

**California State University, Northridge:
Regionally Focused, Nationally Recognized**

**President's Eighth Annual Convocation
August 21, 2007 • Oviatt Library Lawn
Jolene Koester, President**

Let me begin by introducing campus leaders who join me on stage today.

First, I would like to acknowledge the fine work of Faculty President
Jennifer Matos;

the leadership of Provost Harry Hellenbrand;

and Adam Haverstock, Associated Students President.

We have new members of the university's administrative team, who I will ask to stand.
(Please hold your applause until everyone has been recognized.)

- Randy Harris, Vice President for Administration and Finance
- Vance Peterson, Vice President for University Advancement
- Robert Bucker, Dean of the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication
- Ralph Hoskins, Executive Director of the Performing Arts Center
- Mary Ann Cummins-Prager, who takes on new responsibilities as Associate Vice President for Student Access and Support Services.
- Laksmi Malroutu, ACE fellow

Finally, I'd like to ask all new faculty and staff here today to please rise. [*Applause*]

Since 2000 I have asked this campus community to come together at the beginning of each academic year to take stock and to define our short- and long-term goals.

This 2007 convocation finds Cal State Northridge at a crossroads. This academic year leads up to our 50th anniversary celebration in 2008-09, symbolic of Cal State Northridge as a more mature institution.

As we approach our 50th anniversary, and its yearlong celebration, it is critical that we define our aspirations for the university's future. We must focus on articulating a vision for the future of California State University, Northridge.

And, as we anticipate that future, we also must acknowledge current realities. We face external forces that are strong, pervasive, and affect our future: increasing financial pressures, calls for accountability, enrollment pressures, and the imperative for external

recognition and partnerships. All these must be managed, and their presence adds urgency as we “take stock” this year.

Throughout its history, Cal State Northridge has been locally and regionally focused. Through our good work, we have received some measure of recognition, both regionally and nationally, primarily for individual outstanding programs and departments. However, if we are to flourish and benefit from such recognition, it’s important that the sum of these parts be credited to the overall strength and excellence of Cal State Northridge. For these reasons, the theme of my address today is “California State University, Northridge: Regionally Focused, Nationally Recognized.”

In today’s remarks, I hope to build the case for understanding our university in this new way. First, I want to take stock of our enduring and consistent strengths. Second, I would like to share with you how I describe this university when I am in the community, focusing on some of our many specific accomplishments. Third, given our strengths and accomplishments, I would like to explore the question, ‘What is our vision for Cal State Northridge for the next decade?’ And, fourth and finally, I will suggest the pathway we must take to achieve that vision.

I. The Historical and Essential Strengths of the University

There are several features of the Cal State Northridge story that have been with this university since its founding as San Fernando Valley State College. What is remarkable about this history is the constancy of five key attributes:

First, from our beginning, we have been an institution shaped by a commitment to stewardship of place. We have been regionally focused. We are located in and serve the people of the San Fernando Valley and the greater Los Angeles area. Professor John Broesamle, in his history of CSUN entitled *Suddenly a Giant*, described our original mission as combining liberal arts and professional emphases. Ralph Prator, the first president, focused the institution on the “practical sciences.”

Our academic programs have always reflected the needs of this region. From the initial emphasis on business, engineering, and education, to the founding of the Pan African and Chicano/a Studies departments, to the initiation last year of our master’s program in Social Work, to the inauguration this year of the first undergraduate degree program in Central American Studies, Cal State Northridge has established programs relevant to the people of this region.

Second, we have always been distinguished by our excellent faculty. The first two presidents of this university—Ralph Prator and Jim Cleary—directly hired faculty as part of their day-to-day responsibilities. Both placed enormous weight on hiring top-notch people. From the early years to the present, the excellence of the Cal State Northridge faculty has been one of our defining characteristics. Across the California State

University system, colleagues describe our faculty as “quietly outstanding.” And they always can identify a couple of disciplines to support this statement of praise.

A third ingredient from our past and in our present is essential to our future—a strong institutional commitment among faculty and staff to students and to quality academic programs. Even in the aftermath of the devastating 1994 earthquake, Cal State Northridge never ceased to deliver its full academic programs. Colleges and departments maintained their accreditations, achieved academic excellence, and won awards for the quality education provided. For the past decade or so, we have collectively rededicated ourselves to student success with initiatives to improve student achievement and graduation rates. In a major study just completed, our alumni voiced the view that Cal State Northridge “does a very good job preparing students for success ‘in the real world.’”

