



**California State University, Northridge:  
Fifty Years of Life-Changing Opportunity**

**President's Ninth Annual Convocation  
August 21, 2008 • Oviatt Library Lawn  
Jolene Koester, President**

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*(Prepared text for remarks)*

**I. Introduction**

I begin by introducing new members of the University's administrative team:

- Michael Spagna, Dean of the Michael D. Eisner College of Education;
- Sylvia Alva, Dean of the College of Health and Human Development; and
- Michael McManus, Assistant Vice President for Marketing and Communication.

The banners herald the theme of this year's convocation by proclaiming "California State University, Northridge: 50 Years of Life-Changing Opportunity."

In the human lifecycle, a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary evokes nostalgia and memories, but also signals a culmination. A university's trajectory, however, is not like that of a human life. Far from marking a culmination, for Cal State Northridge, this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary represents a "coming of age." We thus celebrate our first half-century of service as the completion of our "formative years" and the beginning of a new and youthful maturity.

I begin with a focus on the future of the University because this anniversary creates the imperative to look ahead to assure the *next* 50 years of life-changing opportunity. Secondly, I will describe specific initiatives in this academic year undertaken to assure continued success and impact in the next 50 years. Third, we will honor some of the memorable accomplishments from the past year. Finally, as befitting an anniversary, we will review the impact of this University's first 50 years of life-changing opportunities.

**II. First, a glimpse of the future Cal State Northridge and the hallmark characteristics that will be celebrated at our next milestones—60, 75, and 100 years.**

Predicting the University's future in 50 years is a risky endeavor! Powerful forces are reshaping the terrain of U.S. higher education. Accountability; demands for efficiency

and productivity; erosion of funding; enrollment pressures; charges that students aren't prepared to compete in a global world; and, yes, for-profit competitors.<sup>1</sup> All of these have been identified in previous convocation addresses as external forces affecting Cal State Northridge.

And, all must be taken into account as we answer the question: What, then, does our future hold?

The answer begins with the declaration that first and foremost, we will continue to be a university with a regional mission. As in our first 50 years, we will serve the San Fernando Valley and surrounding region. Our students—then as now—will primarily come from the greater Los Angeles area. Our academic programs—then as now—will be shaped in response to regional needs and interests. Our faculty scholarship—then as now—will have useful application, and be relevant to the region's social, cultural, political, scientific, and economic needs. Our faculty, staff and students—then as now—will work and learn in an interactive environment that bridges the University with the world. The excellence of our academic programs will be the bulwark—then as now—allowing Cal State Northridge to remain indispensable to this region.

What will be different is that Cal State Northridge will be recognized across the nation for the excellence with which we fulfill our regional mission. We seek not to change the mission, but to continue to be “regionally focused, nationally recognized.” Put succinctly, the Cal State Northridge of the future will see its mission accepted, celebrated, and recognized.

Another hallmark of our future, embedded within the present, will be a clear focus on student success and, yes, graduation. We will act upon the belief that our students can succeed when we set high expectations. Cal State Northridge will demonstrate the positive impacts of faculty pedagogy and staff engagement on student learning. Among its comparison institutions, Cal State Northridge will have higher-than-expected retention and graduation rates.

Of course there will be challenges. We already see that the digital age shapes brain circuitry and affects learning in ways that challenge traditional curricula and pedagogy. These are challenges shared by every institution of higher education, and we have responded at Cal State Northridge through a variety of means we collectively call, “becoming more learning-centered.”

For example, we have already begun to envision courses as defined not by credit hours, but rather by skill- and knowledge-sets that students may tackle at different paces. We must, and will, readjust the ways we teach to the ways that students learn, building on the new understandings of learning that scholars have identified.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Paul Jansen and Debby Bielak, “Flex or Fail,” *Business Officer*, National Association of College and University Business Officers, June 2008, pp. 14-16; and Byron P. White and Peter D. Eckel, *Collective Foresight: The Leadership Challenges for Higher Education's Future*, American Council on Education, 2008.

More importantly, evidence will indicate what students must learn, and what they have learned. As a learning-organization, we will have robust data systems allowing us to substantiate our success and adjust our practices based on evidence. We will demonstrate our accountability through evidence to the people of California. Thus, we will validate what we already know informally—that Cal State Northridge is a place of life-changing opportunity.

