

**Jolene Koester, President  
California State University, Northridge**

**President's Fifth Annual Convocation  
Thursday, August 19, 2004  
California State University, Northridge  
Oviatt Library Lawn**

I. Introduction

Amazing to me is the fact that four years ago I gave my first convocation speech to the Cal State Northridge community, making this the fifth convocation address. In that first speech I indicated that I would, in various combinations over time, focus on specific campus issues and priorities, as well as system, state, and national forces that affect our ability to achieve our mission. Consistent throughout the speeches has been attention to setting and achieving four priorities I deemed critical for Cal State Northridge's future. You know them: improving graduation rates, making the campus more user-friendly, strengthening the university's connections to the community, and improving our private fund development. The four priorities remain priorities for this university, and our work will continue to be guided by them.

Last year, I focused my speech on national forces affecting higher education, calling for a campus conversation to map the university's future with respect to three external forces: a declining resource base, increasing enrollment pressures, and demands from outside the university to be more accountable and more learning-centered. These three forces—and they are national in scope—remain as potent now as they were when I described them last year.

Keep these priorities and external pressures in mind this morning as I begin with a description of how California State University, Northridge is now being understood in the region, in the greater Los Angeles area, and yes, even nationally. Keep these priorities and pressures in mind as, in the second part of the speech, I turn to the future and the specific actions that we will undertake during this academic year to assure that our future is a positive one.

II. "People are talking."

People are talking about Cal State Northridge. That's a shorthand way to summarize the first message that I have for you today. It is no secret to any of you that, from the beginning of my work here, I have seen Cal State Northridge as a university with incredible unsung and unheralded strengths.

I now have had the privilege, for four years, of representing our university in the community, in the region, among businesses, donors, alumni, and yes, on campus among faculty, staff, and students. The vantage point I happen to have is unique

because it is so broad in scope and, thus, gives me a perspective on how Cal State Northridge is increasingly perceived, understood, and recognized by the public.

You've all heard me say that this university is indispensable to this region—culturally, intellectually, and economically. Now we are hearing this message wherever we go. It's one thing for us to tell others about the greatness of this university. It's quite another to have people tell us about the greatness of this university. Some very real and very recent examples of comments to me include:

- A leader of a national organization who said: “Wow, your university is a national leader, paving new paths in education reform.”
- A political leader who said: “This region couldn't survive without Cal State Northridge!”
- A business leader who said: “I invested in Cal State Northridge because it has the best academic programs.”
- A philanthropist who said: “I chose Cal State Northridge because of its reputation.”
- A member of our Board of Trustees who, after a recent visit, said: “I am telling everyone how impressed I am by Cal State Northridge.”
- Alumni who say that the education they received at Cal State Northridge has laid the foundation for their professional success.
- A faculty member on campus—indeed, I've heard this from many faculty members who recognize the excellence here—said: “I am proud to be a part of what Cal State Northridge is doing.”
- A staff member who told me: “Everywhere I go, I meet someone connected to Cal State Northridge working in the community.”
- A student who said: “Cal State Northridge has changed my life and opened new doors for me.”

Together, these individuals are telling us about the tremendous impact we have on culture and arts; improving the quality of life for people who live in this region; the economy and work force; and the intellectual resources in this region, as we are creating opportunities for tens of thousands of people every day who are transforming their lives with the magic that higher education provides.

Around campus I see renewed pride in the strong academic programs that have always been here but now we are being recognized for their excellence.

On campus I see a renewed pride in a physical environment that is now green, gracious, and simply pleasant to be in. Don't you see it and feel it?

We are embracing our identity as the economic, intellectual, and cultural leader in this region, which is bringing us regional and national recognition and visibility for our excellence in fulfilling our mission.

Those of us who have been in higher education for many years know that there are critical junctures in the history of a university that you can point to and say, "That's when the university took off in a new direction," or "That's when the university matured to a new level," or "That's when the university's excellence was recognized nationally."

I believe people a decade or two from now will point to this time at Cal State Northridge with those sentiments. Actually, they're already doing it. Organizations that may have overlooked us in the past are now visiting our campus to search out possibilities for new relationships because they believe we are the best place for them to invest in the future of our society.

Why is all this happening?

First, the faculty and staff at Cal State Northridge are dedicated to their disciplines and their students. Second, our faculty and staff are committed to using their knowledge to make this region a better place.

I don't have to remind you that just a few years ago, our accreditation agency, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), described Cal State Northridge as a model for other urban universities to follow.

And we didn't stop there.

