team – and many, many more. Please join me in recognizing all of those innovative approaches.

(Applause)

The extraordinary growth of high-impact practices on our campus has made a critical difference.

In the past year, a record number of students studied abroad, participated in internships and the Aztec Mentor Program, presented their original research at our Student Research Symposium and enrolled in the Susan and Stephen Weber Honors College.

Especially exciting developments occurred in our entrepreneurship programs which were ranked in the top 25 by “Forbes” and by “Fortune” magazine. A \$5.1 million gift from the Zahn family allowed us to establish the Zahn Innovation Platform and award the inaugural Irwin Zahn Spirit of Innovation Prize to graduating senior Austin Owens.

(Applause)

International programs – ranked 15th in the nation – continued to support student achievement. Nine students received Fulbrights, 10 students received Gilman International Scholarships and three students received Boren Awards for international study.

Also traveling far in the past year were Ellison Grove, who interned at the State Department; Stephanie Castillo, a biology major who carried out original research at the Smithsonian; and journalism major Quinn Owen, who interned for George Stephanopoulos at ABC News in New York.

(Applause)

Our faculty and staff certainly kept pace in the past year.

Among many accomplishments, Alex DeNoble of the Lavin Center received the Presidential Award from the International Council for Small Business, Mark Sussman of Biology received the Distinguished Achievement Award from the American Heart Association, Carlos Herrera of our Imperial Valley campus received the Gaspar Perez de Villagra Award and Frank Harris III of the College

of Education received the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' Research and Scholarship Award. And there is more.

Kelly Doran and Eunha Ho were recognized by INSIGHT Into Diversity for mentoring young women in STEM fields; J. Luke Wood of Education received the Carlos J. Vallejo Memorial Award for Exemplary Scholarship, Forest Rohwer of Biology received the Rosenstiel Award for ocean science and KPBS reporter Jean Guerrero won the 2016 PEN Literary Award in investigative journalism.

Please recognize all of our faculty and staff.

(Applause)

I told you, it was quite a year!

Research and creative endeavors brought special distinction to the university. We received \$130 million in external funding – almost 10 percent more than the prior year.

Our efforts to eradicate health disparities in our communities received special recognition.

Our comprehensive Cancer Center received \$13 million to fight cancer in underserved communities, and our interdisciplinary team, led by Suchi Ayala, received a \$10 million endowment from the National Institutes of Health.

(Applause)

Led by our Arts Alive SDSU initiative, our momentum in the arts continues.

127,000 members of our community attended nearly 300 arts events on our campus and, as you see in the photograph, our SDSU Downtown mega-concert sold out Copley Symphony Hall.

Ziryab Ben Brahem, a student in Theatre, Television and Film won the Kodak Cinematography Scholarship for his film, "Wake," and Chelsea Best and Maxwell Renner screened their short films at the Cannes Film Festival. Not to be outdone, professor Randy Reinholz will premiere his new play at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

(Applause)

The arts are just one way that this community comes together. We continue to grow as a hub of intellectual life.

The Provost's Distinguished Lecture Series brought Nobel Prize-winning chemist Richard Schrock to our campus.

Vint Cerf, father of the Internet and Bruce Cole, former chair of the National Endowment of the Humanities, joined us on campus, as did U.S. poet laureate Juan Felipe Herrera and President Obama's inaugural poet, Richard Blanco.

(Applause)

Celebrating Aztec Faculty and Staff – as you can see – efforts continued with the lecture series, bowling and a – from the laughter – a very exciting field day.

And our unprecedented success in athletics continues – five Mountain West championships, including men's basketball and football playing in its sixth consecutive bowl game.

(Applause)

We start with New Hampshire soon on Sept. 3.

Our campus is our community's home, and we undertook some significant home renovations this past year.

We completed the renovations of Zura, College Square and Page Pavilion. We moved construction forward on South Campus Plaza, Engineering and Interdisciplinary Sciences, and the Clay Gateway – and completed our new intramural field.

(Applause)

Collectively, all of these successes contributed to the momentum of the Campaign for SDSU.

In the ninth year of the campaign, our extraordinarily alumni, community supporters, faculty, staff and students donated a record \$107 million to The Campaign total now stands at \$725 million.

