



**Investiture of Dianne F. Harrison, Ph.D.
as Fifth President of California State University, Northridge**

“Unlocking Potential, Cultivating Achievement”

Friday, May 17, 2013

Valley Performing Arts Center at California State University, Northridge

(prepared address)

Good morning.

Chancellor White, CSU Trustee Vice Chair Monville, fellow presidents, faculty, students, staff, alumni, friends, family, and members of the community: I am privileged to stand here this morning for my investiture as the fifth president of California State University, Northridge. Given CSUN’s growing reputation for excellence and the challenges that lie ahead as we work to maintain our momentum, I am honored by the trust and confidence that has been placed in me to lead this institution.

I am pleased to welcome all of you to the CSUN campus and to our beautiful Valley Performing Arts Center. I am honored to have so many distinguished guests gathered here with the campus community for this special occasion. I want to take a moment to recognize and thank a few family members who are here today. In a family of seven kids, all on the other side of the country, I was fortunate to have two of my siblings fly in for this occasion. We normally mostly gather for weddings and funerals.

Dr. James Harrison and his wife Marie are here from Mobile, Alabama. Jimmy is my oldest brother and after my father’s passing at a fairly early age he probably gave me the best advice ever when I was 20 – namely, forget being a flight attendant for Pan Am, get your masters’ degree. Which I did. So if you don’t like something I do, call Jimmy – it’s his fault.

My youngest sister, Debbie Balzli, a nurse practitioner in Birmingham is here today. She constantly reminds me how much younger she is than me. Thank you, Debbie.

I also want to acknowledge my husband, John Wujack, who has become a great friend-raiser for CSUN and supports my sometimes insane schedule and workaholism. He is also currently the chair of the Spouse/Partner Planning Committee for AASCU and former mayor of Bend, Oregon.

And finally, my daughter, Melissa Montgomery, who flew in from Indianapolis to be here. She is my best girlfriend and number one cheerleader! My son, John Paul, could not be here today as he is presenting his senior capstone project in Monterey. As soon as the festivities are complete here, we will drive to Monterey and attend his graduation

tomorrow morning. I never thought I would say those words or see the day! Yeah! Thank you for allowing me those personal comments.

Now, back to today's event. The investiture ceremony is one of the oldest traditions in academia, signifying the ceremonial transfer of the symbols of office – in this case the CSUN presidential medallion – and the pursuit of knowledge. Most typically it is done near the end of the person's first year. Some experts have suggested this timing is to make sure the person is suitable before doing the ceremony.

Of course, today we celebrate something much bigger and greater than any one person: it is an opportunity to reflect on the great history and traditions of higher education and, especially, California State University, Northridge. More importantly, the occasion is an opportunity to look ahead to the future and shine a light on the university's critical and outstanding work in fulfilling its promise and mission, which is embodied in the theme of today's investiture ceremony – unlocking potential and cultivating achievement – among the diverse, committed students who have chosen to enroll at CSUN as well as the dedicated faculty and staff who work here.

Honoring the Past

Before looking at the present and into the future, I'd like to recognize my predecessors:

- Dr. Ralph Prator, the first president of this institution, founded in 1958 as San Fernando Valley State College, who laid the foundation for CSUN today;
- Dr. James Cleary, president from 1969 to 1992, under whom the university was officially renamed California State University, Northridge, and who led the university through explosive growth, overseeing a doubling of enrollment to a record high at one point of 31,575 students during his tenure;
- Dr. Blenda Wilson, president from 1992 to 2001, who sustained and, indeed, advanced the excellence of CSUN despite the overwhelming challenges of leading the campus through the devastating 1994 Northridge earthquake;
- And my immediate predecessor, Dr. Jolene Koester, who served as president until 2011 and worked to ensure that CSUN was “the intellectual, economic and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley and beyond” and who was steadfast in realizing the very building we're in today.

I wish to thank these predecessors, as well as community members, faculty, and staff who made CSUN what it is today. Thanks to their vision and accomplishments, I inherit a resilient, rebuilt and strong institution that is ready to move forward.

My First Year

It has been nearly a full year since I assumed the presidency of CSUN, June 11, 2012. I have been busy learning about the institution, meeting with CSUN's many constituents, friends and supporters, building relationships in the community, and overseeing what

many have described as essentially a small city. And with next week's commencement festivities, I will have gone through the full academic year cycle.