The Cal State Northridge of our future must also be a university with a culture of service, with an emphasis on continuous improvement and collaborative work with one another.

Accountability and evidence will help us bring in substantial outside revenue to support our programs and scholarship—through continuing education, grants and contracts, and philanthropic gifts to the University. We will attract support based on the excellence with which we fulfill our regional mission. Case in point—in June the University received a \$5 million cash gift from an anonymous donor to support student success. A very tangible and, need I say, *welcome* recognition of our contributions to the people of this region!

As we look to the future, we will be diverse in every way. Right now we have a diverse student population, but our faculty, staff, and administration do not as yet reflect the same diversity of the human experience. And if we are to continue to serve this region with excellence, we must also address successfully the disparities that exist among races, classes, and gender in terms of success in the college experience.

This portrait of our future University holds few surprises. Our future will in many ways be similar to today. We will continue to engage with the community. We will continue to be the driver of our region—the intellectual, economic and cultural heart of the Valley and beyond. And we also will have grown and changed in these positive ways, some of which have been in the making for many years. Our priorities have been identified in previous convocation addresses and elevated and codified as our planning priorities—academic excellence, student engagement and success, resource enhancement, user-friendly business practices, and campus-community collaboration.

### **III. Returning to the present, let's focus on what must be accomplished during the current academic year to assure this future University.**

Let's start with the obvious—construction. Changes in the physical campus renew, reform, and breathe life into our educational efforts. A third parking structure, 400 new “beds” for students to live on campus, a new science building, a student recreation center, faculty and staff housing that we hope we can build in the future despite dropping home sales prices and escalating construction costs, and a world-class performing arts center—that's an ambitious building agenda! What an exciting time as we prepare for our University's future!

Let's shine the spotlight on the Valley Performing Arts Center at California State University, Northridge. Why are we committing the energies, efforts, and resources of the University to this effort?

Let me remind you that the performing arts center is being built on the foundation of excellence in our academic programs in the arts. It will be both an academic facility serving our students and faculty, *and* the site of two performance venues for the people of this region to have quality arts experiences. It will serve as a physical symbol for what this University already means to the San Fernando Valley—its “intellectual, economic, and cultural heart.” We have sought to make Cal State Northridge part of the consciousness of those who live in the greater Los Angeles area. What better way to accomplish that powerful goal than through a magnificent new center for the performing arts that will become an intellectual and cultural magnet in this part of Southern California.

This year also continues our work on our WASC reaccreditation effort. The importance of the WASC effort is that it contributes directly to the University's glide path for the next 50 years by focusing on student learning and success.

The success of our students is hindered by the fact that K-16 education remains a “house divided.” Too many of our students arrive here not fully prepared for university-level work in math, English or both. Too often, those of us in higher education have blamed our colleagues in K-12, rather than identifying the problem as a lack of will, dedication, and perseverance to get all of us from K-16 on the same page. We at Northridge have evidence demonstrating how teaching, and the teaching of teachers, can improve student preparation, but we have lacked a common culture for teachers, professors, and administrators across K-16 to work together. This year Provost Hellenbrand leads our efforts to change that in the San Fernando Valley.

A year ago we began a critical effort to identify and develop our future student body through a strategic enrollment plan, which we begin implementing this year. A new marketing approach will present the University with one institutional voice to communicate our brand. We are becoming a first-choice institution based on quality academic programs and student experience. We will increasingly attract students who have choices, but who find our programs better serve their educational goals and needs.

In our continuing efforts to make Cal State Northridge a more user-friendly university with a culture of service, we specifically take on two challenges this year.

First, in Bayramian Hall our students transact important business. We have worked in recent years to better our services—improving facilities, deploying staff, and launching web-based alternatives—and we have excellent staff making sure students are well-served. Still, students stand in long lines. If you have been there in the past few days you have seen those lines. It's time to do an assessment of what brings students to those lines, what can be done to move the lines more quickly, and how we can improve the experiences of both our students and the staff who serve them. The Executive Sponsor on

this important initiative is Vice President Piper, with assists from Provost Hellenbrand and Vice President McCarron.