Take a look at just a few examples of what this university is accomplishing today:

- We are doing ground-breaking work in teacher education programs with the Carnegie Corporation of New York and its Teachers for a New Era initiative, including not only the Michael D. Eisner College of Education but five of the university's other colleges. In all, 140 Cal State Northridge faculty are working on this initiative.
- We receive millions of federal dollars annually as the region's leader for small business development.
- Our engineering students annually earn national honors.
- Our Northridge Singers choral group was named best in the world.
- Athletics capped one of its most successful years ever by hosting for the first time the NCAA Regional Track and Field Championships, bringing some 800 student athletes from the Western U.S. to campus.

- Last year we hosted the largest debate tournament in intercollegiate history, the National Parliamentary Debate Association's national championship.
- Our Alumni Association is the fastest growing in the CSU system, increasing its membership by 25 percent last year.
- Our Center on Disabilities annually sponsors an international conference on technology and persons with disabilities that serves as a training venue for professionals around the world. It is the longest running and largest conference of its kind.

Culturally and artistically, we are sought after as the place to showcase some of the world's most unique treasures. In just the past year we have become the home of the Tseng Chinese Antiquities Collection and the archive of the 20-year history of the Latino group "Culture Clash." And we have received a pledge to be the future home for the third largest collection of Charles Dickens material in the world.

I could go on and on with examples from every area of the university.

In the past, Cal State Northridge has been described as "underestimated" or as a "sleeping giant." We are awake. We are wide awake and we are truly a "university on the move."

The word about our university is out and that word is leading to unprecedented levels of fund-raising success.

During the past four years, consistent with our priorities, our fundraising and development efforts have been intensified. Ten years ago we raised about \$3 million annually in private funding. Five years ago that figure had risen to more than \$7 million, which was much better but was still in the lower tier of the CSU system. Today, after an increase of 400 percent over the past five years, we are raising \$28.5 million annually, and we fit comfortably in the CSU's top tier. This achievement is even more remarkable when you recognize that we spend only about six cents for every private dollar we bring in, which is about half of the average of what universities spend nationally.

The work that our faculty and staff do in support of this region is not new. But people on campus did not understand the collective impact of their individual work. And the community did not recognize the enormous impact Cal State Northridge faculty, staff, and students had in the community. Our greatest compliment was that we were "the best kept secret in town."

Today, due to the increasing reputation of our academic and support programs, the dramatic rise in private support, and our strong relationships with major philanthropists, political and opinion leaders, and Southern California's businesses and industries, we have become a place where the perception is that "partnering with California State University, Northridge is good business."

Smart business leaders want to invest in strength and potential, and there's a lot to invest in at Cal State Northridge. Allow me to share with you a conversation that occurred this summer, in which two prominent business leaders praised our university:

In this conversation, one said to the other: "What is it about Cal State Northridge? All I've been hearing in recent months is that this is the place where things are happening." This remark was made to a world-famous Southern California business leader by another world famous business leader and philanthropist who lives in the mid-west, and who to my knowledge has never been on our campus.

Other examples include collaborative community partnerships and grants with such organizations as New York Life, Unihealth, California Endowment, the First Five L.A. Commission, the Open Society Institute, the Jeopardy Foundation, the LAPD, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, the Keck Foundation, LADWP, and the federal government.

These developments are truly taking on a momentum of their own.

They are the direct result of the hard work of deans, faculty, and staff who have come together to focus on strengthening this university's connections to the community.

They are the direct result of the hard work of deans, faculty, and staff who have come together to focus on raising private funds to support the quality of our academic programs and expand our ability to fulfill our mission of service to the region.

As a consequence, we are now known in Southern California and beyond as being indispensable to this region.

Success breeds success, resulting in even more momentum toward successful fund-raising. The stage has been set to plan for a very big future. I can feel a sense of pride and teamwork on campus, a sense of pride and teamwork that will allow us to respond to the inevitable and ever-present challenges and opportunities.

### III. Looking to the future

Yes, I have been bragging about our accomplishments and I am excited about our future. I believe we can solidify the gains we have made in strengthening connections to our community and in private fund raising. But as I described to you last year, we face serious and compelling realities with respect to:

- enrollment issues;
- budgetary constraints; and
- an ever-growing public expectation for a new, more intrusive form of accountability.

I will say to you I am confident and optimistic that we can meet these challenges. Great institutions respond to these kinds of challenges by looking to the future with a vision and a plan to accomplish that vision. That is why the conversations on becoming a more learning-centered university, on the management of our enrollment, and on how to respond to the state budget are so critical. Great institutions are also characterized by a willingness of people to work together. The values of collaboration, joint vision, and mutual respect are and will be an important resource for all of us at Cal State Northridge as we meet these challenges.