Another integral feature of our university has been developed more fully in the past 15 years. Not only is our mission linked to the region in terms of academic programs, but our pedagogy and scholarly research are now highly interactive with the region. Our faculty apply their intellectual prowess and disciplinary expertise to regional concerns; and many of our students, as part of their formal education, are in the community, sharpening their knowledge and skills while improving the quality of life in the region.

Finally, President Blenda Wilson and her team left CSUN with another praised and appreciated characteristic. We emerged from earthquake reconstruction with a planned approach to buildings, landscaping, pedestrian walkways, and green spaces. Once considered an ugly duckling among CSU campuses, ours is now among the most attractive. Our research shows that potential students are attracted to this beautiful park-like campus.

Stewardship of place, a distinguished faculty and staff, a commitment to academic quality, partnerships with our region, and a carefully planned approach to our physical campus—these are the historical trademark attributes that have brought us into the present.

II. Describing the University to the Community

How then do I describe this university when I am in the community?

I always begin with:

California State University, Northridge is the intellectual, economic, and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley and beyond. We are a vital force and a valuable asset to the region we serve.

We generate more than \$680 million and 12,000 jobs in the region; and for every \$1 the state of California invests in us, we generate \$4. We have 5,800 employees, making us among the top ten employers in the Valley.

We have 185,000 alumni, and 85% of them still live in California. In addition, during the past 40 years, the Tseng College of Extended Learning has served more than one million people, and most live and work in this region.

Diversity is our descriptor. We are 10th in the nation in bachelors degrees awarded to minority students; 5th in the nation for bachelors degrees awarded to Hispanic students. We educate the largest number of Armenian students outside Armenia, and the largest number of Central American students of any university in the country. We are 18th in the nation, and either 1st or 2nd in California, among public universities chosen by Jewish students. We have the largest number of mainstream deaf students of any university in the country.

I also say to the community that as the very best of the regional universities our programs are characterized by quality and innovation, and I use examples such as these:

The National Science Foundation ranked Cal State Northridge 2nd in the nation among masters-level universities in preparing students who later earn doctoral degrees. Our Biology Department ranks 5th in the nation in the number of students who go on to pursue Ph.D.'s. Our Psychology Department ranked 1st among masters-level universities for producing students who go on to earn doctorates in Psychology.

In 2002, we were one of just four universities nationwide selected by the Carnegie Corporation of New York for our exemplary teacher preparation programs. More Northridge graduates are issued California teaching credentials than from any other public university, and more than from all the University of California campuses combined.

I could extol academic quality and excellence for programs in each of the university's colleges and divisions but let me cite only a few examples. From our Accounting program, which has long had one of the highest first-time passing rates among California universities for graduates taking the CPA exam; to our Music Department, regularly considered among the top two or three music programs at state universities; to our undergraduate Engineering program, ranked in 2008 by *U.S. News and World Report* as 5th among California public colleges and 14th among U.S. public colleges. The Oviatt Library commits itself in its special collections to important resources such as the San Fernando Digital Archives. Our Center on Disabilities sponsors annually a conference on assistive technology that is known the world over. Last year our Physical Plant Management built and installed a 1 megawatt fuel cell—the largest for any university in the world—evidence of this university's commitment to sustainability.

I next point out that our academic programs serve the needs of the region in multiple ways.

Annually, 75,000 people attend performances and cultural events on campus. Last December the Theatre Department celebrated “50 Years of Opening Nights,” recognizing the more than 600 productions staged here since the first performance in 1956.

Approximately 150 athletic competitions in 20 sports were held on our campus last year.

The College of Health and Human Development’s renowned Center of Achievement for the Physically Disabled, including the Abbot and Linda Brown Western Center for Adaptive Aquatic Therapy, offers unparalleled, low-cost programs in therapeutic exercise for persons with disabilities. These centers have served more than 6,000 community members.

Our Speech and Hearing Center operated by the Communication Disorders and Sciences Department treats 12,000 to 15,000 hearing- and speech-impaired community clients each year.

I then note that our faculty and staff distinguish themselves nationally among their peers. I always have examples to share such as: Physics Professor Nick Kioussis received a \$2 million grant from the National Science Foundation for his work in nanotechnology; and the MARC program received \$2.7 million to encourage historically underrepresented students to consider careers in biomedical research.

