

**2005 All-University Convocation
President Stephen L. Weber's Remarks
August 25, 2005**

Welcome.

It is good to be together again in anticipation of the coming academic year.

We have all chosen, in different ways, to devote our lives to the work of education, to the growth and development of future generations.

It is good, noble, important work and I suspect that, like me, your pulse quickens with the advent of fall and the sight of bright, eager students wending their way to campus.

One of the great privileges of serving as your President is the opportunity to see our university as a whole, -- to learn about the many ways in which we are collectively challenging ourselves, our students, and our community to invent a new world: one of global opportunity, diversity, technology, and community engagement.

While you are all stretching the envelope, I have the honor - and it is an honor I do not take lightly - to think about the long-term growth and development of our university; to hear your many...

* sometimes harmonious,

* sometimes conflicting,

* but fundamentally wise and caring voices - each calling San Diego State and its students to a better, brighter, more excellent future.

It is that future that I want to discuss this morning.

It is unlike any future San Diego State has ever had - and yet it is that future of excellence San Diego State has always had and toward which it has inexorably moved...

* As a normal school;

* As a Teacher's College;

* Responding to the GI Bill;

* Through the growth of the sixties;

* With good budgets and bad.

In each of their moments, our predecessors worked not only to teach and learn and serve, but also to build a greater university that would have the capacity to challenge itself and its students to even higher levels of achievement.

You and I are part of that great tradition -

* and part of a university that is now bigger, better and stronger than ever envisioned.

So what is our job?

Has the purpose of this 108 year long ascent been simply to allow us to enjoy our moment?

Of course not.

We, too, must dream a still greater San Diego State and work to make that dream come true.

Not for ourselves, but for the unknown students, faculty and staff who follow after us and for the future prosperity of California.

At our Fall Convocation of 2003, I said:

* "We are in for a tough time through the next couple of years.

But we have been through tough times before; we will get through this one."

Those predictions both came true.

In the intervening three years we have lost \$40.2 million dollars through budget cuts and unfunded mandates.

Despite that reduction, we got through it together.

Thanks to your hard work, sacrifice and dedication, we were able to meet the course needs of our students.

The impact of our efforts can be seen in the significant increase in the average student unit load and in the significant improvement in our 6-year graduation rates.

It has been a long three years, but (in the spirit of our predecessors) we have all made many sacrifices and worked very hard to keep San Diego State moving forward, serving its constituencies.

At last year's convocation I thought we were beginning to see "light at the end of the tunnel."

If California was able to reverse its three-year decline in state support for the CSU, we would be able to release some money during the year to strengthen your important work.

And, believe it or not, that prediction also came true. (Sometimes even presidents get it right!)

During the past year, in consultation with the Budget Advisory Committee, Academic Affairs authorized an additional \$8.2 million in one-time spending for...

- * instructional support equipment;
- * faculty and staff workstations;
- * student lab computer workstations;
- * and equipment for 27 new smart classrooms.

As you know, during the budget cuts many positions went unfilled; others were filled only on a temporary basis.

But, as the financial sky brightened, we could once again invest in permanent positions.

We began the process of converting 101 temporary appointments to permanent appointments.

Perhaps most encouraging of all, Nancy initiated searches for 87 tenure-track faculty this coming year (up from only 64 last year).

Many new colleagues are with us this morning as a result of those searches.

And, while we are still in the process of authorizing searches for next year, I suspect we will be searching for another 100 new tenure-track colleagues per year for the next several years.

(If you will allow a personal indulgence: Susan and I are beginning our tenth year at San Diego State: approximately 48% of our tenure/tenure-track faculty have been hired since we arrived in 1996.)

Then 16.1% of our faculty were persons of color; now 24.2% are.

Then 28.3% were women; now women make up 40% of our tenure / tenure-track positions.

All of which is to say: we are younger, more diverse, and in my judgment stronger than ever before.

We have the "intellectual horse power," the energy, and the ambition to do great things.

It makes me very proud to see the quality of people you have brought into our family.

I say "you" because I am not on those search committees; you are.

I want to commend your search for excellence.

We have had to replace some very good colleagues, but you have done so with an eye toward stretching ourselves and our university.

And speaking of investments in our campus, we have also seen a great deal of construction that continues to transform the face of San Diego State in, (I hope you will agree), very favorable ways.

