



## Opening Speaker

President, Dianne F. Harrison: California State University, Northridge  
<http://www.calstate.edu/administration/bios/presidents/harrison.shtml>  
<http://www.csun.edu/leadership/dianne-harrison>  
<http://www.csun.edu/president>

## "Students First"

**President Dianne Harrison:** Good morning. So if you're not the keynote are you a low note? Are you an off note? What are you? [Audience laughter] That would be a good puzzle to solve this morning, I think. In any event, good morning; I'm glad I am here on the second day of exploring higher education in the brave new world, and certainly I wish I could have been here yesterday.

I was doing part of my system-wide service, meeting with the search committee for the president of Long Beach at their initial meeting. I'm the Presidents' representative on their search, and I want to tell Steven and others who organized this meeting that several of your colleagues at Long Beach wished you well at the meeting. They wished they could have been here too, so we wish them well in their search.

I want to start by saying I appreciate the kind of two-part notion of the meeting. The first day talking about how we teach, what methods, pedagogy; and today focusing on what we teach. Because regardless of the delivery mode chosen, whether you're talking about face-to-face, fully online, hybrid, web enhanced, MOOC, flipped, or ten-year-old yellowed lecture notes, or whatever method you select, to me the real important issue is the student learning outcomes. *So whether course credit is based on the credit hour, or on competency, the real issue is learning outcomes. Have learning outcomes been achieved?*

The important thing is what we want our students to take away, to be capable of, to know, to be prepared to do via knowledge, skills, abilities, and values. What does it mean to complete a course of study? What does a degree completion mean? What does it mean to be an educated person? What is essential is the quality of learning? Higher education has not exactly nailed down what defines quality. How do we know across the board that students have the competencies that they need? And more fundamentally, what are these competencies? I think we have more work to do defining quality, and developing assessments that measure whether students are receiving or achieving that quality. We have work to do gathering evidence on the measures themselves, on the results of those measures, and on our teaching.

National organizations such as the *Association of American Colleges and Universities*, AAC&U, and many others recognize that whether education is credit hour-based or competency-based, it is the quality of learning that really matters.

The Department of Education, now shut down only temporarily we suspect, has acknowledged that educa-

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tion does not necessarily need to be tied to the credit hour. This opens up a whole new world and possibility in designing curriculum, and for tying to a degree. Last summer in our own region, WASC gave one institution, Argosy University, a green light to move forward with a totally competency-based MBA degree. This was a first for our region, but it is extremely hard work for faculty and for students to be totally competency-based. Sometimes it's simply more convenient and easier to fall back on what we know, and what we're accustomed to, and most of us are accustomed to the currency of the credit hour.

Today higher education, I hope, is moving away from believing that there is a one-size-fits-all delivery method that is superior. We know that some of the recent evidence on MOOCs has even convinced our Governor and our Legislature that *there is not an educational super pill for our ills*. I am optimistic that more

people, more key stakeholders, will in fact come to the conclusion, at least at this point in our knowledge, that there is no magic bullet in the type of delivery method. But the real significant challenge is this – how do we define the most important learning outcomes? How do we assess those learning outcomes and know that we are achieving them? How do we hold ourselves accountable for the quality of knowledge, the skills, and the values that our students hold? Regardless of delivery method, and even regardless of the chosen major, *what is important for this brave new world of higher education is that students graduate with the intellectual skills needed for the 21st Century*, and this relies on the type of learning from a broad liberal education, as well as deep knowledge within the chosen major, and real-world experience in knowledge, including an ability to integrate and apply learning to complex problems and projects.

Businesses and nonprofit employers surveyed by AAC&U, and you'll hear of much more about that from Debra, have indicated what they considered to be *the most important outcomes for college graduates no matter what their major, or the mode of delivery – and they are an ability to think critically, to communicate clearly, to solve complex*

*problems, skills that enable them to contribute to innovation in the workplace, ethical judgment, integrity, and civic responsibility, intercultural skills, the capacity to learn beyond the years of formal education*. These employers are seeking college graduates who have a broad set of skills and knowledge beyond the major, no matter what the major, to fuel our 21st Century innovation-driven economy.

So think about this. Regardless of the major, we need our graduates to be able to think critically, to communicate clearly, and to solve complex problems. Consider how this applies to our journalism majors. Students need skills that enable them to contribute to innovation in the workplace. Think about how this applies to creative writing, and ethnic studies majors. Students need ethical judgment, integrity, and civic responsibilities. How does this apply to our business majors' intercultural skills? How does this apply to our STEM majors? The capacity to learn beyond the years of formal education – how does this apply to all of our majors?

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Most of these employers said that what they want from higher education is more emphasis on the five areas – critical thinking, complex problem solving, written and oral communication, and applied knowledge in real-world settings. And they also agreed, *regardless of the major, that every college student should acquire broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences*. They see both field-specific knowledge and skills and a broader range of skills and knowledge as important for college graduates. They also endorse several educational practices as helpful in preparing college students for workplace success. These include requiring college students to conduct research and use evidence-based analysis. This is one of the reasons why we do need to redouble our efforts, at least at CSUN, on our research activities and funding.

