



Spring Convocation Remarks
Thursday, January 11, 2018
10:30 a.m.

Welcome/Greeting

Good morning and welcome to the spring convocation... in a year that will have great historical significance—not only for our burgeoning University but also for our remarkable city. We are just two weeks into the start of San Antonio’s Tricentennial celebration... and less than 12 months away from Texas A&M-San Antonio’s 10-year anniversary.

Over the last few weeks, I have spent a fair amount of time talking to people about San Antonio’s history and the year-long celebration. I’ve fielded numerous Tricentennial questions. Some of the most common are: “What can we anticipate for 2018?” and “What is the most important take-away?”

My response is typically, “Our bright future!” Even in a year when we are celebrating our rich past and shared heritage, we must continuously think about lessons learned to shape a better tomorrow.

This is just as true for our University. This should resonate with each of you as we reflect on the last half of 2017 and imagine the year that lies ahead of us... in an increasingly complex, interconnected and fast-paced world.

As a sector, higher education obviously plays a critical role in the growth and development of our nation’s diverse population. We must never lose sight of the fact that through our teaching, research and public service, we will also shape the future direction of our planet. The graduates we send out into that world must be prepared to anticipate and harness the successive tidal waves of change sweeping through every industry, and in our civic and social lives.

Futurists around the world have posited that humanity will change more in the next 20 years than in all of modern history. As astounding as that

sounds, I urge you to think about the responsibility that a public university like ours has... in all that we do to shape and form our future human talent. The sense of urgency for a student-centered core value and outcome becomes quite powerful when you situate it in the context of the future of humanity. It should also spark your vision for the future, what do we aspire for our university in the next 20 years? And what are we doing today to create the excellence that we expect for our future-selves.

Look Back at 2017

As we embark upon a new year, I would be remiss if I didn't take a few moments to reflect on 2017... and point out some milestones we achieved. On this slide, you can see examples of our enrollment growth, new degree programs and national recognition.

Overall, we experienced progressive growth and campus enhancements. We also accomplished some groundbreaking firsts. By any measure,

2017 was an exceptional year... all thanks to the talented and dedicated faculty, staff and students working together.

Last year, we also elevated our focus on another core value, innovative collaborations. We implemented a partnership with Bexar County to open the Presidio Gallery downtown as the new home for our Archives and Special Collection... this venue will leverage opportunities for other significant collaborations that expand the archives or special collections and develop additional programs with authors, educators and civic leaders.

Last year a thoughtful group explored the role of parents and family in the student success equation. This led to the creation of a pilot-program called the Family First seminar for parents and family members of current students. This program aims to build quality relationships... particularly with those that do not have college in their family history.

In addition, we welcomed to campus our first group of Early College High School students from Three Rivers ISD. The College of Education

and Human Development launched a forward looking collaboration with Stewart Elementary School as a unique mentoring program for students along with a paid-teacher residency model for teachers, all with the outcome of providing educational equity to students in that school. In addition, in the College of Arts and Sciences we forged a one-of-a-kind program, in fact the only one in the entire U.S. Univision network that is preparing the next generation of media professionals.

In response to Staff Council, we developed special purpose task forces for Alternative Transportation and Parking, Staff Recognition and Staff Summer Hours to support daily campus operations. These task forces continue to meet and will submit recommended actions to me in late May for review.

Nothing we did last fall had a greater humanitarian impact than our efforts to aid the victims of Hurricane Harvey. I sincerely appreciate those of you who were able to make donations or deliver supplies to Gulf Coast residents. One of our most compelling stories involved our

Military Affairs team, which delivered supplies donated by the University and the San Antonio Coalition for Families and Veterans to the city of Portland...in South Texas.

Here you see some pictures of Richard Delgado and volunteers from other organizations who took backpacks, spirals and basic educational supplies to elementary students who were displaced by the flood. In a matter of weeks, Richard made 10 trips to Portland to ensure the students had the essentials they needed to continue their studies. Acts of compassion and selfless service like these... speak volumes about the people we have here at A&M-San Antonio. These are just a few highlights from a vast list of accolades that touch every department.

2018 at a Glance/Look Ahead

As we look to 2018, we have much to accomplish in order to achieve our strategic goals.