- * The non-state-funded Gateway Addition was completed last fall.
- * The donor-funded Tennis and Softball Complex was completed last spring.
- * The Metropolitan Transit System-funded Trolley was completed this summer.
- * The BioScience Center, funded with our own facilities and administrative overhead costs from research grants, is scheduled to be completed this fall.
- * The state-funded Arts and Letters building should be completed next spring.
- * The student-funded Student Health Services building is scheduled to be completed in Summer 2006.
- * The student-funded swimming pool will start construction this Fall and should be completed by Winter 2006.
- * And, finally, I hope to wrap up the campaign for our donor-funded Alumni Center within the year.

Now California has adopted a budget. As predicted, it represents an increase.

California's ship of state is slowly turning toward more favorable seas.

I believe we are moving into another of California's "up-cycles," a period of five, six, seven, (who knows how many) years of growing fiscal support and opportunity.

In times of constrained budgets, it is understandably difficult to dream big dreams.

Much of our energy is inevitably taken up with problem solving and survival.

However, if the usual pattern of California budgets holds true, and our compact with the governor remains in place, we have reason to expect growing budgets for at least the next several years.

We must use them wisely and well.

Thanks to your good work and the good counsel of the Budget Advisory Committee, we have weathered difficult budgets.

Moreover, we did so with a calm, measured approach that ensured the least possible disruption to our campus.

But excellence is not all about money.

Funding is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for our progress.

New ideas, imagination, and daring, are equally important.

It is essential that we do everything that we can to shift from "defense" to "offense" in the coming year.

Let me repeat that, if there is one message you take back from these remarks this morning it is this:

Now is the time for San Diego State to go on the offense.

We now have grounds for optimism; reason to look ahead to new challenges and opportunities.

Where do we want to be in five years? In ten years?

It looks as if we will have resources to invest in those dreams, but we must generate the dreams and generate the campus dialog necessary to choose among them.

There is much work that remains to be done for our students, for our disciplines, for California.

And we, now have an extraordinary opportunity, (Perhaps the best opportunity ever in the history of San Diego State), to do that work -- not only with distinction, but in such a way as to invent the new urban university at the outset of the 21st century.

First, we must embrace an extraordinary new era of growth for San Diego State.

Following 24 months of campus and community dialogue, -- we have pending before the CSU Board of Trustees -- a request to grow our campus capacity from 25,000 full-time equivalent students to 35,000 by the year 2025.

California is being reshaped by a changing population, a globalizing economy, and a new high tech world that are redefining our priorities -- and our possibilities.

By 2020, the workforce is projected to grow by more than 30%.

By 2025, the college age population will have increased by more than 800,000 students.

As manufacturing continues to slip away, replaced by work in information technology, biotechnology, and healthcare, the portion of jobs in California requiring a college degree is expected to rise to 39%.

But only 33% of the state's workers are likely to have the necessary education level.

California must invest now or pay the consequences later.

As educators, we want nothing more than bright, eager students.

Well, they are on their way!!!

Applications to San Diego State have been growing at approximately 10% a year for the past 6 years.

Approximately 8,400 new students are arriving on campus this fall from a pool of 49,000 undergraduate applicants.

Our incoming freshmen are bringing a GPA of 3.49 (up from 3.18 since Fall 1998) and combined SAT scores of 1077 (up 94 points in that same period of time).

These are bright, capable students whose hands will hold the future of California and our society.

They are worthy of our best efforts.

And the combination of their better preparation and great teaching-- service on your part is already paying off in increased continuation and graduation rates.

We need to get our minds around the fact that SDSU is growing.

That growth will bring change and opportunity and stress for us all.

How do we use our growth well?

How do we grow wisely in ways that will support our professional development as faculty and staff?

And how do we continue to serve our students and our community well?

SDSU's proposed Campus Master Plan 2025 responds directly to the need to accommodate increased demand for higher education.

It presents a smart, strategic plan for sustainable growth over the next 20 years.

Second, we need to think, in particular, about our graduate programs and research.

On the research side, we are making good progress.

Grants and contracts dollars to our faculty and professional staff are moving up again.

This past year, the SDSU Research Foundation logged close to \$130 million in awards.

An increase that reflects the combined successes of the many new faculty hired within the past five years who are just starting their sponsored programs and of our established SDSU faculty and professional staff.

The Foundation, working with Academic Affairs and the deans, has made some excellent investments in research - placing bets on the talent, energy, and engagement of our faculty and staff - and those investments are paying off.

Partnering with the U.S. Geological Survey and the City's Metropolitan Waste Water Department, the Foundation is also building a state-of-the-art Coastal Waters Laboratory on San Diego Bay, due to be completed this October.