(Applause)

And today, on a day when we celebrate our faculty and staff, I am exceedingly pleased to tell you that our faculty and staff have now donated over \$60 million to the campaign.

Please join me in recognizing that. I do share that statistic with other university presidents, and they are quite jealous of that.

Now looking at the broader picture, the state of our university is strong.

We received a record 83,000 applications this year, and our 5,000-strong freshman class has an average GPA of 3.7. We increased salaries for our hard-working faculty and staff, and we have a stable, balanced budget. Please join me in recognizing that accomplishment.

(Applause)

The Education Trust recognized us as one of only 26 universities in the country that have increased graduation rates for students in all ethnic and racial backgrounds, and “Forbes” magazine rated us 16th in the nation for providing the best value in a quality education.

All of this came together this year with WASC’s 10-year reaffirmation of our accreditation.

(Applause)

And thank you to everyone who led the way on our accreditation reaffirmation.

It was quite a year – so, what’s next?

In the year ahead, we have an extraordinary opportunity – an opportunity to create even greater distinction.

We named our strategic plan “Building on Excellence” to acknowledge the foundation of excellence that our predecessors built at San Diego State. Now, we can pass a foundation of even greater excellence to our successors.

In each of the core areas of the plan – student success, research and creative endeavors, and community and communication – we will advance our initiatives.

In student success, we will expand the Provost’s Advising Initiative and our learning and peer mentoring communities. We will support academic success through course redesign and supplemental instruction and foster transformational educational experiences by the growth of study abroad, entrepreneurship, internships, the Aztec Mentor Program, and our One SDSU Community initiative and our Susan and Stephen Weber Honors College.

New initiatives will include our efforts to house more sophomores on campus – our Sophomore Success Initiative – and integrate general education curriculum with the broader curriculum.

In research and creative endeavors, we will invest in the efforts of our faculty, staff and students to grow research, including our GREW Fellowship Program

that support grant success, enhancement of core laboratories and additional seed and startup funding for our faculty members.

We will expand efforts to bring new perspectives to our campus.

Alumnus Matt de la Peña, the 2016 winner of the Newbery Award for children's literature, will join us in the fall to give the Provost's Distinguished Lecture Series.

Arts Alive will infuse arts throughout our campus with pop-up performances, arts-making opportunities and curricular integration.

In community and communication, we will complete the construction of South Campus Plaza – residences, restaurants, retail, and, of course, Trader Joe's. This will provide opportunities for our campus and, equally important, our broader community.

And we will complete the Campaign for SDSU. As we enter the 10th year of our campaign, we're within striking distance of our \$750 million goal. Our goal is to "Finish with a Flourish" – strengthening connections to our alumni, community supporters, faculty, staff, and students who have made the campaign a success.

In the coming year, we will support our campus community by enhancing our campus climate for persons of varying abilities, redoubling our efforts to prevent sexual violence and expanding the Celebrating Aztec Faculty and Staff programs.

Among new efforts, we will also pursue a campuswide initiative to enhance information technology. Let's all work together. Let's rely on our shared governance tradition in making that happen. And we will make the summer a vibrant time for academic and co-curricular programs.

Our goal is for all of these efforts to create a new foundation of excellence – one that will inspire even greater aspirations on this campus.

Now, I am acutely aware – painfully aware in some ways – that these ambitious goals are presented in a time of great national strife. But ambition in times of challenge, is, as each of you are aware, this campus's defining tradition.

In 1931, in the middle of the greatest economic depression in our nation's history, we laid the cornerstone for our current campus – literally creating the foundation for today's success.

And today, as we face the challenge of significant discord in our society, I ask you to reflect on one enduring truth: While we may differ from each other in some ways, something more profound ties us all together. We are all part of One

SDSU Community, and we share the special privilege and the special opportunity to move this community forward and to build on excellence.

As we begin the new year, none of us can predict the future. It always calls to us with some uncertainty.

But what I can say with 100 percent – with complete certainty – is that as in each of the past 119 years, the work that we do together this year will lay the foundation for our campus's future success and build on our communal legacy.

Thank you, each and every one of you, for everything you do for the university.

I look forward to a great year.

(Applause)