A few of these activities include:

- Attending almost every one of the Freshman and New Student Orientations and my first Freshman Convocation which welcomed 3,900 of our new freshman class;
- Delivering my first President's Convocation here in the Valley Performing Arts Center to almost 1,000 faculty and staff;
- Hosting (and feeding!) 6,500 students at the Welcome Back Picnic to kick off the 2012-13 academic year;
- Hosting the first-ever campus-wide reception for principal investigators to thank our researchers and scholars for their work and contributions;
- Inducting 50 new members into the "50 Year Club" at our annual Founders Day event, organized by the CSUN Alumni Association;
- Celebrating the grand openings of our new Veteran Resource Center and Pride Center;
- Seeing the results of the projects by our students in the Northridge Scholars Program, produced under the guidance of dedicated faculty mentors;
- Dealing with crises small and large, including the temporary evacuation of the university library, a bomb threat, students protesting proposed fee penalties for taking too many credit units, several students being hit by vehicles, and an emergency crash-landing of a small airplane on a recreational field. In fact, I should probably acknowledge someone who you may have seen outside as you were entering this building and for whom I have the utmost respect and admiration: that is "Isy" our German shepherd bomb sniffing expert and her handler, Sgt. Thomas Finnerty. Isy provides a great deal of reassurance to us and is a true professional at age two. They say a dog is man's best friend – well, I will tell you in my case this dog is a university president's best friend.
- I have had the pleasure of hosting several
 - student groups, separate from the numerous events I attended throughout the year with students and the Associated Students leadership;
 - 10 of our 18 sports teams consisting of approximately 220 student-athletes and their coaches;
 - 70 staff members for breakfast;
 - and lunching with 60 faculty.

My goal is to have lunch or breakfast with every one of our 4,000 staff and faculty.

- Even before the academic year began, between June and August last year, I had met with at least 600 people in the community alone – supporters, business leaders and elected officials;
- And I attended numerous Matador athletics events, receptions, student film showcases, art exhibits, an engineering showcase, Master of Social Work capstones, and student performances, plus I twice had the privilege of hearing our amazing Northridge Singers, under the direction of Paul Smith.

It has been an incredibly busy but productive and personally fulfilling first year. From these many meetings and activities, I can more emphatically attest that CSUN is a vibrant and enriching institution focused on excellence and student success – and, yes, focused on unlocking potential and cultivating achievement. It is an environment where people respect one another while working across traditional departmental and divisional lines for the shared purpose of ensuring student and institutional success. I have seen this at the Cabinet and Extended Cabinet level – whose members are seated with me onstage this morning – and among managers, staff, faculty, and students. John and I have appreciated the warm welcome with which everyone has greeted us since we arrived. In turn, I intend to support your work on behalf of the institution and its students and mission.

Unlocking Potential, Cultivating Achievement at CSUN

The title and theme for the investiture is “Unlocking Potential, Cultivating Achievement.” These words, of course, relate to our students primarily, but also to faculty and staff, and the university as a whole, and they are all connected to what we described in our university priorities as an unrelenting focus on student success.

This theme has been the key to the success and growing national and international reputation of the California State University system as one of the world's great public universities. In keeping with the tradition that has made American higher education extraordinary, we in the CSU focus on giving students of promise access to all that higher education has to offer. The CSU reaches out to those who have taken nontraditional paths to the university's door – those who are the first in their families to go to college, those remarkable and resilient members of our community who have faced exceptional challenges in life, and those who need a bit of extra support and encouragement from caring faculty for their talents to grow. Yes, we are increasingly the first choice for many students who are academic high achievers, enroll in honors courses, and are in the top 10 percent of their high school graduate class, but we also hold tightly to our belief that what American higher education at its best does is take students of promise from the broad spectrum of our shared communities and give them the opportunity to realize that promise to the advantage of us all.

We offer the kind of high quality education that is necessary to succeed in a world that is more and more global-, knowledge-, information-, and technology-based. And as one of the largest and most diverse campuses in the CSU and in the country, CSUN has always embodied this spirit of access and opportunity and led in serving students who reflect their community and the growing diversity of California and our nation. In turn, today's society and workplace demand that students graduate with a broader set of skills so that, regardless of a student's major, they have the knowledge and intellectual curiosity to engage in evidence-based reasoning and innovation.

With this in mind, I have asked faculty to view their roles as gatekeepers – maintaining quality and educational excellence while unlocking student potential – potential to become an astronaut, a teacher of the year, a film producer/director, a Wall Street investment banker, an attorney, a world-renowned artist or scientist or aerospace engineer, a creator of assistive technology, lead soprano for a major opera company, a professional athlete, or a state governor. (By the way, these are just some examples of

actual CSUN alumni achievements!) Once our students realize their potential, we can then cultivate their achievement both here and into the future. And to borrow a phrase many of our CSUN Veterans will understand, “become all you can be.”