But, while we have been making progress on grants and contracts; graduate enrollments in general are problematic.

Over the past few years, graduate enrollments have decreased.

Some of this decrease is attributable to national trends.

For example, MBA enrollments are decreasing almost everywhere, and some of that decrease is attributable to our own budget problems.

As we have come out of the budget crisis, Nancy has allocated additional funds to support graduate students.

However, resources alone won't get this job done.

We must work together to strengthen our graduate enrollment.

We do seek to become all that we can be - to serve our state and community; to be good citizens; and to play at the top of our game.

To do so, our graduate programs must be rekindled and our research pushed forward.

Third, we must launch, and successfully complete, San Diego State's first comprehensive fundraising campaign.

Currently, the appropriation from the general fund of the state of California only provides one-third of the total operating budget at SDSU.

Despite the fiscal challenges of California, SDSU remains poised to become a premiere national, public, urban university.

To reach that goal we will undertake our first campaign.

We are all privileged to be part of this great university and its important work -- part of a 108 year old tradition of enabling and supporting human growth and development.

Each generation of our predecessors left San Diego State a better university than the one they encountered.

Throughout the years, colleagues at SDSU have made hard-fought gains and then institutionalized those gains so that our university would be free to pursue excellence in new and unimagined ways.

We owe no less to our successors.

How can we make it easier and more effective for them to carry on our work?

How can we gain for them tools and resources we have never had?

I believe the answer to these questions lies in SDSU's first comprehensive campaign.

A campaign may have been little more than wishful thinking ten years ago.

But it is no longer an idyllic hope.

We have grown; we have increased our support; now we are ready.

Last year, we talked about moving aggressively into planning our first comprehensive fundraising campaign and its importance to our future.

We have made significant progress over the past 12 months.

Departments have submitted proposals for funding.

Deans have reviewed them.

We are now working to weave your ideas into a coherent, fundable whole that we can begin vetting with potential donors.

Let me take a moment to thank everyone who has already contributed so much of their time to this important endeavor.

A campaign -- especially the first one -- is an exciting time in the life of a university.

It challenges us to think passionately about who we are and what we aspire to become.

San Diego State is already on a steep trajectory of increasing excellence.

We are poised to become a premier public urban university.

The key is to work with our alumni and friends to raise money in support of three primary areas:

First, we need endowments to recruit and retain talented faculty and staff who are the heart of San Diego State.

We have been successful in recruiting great new faculty, but the rising cost of housing in San Diego is making it harder.

We also need endowed chairs and professorships to attract and hold outstanding faculty.

State support alone cannot provide the necessary resources to attract and retain the faculty who will transform our students and their world.

Second, we need funding to provide financial support for promising students who seek to stretch and grow and to make meaningful contributions to society.

We have greatly improved the preparation and seriousness of SDSU's student body.

More needs to be done: too many bright/capable young minds cannot afford to come to SDSU.

Only by supplementing the state budget with private support will SDSU be able to maximize student opportunities.

Third, we need to develop academic programs of distinction that are the hallmark of San Diego State.

We will focus on programs of excellence that continue our long-standing tradition of engagement -- innovative programs that serve local, regional, national, and international needs.

San Diego State has always done a great job responding programatically to the changing needs of California's students and workforce.

But the future will require continuing evolution of our academic and non-academic programs.

We need financial support for new ideas and programs.

We have every right and reason to be proud of who we are today -- the quality of our teaching, the robustness of our research, the impact of our engagement, and the reach of our international focus.

But, like those who came before us, we aspire to even greater.

This campaign will be a defining moment in the history of San Diego State University -- a multi-year, shared journey that will set our course for generations to come.

Now is our moment.

Your talent, intellect, enthusiasm, support, and collegiality have never been able to accomplish so much and to move SDSU forward so far.

I am told that the Chinese have a favorite curse: "May you live in interesting times."

Here at San Diego State, you and I live in interesting times. Ours is the welcome curse of opportunities...

* opportunities to attract bright, eager students and to challenge them to stretch and grow as never before;

* opportunities to attract great new colleagues who will not only challenge us, but who will also challenge the frontiers of learning;

* opportunities to serve in a place where the future is being invented, and where diversity, technology and globalism are not only slogans, but ways of life.

We are about to have a great year.

Let's have it in a way that increases the likelihood of many more great years to come for ourselves and for San Diego State.

Have a great year!