Similarly, all of us who work and study here are bedeviled by the large number of paper forms routed from office to office as a means for us to conduct business. I have charged Vice Presidents McCarron and Baker to completely rethink and streamline our basic business processes, beginning with those associated with filling vacant positions and reimbursing employee expenses. Their goals — reduce our reliance on paper processing to produce measurable reductions in the time and effort required of our staff, and improve satisfaction for those who receive our services. I am told this goal will require all of us to be flexible and willing to change, even as it means giving up familiar systems and tools. I ask that you support these upcoming changes to our work processes.

Both of these are daunting challenges, but we have overcome others! Think about some of the bottlenecks of five years ago and what we have done—we have eliminated the long lines in the bookstore and we experience far fewer long and frustrating hunts for parking spaces.

This year, Cal State Northridge also moves into a new academic degree arena, the applied Doctorate in Educational Leadership, representing our continuing commitment to the region's needs.

The Career Center will launch Pathways, an innovative career exploration and planning tool that allows students to develop and organize a comprehensive academic and career path.

This year you will often hear the phrase, “Do the Math,” as we address students' total cost of attendance. First, we will more explicitly educate students about the finances of attending college. For example, CSU students pay by the term rather than by the credit unit. We must help our students plan ahead to take a full course load, graduate sooner, and lower their overall cost of attendance. We ask you as advisors to help students choose the right courses and take as many credits as they can. We are not blind to the fact that students have families and jobs. But remember, students pay by the term, not by the credit; and a term at work without a degree is usually a term with less pay. Do the math.

The cost per semester also is rising. While our fees remain among the nation's lowest, this year the cost has increased by about \$350. Our goal is to match or exceed fee increases by showing students other savings. For example, the bookstore is piloting a book rental program that potentially can cut the cost of a textbook by as much as 65%. Early textbook adoptions by faculty give the bookstore time to obtain more used books so students can save money. Do the math. We have increased our online and hybrid course offerings, and are looking at the possibility of more block-scheduling, thereby reducing the number of weekly trips students must make and lowering their transportation costs. Do the math.

We are asking all of you—faculty in departments, the Faculty Senate, and staff, what else can be done to save or at least neutralize overall costs for students? Together, let's do the math.

Last year's convocation outlined a new vision for our University as regionally focused, nationally recognized. We will be taking several steps this year to enhance our national visibility and burnish our reputation as one of the finest regional universities in the nation. First, we will be telling our story more frequently and more forcefully to media—higher education media and national media who follow higher education. At the local level, University Advancement will increase the number of “pitches” it makes to local media to publicize the distinguished work of our faculty, staff, and students.

In addition to increasing our own visibility, we will be helping to make the broader case for regional universities in general. The media pays close attention to national research universities, and community colleges are frequently mentioned. We are concerned that the primary drivers of workforce preparation for our knowledge-based society—our regional universities—are presently lost in the national conversation. We have all too often been the silent engine of progress, and this much change.

Another related effort, largely behind the scenes until now but soon to be a campus-wide project, under the leadership of University Advancement, is to clean up and strengthen our web environment. The character and clarity of our Web presence is central to our brand promise of regional excellence. We will need your help in this clean-up effort, so when the requests for assistance arrive, please help.

This year also brings renewed focus on private fundraising. Under the leadership of Vice President Peterson and the efforts of the Deans, Directors of Development, and myself, 2008-09 will see us refresh our fundraising infrastructure with an emphasis on an expanded and unified annual fund while continuing our focus on major gift prospects, so we can be ready in about two years to launch Cal State Northridge's first comprehensive campaign.

We will continue to emphasize teamwork and collaboration—providing life-changing opportunity for individual growth through cooperative activity. The University is great not only because of the talents and commitments of individuals, but also because of how we work together day-in and day-out. Nurturing the development of people through a new talent management program out of Human Resources is essential to our future success. This Talent Management program will include direct involvement by the vice presidents and myself in our semester-long cross-divisional leadership seminar, as well as expanded programs to develop the skills and capabilities of managers and staff.