Since resources—the dollar kind—and the 2004-05 budget seem to be on so many minds, let's begin there.

Like every other CSU and every other state agency, we are experiencing the pain caused by the state's budget situation. This is the fourth year of budget reductions to the California State University system and to this campus, but the first year that we will actually reduce budgets to the colleges and to all administrative divisions. The budget reductions are linked to a planned reduction in the university's enrollment. Every division of the university has carefully planned for this year using several principles developed by the University Planning and Budget Group. Primary among these principles is the imperative to protect the jobs of permanent staff and that of tenured and tenure track faculty. And we have done so.

The actual reductions to our budget this fiscal year, including unfunded mandatory cost increases, are about \$15 million to the base budget. We will take about \$6 million of this year's reductions by using dollars that are available on a one-time basis, which gives us time to make the structural changes necessary to adjust the base budget for the future. This does leave us vulnerable if next year or the year beyond brings deep cuts to our budget. Clearly, this is a strategy with some inherent risks. But we have little choice under the circumstances.

However, the cumulative loss in the state's support of our enterprise is more pernicious than the direct reductions we have been experiencing. Remember the analogy I used in last year's convocation address about a family who once traveled on vacation in a fairly spacious sports utility van, and how over the years as the family grew and their income shrank, more family members were squeezed into a four-door sedan and eventually into a compact car. We are feeling squeezed right now, too, but to continue down this stretch of bumpy road toward the pursuit of our mission all of us must continue to use our multitude of talents to create new ways to transport our ever-growing family comfortably and effectively. In the last several years, good fiscal management and the dedicated efforts of faculty and staff diminished but did not erase the impact of the budget cuts at this university. However, such strategies are short term and do not deal with the fundamental problem of an eroding financial resource base.

Certainly, the erosion in our financial base will be slowed when the state's financial picture improves, but the erosion will continue unless and until we transform how we

do our work through a focus on a learning-centered philosophy, by creating new ways to serve students, and providing administrative support services in a different way.

Now let me deal more directly with issues of accountability or, as we have framed the issue, becoming a more learning-centered university.

We have two efforts coming together that are responsive to the external forces of increased accountability. For the last several years we have focused on the need to improve the rate at which our students graduate. I am going to return to that priority in just a minute. Last year, however, we renewed the conversation begun during the last WASC accreditation process to understand what steps we need and want to take to become a university that is more learning-centered.

Last spring saw several hundred members of this community listen to speakers from off campus and attend brown-bag dialogues on what it means and what it would take for Cal State Northridge to move in the direction of becoming more “learning-centered.” There is no doubt that we are committed to learning. The challenge for us is in assuring that our students are learning in the best possible way. And in a time of a decreasing resource base and enrollment pressures, the challenge is geometrically intensified. Many of you have already heard me say that we will be challenged to be more articulate and specific about what it is we want our students to learn, and we’re going to be challenged to demonstrate that, in fact, they have actually learned what we want them to.

We also will be challenged to change what has been for quite a long time a virtually invariant relationship among faculty, students, and what we call “learning.” Think about it: we define learning as amassing a certain number of credits achieved through a specified number of subject areas and measured by a grade point average. While defining “learning” in this way has been useful and functional in U.S. higher education for many years, this has not always been the measurement, nor is there anything sacred about it.

This year under the leadership of Provost Hellenbrand, with assistance from Vice President Piper, we will continue the conversations about how to change the relationships between faculty, staff, students, and learning. In fact, a group of our campus members is planning a symposium, “The Learning Centered University: Where Are We Going, Where Have We Been,” for October 8. We will focus on two things during this symposium: first, what we have learned about learning—in our own courses and services—in Chemistry, Business, Computer Science, Philosophy, Languages, and other fields; and second, what we all can do—as individuals and as administrative units—to make teaching and learning even more productive for everyone involved. Out of this work, potential models of transformational change will emerge. Provost Hellenbrand has been tasked with developing these models by the end of the spring semester 2005 for implementation in the academic year of 2005-06.