Our faculty are also awarded prestigious Fulbright Scholar grants—for example, in the past two years, Robert Espinoza in Biology, Carol Shubin in Mathematics, Gerald Simila in Geological Sciences, Nhut Ho in Mechanical Engineering, Heinrich Falk in Theater, Lisa Baughton in Psychology, and Irene Clark and Robert Chianese in English.

Other honors have been won by our colleagues, including Marketing Professor Franck Vigneron whose article in the *Academy of Marketing Science Review* was selected as its Best Paper of the Decade for 1997-2006. Track and Field Coach Don Strametz last year received three peer-awarded Coach of the Year honors. Tom Brown, Executive Director of PPM, in May received the California State University Board of Trustees’ Wang Family Excellence Award as the most outstanding administrator in the entire CSU for 2007.

The success of our students, I next suggest, is another cause for celebration. Recent examples include:

For the second consecutive year, we lead the CSU system in the number of students selected as Sally Casanova California Pre-Doctoral Scholars.

CSUN students led by the Political Science Department won first-place honors at the annual Model United Nations competition in New York, where they competed against 3,400 students from 250 colleges and universities. A CSU Trustee described this as the equivalent of a sports team winning a national championship!

The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, the world's leading professional association for the advancement of technology, recognized CSUN's student chapter as the best in the western United States.

Clearly, I conclude, Cal State Northridge is a center of excellence in a multitude of ways, and this excellence should be recognized and celebrated by others.

I deliver this message with admiration and pride.

Yet our excellence is not widely known.

What we need now is to communicate more fully and clearly our strengths—not just in limited ways about specific programs, but about our full range of programs and strengths as an institution. We ourselves must recognize and articulate our strengths, and then make them better understood and better known—in the region, in the state, and across the nation.

III. The Future Vision for California State University, Northridge

The central question of this convocation is then: What then of our future? What is the vision for California State University, Northridge?

The vision, simply stated, is that California State University, Northridge, remain regionally focused but become nationally recognized as among the very best regional universities in the country.

Beyond the obvious gratification such recognition would bring, what are the practical short- and long-term benefits of realizing such a vision? I think there are several.

First, until we become more “top of mind” in regional, state, and national contexts we will miss out on academic and donor partnerships that will bring added resources to bear on our mission.

Another important reason is that as the traditional college-age market tightens, our ability to recruit and retain students for whom Cal State Northridge is a first-choice institution will be enhanced by a higher profile.

Third, our ability to recruit top-notch faculty and staff is similarly linked to our reputation of the first ranks.

And finally, the simple fact is that success breeds more success. People like being part of a winning team. We know that Cal State Northridge has a winning combination of mission, location, and accomplishment. It is time to share that with the world beyond our campus.

We know that this place is filled with magic and wonder. We need to assure that the mere mention of the name Cal State Northridge conjures that magic!

IV. Achieving this Vision

How then do we accomplish this vision, this aspiration, for this university?

First, we must continue to formalize our annual plans and establish our strategic focus. For the past seven years, we have been guided by four Presidential Priorities, undergirded by our mission, values, and the university's strategic plan. And we have accomplished much.

It is now time for those Presidential Priorities to evolve into the five planning priorities that emerged from the annual planning process led by Provost Hellenbrand last year. He continues his leadership this year as we also focus on strategic emphases identified by the WASC reaccreditation steering team lead by Dean Elizabeth Say and Dr. Michael Neubauer.

Our annual plans have five planning priorities. The parallels to what we have referred to as the Presidential Priorities are very clear. Specifically:

Seven years ago, I defined as a Presidential Priority improving graduation rates and reducing time to graduation. This priority translates into two related and strategic planning priorities: first, academic excellence—the excellence of our academic programs and of faculty and student scholarship; and second, student engagement and success. These go to the very core mission of the university.

Another Presidential Priority was strengthening connections, both between the university and the community, and within the campus community. We have made great progress, and building on this, another planning priority is campus and community collaboration.

We have worked toward becoming a more user-friendly campus. A parallel and more specific planning priority is to establish user-friendly business processes that will facilitate the work of faculty and staff, and benefit our students. This important work will be led primarily by Vice Presidents Harris and Baker.

Finally, a Presidential Priority was to improve our fundraising. In our planning, we have broadened this priority to include other forms of resource enhancement—grants and contracts, earnings through the University Corporation, and programs offered through the Tseng College of Extended Learning.