Finally, for all of us this academic year, not an initiative or project, but a call for individual compassion and grace for others who work and study here. This is a time of economic difficulty for many in our campus community. Gas prices are the most visible symbol, but there are other strains as well. I ask that we all seek to understand that our world and our work is complex. I ask that we all seek to understand that the personal

lives of those who work and study here are complex. I ask that we not rush to judgment, fear, or loss of respect for others. I ask that all of us sustain the bonds of community and civility in the face of differences and difficulties.

**IV. The year before us moves us to the mirror of the past year and some of our many accomplishments. Among them:**

Last September we initiated a marvelous new tradition at Cal State Northridge—the Freshmen Convocation—a ritual welcome to the newest student-members of our campus community, designed to orient the freshmen class to our culture of learning and student engagement. We look forward to our second Freshman Convocation on September 4, with the keynote speaker, Barbara Ehrenreich, author of the freshmen common reading, *Nickel and Dimed*.

The Governor of California selected Cal State Northridge as the location to announce a new Cabinet-level position dedicated to community service. We were selected specifically because of our outstanding efforts in service learning and bringing the pedagogy of our classrooms into service for people in this region.

Our Jazz A Band took national first-place honors in the College Big Band division of the Monterey Jazz Festival. To qualify for this prestigious event, the band vied with college bands across the country, with only five chosen to compete. Director Matt Harris called the first-place honors, “the equivalent of winning a championship game.”

Our Department of Public Safety received accreditation from the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators. The department was commended as “stellar,” “extremely well-run,” and “among the most outstanding.”

Ernst & Young committed \$1 million to the Department of Accounting and Information Systems, recognizing Cal State Northridge as a potent force in the accounting profession in Southern California.

These are but a few examples of our many accomplishments.

**V. 2008-09 will be a year of work toward our future, but also one for celebrating “50 years of life-changing opportunity.” Let’s pause for a moment to consider what we mean by this phrase.**

Our first meaning is obvious—Cal State Northridge has served the people of this region for 50 years!

Over the past 50 years, we have awarded roughly 165,000 Baccalaureate degrees and 33,000 Master’s degrees. Our Tseng College of Extended Learning has recorded more than 850,000 enrollments since the early 1960s.

We started with about 3,500 students; this year it will be 35,500! In 1958 we offered 19 baccalaureate degrees, 9 master's degrees, and a dozen teaching credential programs. Today, we offer 64 baccalaureate degrees, 52 master's degrees, 55 teaching credential programs, and this year we launch our first doctoral degree.

Based on some admittedly broad assumptions—but taking into account Bureau of Labor Statistics averages for income earned when achieving various educational levels, and applying those to the numbers who have attended classes and graduated from Cal State Northridge—we estimate our alumni, in the aggregate, earn somewhere in the range of \$5.2 billion *more* per year than they would have earned had they only finished high school.

Fifty years ago our physical campus opened on 250 undeveloped acres, with 12 temporary buildings. Today, it spans 356 acres with 86 buildings. In 1958, our campus opened with 119 faculty members and administrators. Over our 50 years, we have employed more than 23,000 people, including approximately 3,500 full-time faculty.

As these data show, we have offered the life-changing opportunity that a college education provides to thousands of people. What does this translate to in terms of the human experience? The economics are clear—a college education improves one's earning power over the years. But ultimately, the value of education lies in the quality of thinking of individual citizens, the level of passion brought to a profession, and the collective efforts of educated people to improve the human condition.

Both in and outside the classroom, Cal State Northridge students are challenged and learn to think independently and to make sound judgments. Horizons are expanded; new perspectives are discovered; boundaries are stretched. People come together who otherwise would never cross paths. They learn together and from one another. They read, reflect, explore, listen, discuss, argue, reason, imagine, and create. The results are transformative—a richer and fuller life—for them and for everyone.

We celebrate, then, 50 years of life-changing opportunity in the form of the baccalaureate and master's education that Cal State Northridge has offered to the people of this region. We at California State University, Northridge are part of a powerful force for individual, regional, and societal growth, change and opportunity. This year we honor and celebrate our past and, most importantly, our future, to assure 50 more years of life-changing opportunity to those who will follow.