Employers want students to gain in-depth knowledge in their majors, but also broader analytic problem-solving and communication skills, and this is why we need to focus on increasing rigor. They want students to be able to apply their learning in real-world settings. This is why we need to focus on increasing the numbers of internships for our students, on making sure that students can also have a community service learning experience and opportunity. *In short, the employers are looking for higher education to involve students in active, effortful work that involves the application of skills. They strongly endorse educational practices that require students to demonstrate both acquisition of knowledge, and its application with direct experiences in community problem solving, and applying knowledge in real-world settings.*

They also advise that an electronic portfolio or e-portfolio would be useful to students and recent graduates, allowing the students to show potential employers their work products, to demonstrate that they have gained the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in a company or organization. At the Freshman Convocation on September 12, those of you who were present, I shared that piece of advice with our freshman (this year's anyway), and encouraged them to start from their first semester on their own e-portfolio. And I expect that our technology infrastructure will support this, and will help make it happen. But it certainly is the responsibility of students to populate it, and to understand the advantages of doing so as we help them move through their degree progress and ultimately graduate.

These employers are also interested in partnering with universities to provide more hands-on learning to help students successfully make that transition from college into the workplace. They endorse providing students with research and scientific inquiry, helping students develop research questions and evidence-based analysis, and to do so collaboratively with peers. They endorse senior projects, having students complete a significant project before graduation – one that demonstrates the depth of learning in the major and the acquisition of analytic problem-solving and communication skills. They endorse internships and community-based field projects, having students connect classroom learning with real-world experience. They endorse having students work through ethical questions and issues and form judgments about these issues that are at stake; and they endorse devoting classroom time to dialog, to debate, and problem solving in groups and alone with guidance from the instructor.

Last year as President of CSUN, I was among one of the original signers of AAC&U's national initiative called the "**LEAP Employer-Educator Compact**," and most of you know LEAP stands for *Liberal Education and America's Promise*. As part of this signing, we asked some of our employers and our partners to also sign on to the Compact with us, to partner with us in showcasing our support and their support for the aims and the outcomes of a broad-based liberal education and preparing students who are tomorrow's leaders for economic, civic, and global challenges in the 21st Century. Our employer-partners who signed the LEAP Employer-Educator Compact have committed, for example, to supporting hands-on learning, including their providing opportunities for real world projects, undergraduate research, and internships.

And I just want to share a few comments about what some of our partners had to say about CSUN. For example, Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne (PWR) has a strong partnership with our College of Engineering and

Computer Science. PWR's Chief Engineer with Energy and Advanced Programs, Chris Erickson, signed on to the LEAP Employer-Educator Compact. In doing so he noted that Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne currently employs more graduates from CSUN than from any other university. They appreciate the high-quality education our students experience and how successfully the College of Engineering and Computer Science bridges the gap between theory and practice. They also engage in technical collaborations and design clinics with the College of Engineering and Computer Science. Engineers from Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne teach part-time in the college, and they have active membership on the Colleges' Industrial Advisory Board.

Another partner is Boston Scientific Neuromodulation. Boston Scientific's Vice President for International Sales, Milad Girgis, signed on to the LEAP Employer-Educator compact because Boston Scientific, he said, counts on the unique interdisciplinary programs and the numerous high quality accredited programs at CSUN. Boston Scientific sees CSUN's College of Engineering and Computer Science as a vital resource for the development of highly skilled personnel to meet their emerging workforce needs. Boston Scientific partners with CSUN in several ways. They participate in the Colleges' Career Day events and the Colleges' Honor's Co-Op Program. They provide internships. They have employed many of the College's graduates in highly responsible positions of leadership. Boston Scientific is a strong supporter of the interdisciplinary Professional Science Master's degree cohort program in Assistive Technology Engineering and, like Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne, Boston Scientific is also an active member of the College's Industrial Advisory Board and provides input into the curriculum to reflect current advances in engineering.

And a final example – Mission Community Hospital. Mission Community Hospital is a long-time partner with CSUN's College of Health and Human Development. The hospital provides student internships, collaborates with our faculty and student researchers, and implements community programs in affiliation with the university. For example, as part of the hospital's community outreach to the City of San Fernando, Mission Community Hospital installed a diabetic teaching kitchen with consultation from CSUN's Magaram Center for Food Science, Nutrition and Dietetics. CSUN faculty from the Department of Kinesiology and from the Magaram Center provide community programming at the hospital's San Fernando site.

I could go on and on with more examples, but I think, to me, my take away is that it is hard work, and we have more work to do. This morning your keynote speaker, Debra Humphries, Vice President of Policy and Public Engagement at AAC&U, will speak more about these values and go into greater detail for us. And I am confident, I've actually seen her slides. I know that she will help us understand and appreciate where we need to focus, and the kind of work we have to do. So I look forward to hearing what you have to say, Debra, and I look forward to the remainder of this morning's program. Welcome Debra to CSUN, and I thank all of you for being here this morning and demonstrating your interest in helping to bring higher education into the brave new world.

Thank you.

[ Applause ]

**END**