Concurrently, the work to improve the graduation rate of our students will progress. Again, Provost Hellenbrand will:

- review and then implement the key policy recommendations from the Graduation Rate Task Force that will have the most immediate impact on reducing the time to degree;
- implement along with Vice President Piper those advising recommendations that will have the greatest potential for reducing the time to degree; and
- work with the deans, chairs, and departments to ensure that the four-year degree models that have been developed are, in fact, being used as the basis for key departmental decisions, and work with these parties, as well as the Faculty Senate, to advance the CSU's plans for smooth transfer from community colleges into the university. We want to decrease the time to degree; but we want that time to be quality time with our great faculty. That is why the learning-centered university and time-to-degree issues are two sides of the same coin.

Another critical activity in planning for the future of this university is the work begun last spring on the periodic review of the campus master plan. That plan could be aptly entitled "Envision 2035: Cal State Northridge's Long-Range Design Effort." The work on that process is continuing throughout this academic year and is being led by Dr. William Jennings and a committee of 25 university and community members. We should think about this long-range design effort as a master opportunity for facilitating dialogue about the possibilities for this university's physical future. The process itself will provide valuable input from all our constituencies on how our enrollment and academic programs and activities anticipate and demand the appropriate physical facilities to serve our mission for the next 30 years. Sound, long-term planning is essential to take advantage of funding and other future opportunities. "Envision 2035" will be a long-term design for the next three decades of this university's physical future, but is flexible and will be reviewed every few years, and, when necessary, updated as our future environment changes.

There will be many opportunities as part of this process for members of the campus and larger community to participate as we imagine the possibilities for our campus' physical future.

We will continue to focus on raising private funds to solidify the many gains we have achieved. Our fundraising efforts will focus on the cultivation of key relationships, which will help us establish new partnerships. In particular, the emphasis in our development efforts will highlight the need for endowed chairs and professorships across the campus, along with endowed institutes and programs. We have the academic talent and creativity and we have the students and community that deserve the high level of intellectual energy such partnerships would allow us to pursue.

One of the main goals for the future is to cement our role as the cultural heart of the region. We have begun to lay the groundwork for a capital campaign that will result in a named centerpiece for this university and this region—a state-of-the-art Performing

Arts Center at Cal State Northridge. The campaign to build a Performing Arts Center on campus is our number-one facilities priority, and we will fund this building with private dollars and state capital outlay funds.

- The Performing Arts Center will bring us to a new level in cultural offerings for students and the surrounding community.
- Such a center will be a magnet and a catalyst for increasing support across all our programs, not just for our artistic and creative programs but across the university.
- This kind of a landmark will symbolize the greatness of this university and be an icon for the entire San Fernando Valley.
- The Performing Arts Center will attract more eyes to campus and support the focus on endowments for chairs and professorships.

A feasibility study was conducted to determine that there is sufficient community support for the new PAC. In that study, 46 Southern California opinion leaders were interviewed.

From that work, and a full project endorsement from noted Los Angeles businessman Eli Broad, came opportunities to meet with more than 200 community leaders from business and industry who have committed to helping us create new and exciting relationships that will benefit the future of this university and the region we serve.

#### IV. Conclusion

As I stand here today after four years as a member of this magnificent and great university, I am truly gratified and emboldened by your cumulative intellectual capacity, by your unyielding dedication to our mission, and the willingness of all of you to innovate and move this university to a new place.

Yes, people are talking about Cal State Northridge. I believe—and I hope you share this belief with me—that even better days are ahead for us because there will be tremendous opportunities for us in the years ahead. We are going to be able to take advantage of these opportunities only if we as a community have done the arduous work of planning for our future; only if we have remained steadfast to our core priorities; only if we have adapted what we do in response to the powerful national forces that are affecting all of higher education; only if we have stayed focused on where we want to be, and where we need to be; and only if we have prepared ourselves, rehearsed the skills, developed the relationships, and practiced the repertoire to be flexible, collaborative, thoughtful, and decisive. Only if we do these things will we be in the position to evaluate potential opportunities and seize those that will best serve this university.

People are talking about us! But if you think that this means that our work is completed—if you think that we don't have a tremendous amount of hard, dedicated, focused, collaborative work yet to do—then please, my friends, think again.

Yes, people are talking about us! As they praise what we have done together, you have every right to feel proud and elated.

People are talking about us! As they express pleasure and amazement at our collective accomplishments, it is truly satisfying to know that these feelings are widely shared on the campus, in the community, and throughout this region.

By working together and sharing our many talents, we will continue to transform this university into a place that will continue to receive praise from community and political leaders, respect and support from cutting-edge organizations, and gratitude from students and graduates.

As you go about your work for the 2004-05 academic year, I know you will do so with a feeling of pride and a sense of focused commitment. But please take some time to listen to the voices around you, because people are talking about your university: California State University, Northridge. Let's go!