I recently attended our Distinguished Alumni Awards gala – the biggest yet for CSUN with nearly 450 attendees – and saw evidence for the important work our university plays in unlocking potential and cultivating achievement among our students. This year’s honorees were: George Leis, regional president for the central coast for Union Bank; Ravi Sawhney, president and chief executive officer of the award-winning design firm, RKS; and National Teacher of the Year Rebecca Mieliwocki, who was honored in 2012 at the White House by President Obama. During the gala, each generously credited CSUN for giving them the skills and confidence to succeed.

And as we prepare for commencement, I have seen the same theme in the stories of the students who will graduate next week.

- There is Jenieke Renee Allen, a young African-American woman who did her undergraduate research and master’s in Biology. On the merit of her accomplishments and her work at CSUN, she is one of six students admitted into an incredibly competitive Ph.D. program at Cedars-Sinai, where she will also receive a stipend to support her studies.
- I also recently had the pleasure to lunch with twin brothers Demonte “Tay” Thompson and Demontae “Dré” Thompson. (I hope Tay and Dré made it – they were taking a final exam.) Dré works in the Financial Aid Office as a peer mentor teaching financial literacy and Tay in outreach in the Student Services Center of the College of Business and Economics. Both are former foster youths who came from very challenging circumstances. They are among the most enthusiastic and positive young men I have ever met, and they have found opportunities to shine at CSUN.
- Another is a veteran, Hector Martinez. The first in his family to attend college, after a short stint in community college, Hector joined the Marine Corps, where he was exposed to a wider, diverse world and found the focus and confidence to continue his studies. After returning from a combat deployment in 2007, he enrolled at CSUN. Hector is now in the Master of Social Work program – yahoo! – and graduates next week. At the first ever Veterans graduation ceremony last week, Hector received the Outstanding Veteran’s award for his service and dedication to the CSUN mission.
- I would also like to acknowledge Alberto Dejesus Munoz, a member of the Matador Patrol and a Community Service Assistant. He cannot be here today because he is in the hospital. While performing his duties as a safety escort, he and another student were struck in a crosswalk by an automobile that ran a red light. Alberto saved the life of his fellow student by pushing her out of the way, taking the full force of the impact. No one was surprised by his selfless act of bravery because he is a young man of great character. To Alberto and his family, I extend my best wishes for a full recovery and express pride in your being part of the Matador community.

Unlocking potential, cultivating achievement: These are just a few vivid examples of the kinds of students who came to CSUN seeking an opportunity to succeed, excel and give back to their communities, despite challenges that otherwise might have been barriers to their success.

Our work to unlock potential and cultivate achievement also extends to our K-12 partners. CSUN recently partnered with the Nanjing University of Science and Technology in China to invite Los Angeles high school and middle school students to submit project proposals for a possible science experiment on a Chinese space shuttle. Dr. Paul Chow in Physics and Astronomy, Dr. Kwang-nan Chow in Mathematics, Dr. Justine Su, Director of the CSUN China Institute, and Dr. Steven Oppenheimer, a U.S. Presidential Award winner who is on the platform party this morning as our mace bearer (thank you, Steve!), are involved in this exciting new project that not only promotes international cooperation and understanding between China and the United States, but gives students an opportunity to be excited by science education and involved in scientific research in space! We are working in the hope that at least two young scientists and their teachers will travel to China to be recognized and see their experiment launched into space.

My job as CSUN's president in the coming years will be to continue to unlock the potential of this great university and cultivate achievement whenever and wherever I can. In short, I constantly work in order to create an atmosphere and environment in which our students and the university flourish.

Unlocking Potential, Cultivating Achievement Among Faculty and Staff

Of course, a major key to achieving the goal of unlocking potential and cultivating achievement among our students is a dedicated and talented faculty and staff, whose potential must be similarly nurtured and cultivated. This is recognized in our recently released planning priorities where we commit to “focus on employees for success.” We will do so by creating a positive and engaged environment where employees feel valued for their work and contributions, are given opportunities to grow and develop leadership skills, and are encouraged to be innovative in their jobs and through research, scholarly and creative activity.

One way we have tried to encourage engagement and innovative thinking among our staff is through the “Help Make CSUN Shine Brighter” initiative. Every few months, an issue is brought to the campus community for their consideration and we encourage the submission of constructive and cost effective solutions. It has been a wonderful success, with the first topic resulting in the “Pedestrian and Vehicular Traffic Initiative” and our second, whose results were released just a few weeks ago, giving us great ideas to grow Matador pride and enhance the university's visibility. I have been delighted by the level of interest and response to the topics and am grateful to all of you who have participated by contributing your ideas and thoughts. I am proud to announce that the first topic for the fall will be “Achieving a Tobacco-Free Campus.”