As we look ahead, we foresee as a major challenge an eroding state-supported financial base. As such, we must find ways to reduce our financial dependence on the State of California. I urge you to consider with care and deliberation Provost Hellenbrand's paper to the faculty entitled, "Humpty Dumpty and CSU: Piecing Parts Together."

These 5 planning priorities will help us maintain our focus, thereby strengthening and bringing continued distinction to the university.

Second, we must articulate more clearly who and what we are—first to ourselves, and then to a combination of prospective students, future faculty and staff, and to key segments of the public at large. We have worked hard during the past seven years to heighten awareness within the local community of the excellence of Cal State Northridge and we do receive far more recognition now than in the past. However, I have asked Vice President for University Advancement Vance Peterson, building on the good work of former Vice President Judy C. Knudson, to develop strategies to bring our excellence to the consciousness of the greater Los Angeles community, the state, and beyond. Cal State Northridge should be recognized—within the higher education community, within the business community, and among those who study and critique higher education—as among the very best of the regionally focused universities in the nation. We must be regionally focused, nationally recognized.

Third, in my convocation address last August, I explained that we must adopt a strategic approach to enrollment management. Vice President Piper, in collaboration with Provost Hellenbrand and colleagues across the university, has established an Enrollment Management Committee to guide these efforts. We will utilize, for starters, the results of the study of student and alumni perceptions about Cal State Northridge to help us clarify our unique identity, and to craft a comprehensive plan for outreach and recruitment.

Strategic enrollment management will help us to think and act purposefully around student success; to become more user-friendly; and to communicate who we are, what we have to offer, and the outcomes students can achieve.

For example, we can emphasize that a Cal State Northridge education prepares students for real world jobs. Our students do research with faculty. They learn in the community. And these opportunities extend to undergraduates as well as to graduate students. These are just some of many ways in which Cal State Northridge is distinctive and excellent. Our message to potential students and their parents is, “California State University, Northridge: regionally focused, nationally recognized.”

Let me turn now to other plans for the coming year or two.

We will lay the groundwork this year for the public phase of our campaign to fund the Performing Arts Center project. This summer the university received \$2.5 million in funding from the County of Los Angeles—\$2 million from Board of Supervisors Chairman Zev Yaroslavsky, and \$500,000 from Supervisor Mike Antonovich. Under the leadership of Executive Director Hoskins, we also signed an agreement with the Music Center to explore joint programming opportunities.

We will of course continue our efforts to foster student success. A new tradition begins next month with our first Freshman Convocation, welcoming the freshman class as members and participants in our campus community. A joint project of Academic and Student Affairs, Freshman Convocation will be held Thursday evening, September 6, on the Oviatt Library Lawn, with a keynote address by environmental activist Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. All CSUN faculty and staff are invited. As part of this effort, all freshmen will be encouraged to read the book, *The Things They Carried*, by Tim O'Brien, which has been selected for this fall's Freshman Common Reading Program. I encourage staff and faculty to read the book as well.

The coming years also will see us maintain a beautiful campus with building projects to enhance student life and provide up-to-date academic facilities. Two projects were just completed, both spearheaded by The University Corporation. Arbor Court, near Jacaranda Hall, is open and includes The Arbor Grill and CSUN's own homegrown Freudian Sip. The Matador Bookstore Complex has a fresh look with a remodeled and improved Matador Bookstore, and new food choices.

Other construction will allow us to maintain our regionally focused excellence. Three projects will begin this year: the Science 5 Building; a third parking structure on Zelzah; and a 400-bed expansion of student housing providing enhanced services for first-year students.

Next fall, The North Campus Corporation, under the leadership of Executive Director Tom McCarron, plans to break ground on Devonshire Downs, the much-anticipated faculty-staff housing project.

As our future becomes our present, there is much that will change here at Cal State Northridge, and there is much that will remain the same. New buildings are the easy, visible elements of change. Other more embedded changes will occur as we focus on our planning priorities. The enduring values and characteristics of the university will remain the same, as will the multitude of achievements of our programs, faculty, staff, and students, as they sustain our regional focus.

What must change, if we are to assure the university's future, is that the excellence of the university must be recognized widely and beyond the acclaim we currently receive. Cal State Northridge must be known within state and national arenas as a university that fulfills its regional mission with excellence. We have that excellence now, but we must seek and establish the recognition. Today's message is simple: "California State University, Northridge: regionally focused, nationally recognized."

I welcome you to the 07-08 academic year. I thank you for your commitment to this university. I urge you to celebrate and promulgate our excellence as we remain "regionally focused and nationally recognized."