For faculty, we can help unlock greater potential and cultivate achievement through creating a supportive environment that is conducive and encouraging of scholarship, research and teaching. The efforts of all of our employees – faculty, staff,

and administrators – are needed to as we continue our forward momentum and create a collaborative environment on behalf of our students. So what about the future and the challenges ahead?

The Future and the Challenges Ahead

As many of us here today know, public higher education faces significant challenges that are leading to a sea change in the way we conduct our business of education. We are being asked by the public and government and civic leaders to be more accountable, which we are happy to do. Employers are taking a greater interest in how we prepare students for a new kind of work environment that changes rapidly and requires the intellectual ability to innovate, to engage in evidence-based reasoning and problem solving, and to think critically and globally. The question is, how do we meet these challenges while still remaining true to our unique mission and our commitment to diversity and access?

At CSUN, we are already helping to lead the way in meeting these challenges and transforming the ways we teach and the ways students learn. These are reflected in the university's planning priorities, which encompass the priorities I identified for my presidency, as well as those identified through our accreditation process and the university's divisional and college planning. In most academic speak circles, this would be known as our strategic plan. At CSUN, we cut to the chase and discuss priorities.

One of these priorities is the recognition that we must remain effective and relevant to the region with less fiscal dependence on the state, so we are planning for a future that is less dependent on state funding. Among our priorities is increasing research activity and sponsored programs.

Applied and basic research has always been an essential part of the university's mission, by engaging the expertise of the faculty to address compelling challenges and problems facing our region, state and world. Funded research becomes an important source of support for both faculty and students – and, when it involves students, it also becomes one of the highest forms of educational experience and mentoring. The opportunities we provide students at CSUN and in the CSU at the undergraduate level far surpass the experiences of our counterparts at Research I institutions and is the reason why CSUN is ranked by the National Science Foundation as 1st in psychology, 2nd in science and engineering, and 5th in biology nationally among comprehensive universities preparing students who later earn doctorate degrees. These are incredible statistics which all of us at CSUN should be proud.

We are also already involved in innovative work to help redesign and enhance the academic experience while reducing costs for students. The recently announced myCSUNtablet initiative, which is a partnership between CSUN and Apple, Inc., will give participating students and their faculty a range of educational resources and tools intended to increase the quality of learning materials for students and enhance student learning. Use of iPads and e-books and e-learning materials in a suite of courses will be less expensive and more accessible than traditional textbooks. This is a pilot project this coming fall involving 60 faculty members and 70 advisors across many majors that we

will assess to ensure that the program is effective. It is also an example of how we are looking at new partnerships and creative ways to achieve our mission and engage students through innovative pedagogy.

We are also actively working with a number of the region's leading economic development organizations such as the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC), the Valley Industry and Commerce Association (VICA), and the Valley Economic Alliance as part of CSUN's ongoing commitment to making the university's basic and applied research along with its preparation of high talented professionals an essential and dynamic component of the region's strength in the emerging global economy. CSUN believes that innovation will play the starring role in the future of the region's economy. It will drive the creation of new industries, new jobs, and an enriched quality of life for the region's communities. CSUN is now stepping forward to play a leading role in innovation and commercial development.

With this leadership role in mind, CSUN has joined the LA CleanTech Incubator's Leadership Council and is actively engaged in exploring how that impressive new resource for innovation and commercial development for the region can collaborate with CSUN to make a positive impact on the economic future of the Valley and surrounding communities.

These examples demonstrate how CSUN remains at the forefront of optimizing challenge.

In Conclusion

When I became interested in higher education leadership and had become a dean, one of my favorite books on the subject was *The University: An Owner's Manual*, by Henry Rosovsky, a respected economist who served 11 years as dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University. Based on his experiences, he wrote this perceptive and witty book on America's universities and colleges, with sections representing the perspectives of the various "owners" or shareholders of the modern university, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees.

While the author acknowledges the frailties and flaws of the American higher education system, at the heart of the book is a deep abiding respect and love for the role academics play in our society. And he reminds us that as faculty, staff and administrators, "we practice our profession as a calling and believe we are engaged in activities of high social value!"

I hope I speak for the faculty, staff and administrators at CSUN when I say, despite the challenges we face, we love what we do and recognize our work is important and essential to the success and advancement of our students, their families, and society. With this in mind, I ask each of you to join me in our mission of unlocking potential and cultivating achievement at California State University, Northridge.

Thank you for coming and I hope each of you takes some of our CSUN SHINE home with you today.