I am pleased to report that from fall 2017 to spring 2018, as of today we have achieved an 84% persistence rate for the fall 2017 cohort of

students, which is above the national average. To boost our performance in this area, we've formed a Committee on Retention Efforts —called CORE — that has been reviewing first-year student success and programs related to student retention. Last fall, this Committee developed a retention programs inventory and completed a student experience map. They will use these tools to identify gaps in our efforts and enhance the overall impact on retention.

Graduation rates are another key metric for academic and student success. Far too many universities across the country continue to report abysmal four-year and six-year graduation rates. Activities and programs such as Jaguar Tracks, student-faculty research projects, writing-intensive courses and service learning will play a vital role in achieving our graduation rate goals.

I was pleased to see that the latest results from the National Student Survey on Engagement support the effectiveness of our approaches. Student retention and graduation is complex and I applaud each of you

for your efforts. I challenge you to remain focused on asset-based thinking, we will remain focused on academic success and degree attainment.

Last year, we gained approval for two new academic programs designed to meet the demand for specialized needs in the marketplace. As a result, this fall we will introduce the Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling... and the Master of Science in Water Resources Science and Technology.

We also have plans on the horizon to implement an A&M-SA Express Lane through partnerships with local early college high schools and community colleges. I remain convinced these two approaches are the key to timely degree attainment with minimal debt.

As we continue to plan for academic program expansion and faculty development, new buildings and equipment will play a role in supporting our academic excellence. Plans for the opening of the new

Science and Technology Building in the fall of 2018 continue on time and budget...thanks to the leadership of everyone involved. As a result of the disciplined expense and project management, the facility has been expanded by an additional 22,000 square feet to support additional academic programs including engineering and will open in fall of 2019.

In addition, the Board of Regents approved the first phase of financing for a new academic and administration building. We are now planning for this \$25 million, 45,000 square-foot facility, which is scheduled to open in 2020.

Our enrollment goal for Fall 2018 year is approximately 7,600 students. We plan to accomplish this growth by strategically targeting students in a wider array of Texas markets as well as out-of-state students. These efforts will be supported by the roll-out of our new brand in a multichannel advertising campaign beginning this spring.

We have too many partnerships to name in the time we have today; however, I would like to touch on a few. Several key campus leaders

are enhancing transfer pathways and degree completion partnerships with community colleges.

In the coming weeks, several unique partnerships will enrich the intellectual dialogue about vital and complex issues that shape our community and our world.

In February, CPS will host its 2nd annual Energy Symposium right here.

Energy is a vast changing industry and you will have the opportunity to engage in thoughtful dialogue and learn more about CPS's future thinking. Another incredible opportunity is a timely and policy-changing forum at an event titled Russia's Cyberwarfare in Ukraine and Beyond, featuring Congressman Will Hurd and representatives from Ukraine.

The Atlantic Council, a global think tank based in Washington DC, brings this event and it is their first visit to San Antonio. This will be an intellectually stimulating event you do not want to miss. Later this summer, we will host a diverse group of socially-engaged writers at the Sandra Cisneros Macondo Writers Workshop.

In addition, we are continuing to cultivate and enhance donor support to fund student scholarships, faculty endowments and academic programming.

And, of course, one of our most important partnerships this year is with the San Antonio Tricentennial.

Our University will play an active role in honoring the city's 300-year anniversary. This will include hosting a number of events that celebrate San Antonio's rich history, arts and culture. In fact, next week we will open an exhibit at the Presidio Gallery called "San Antonio as a Crossroads: 300 Years of an Evolving Frontier Community."

Our campus will celebrate nearly 10 official Tricentennial events this year. Starting on May 1st, we will participate in Commemorative Week with a Founders Day Art & Culture Event, a History and Education Day

Roundtable and a tree dedication ceremony in our up-and-coming Eco Park. I invite you to visit the exhibit and participate in Tricentennial events, you can learn more about all the University events on our webpage.

Funding will be critical to support the many programs and activities we have planned. After tightening the budget, we have plans for a fruitful yet fiscally responsible 2018. We have increased our forecasted revenue by \$11 million, which equates to a 16% increase from last fiscal year. This increase is due largely to positive enrollment projections and the growth of federal financial aid on campus.

Student scholarships have increased 69% over last year, to align with the anticipated Federal Pell and Texas Grants allocation for fiscal year 2018. These scholarships will help increase access to higher education for students who would otherwise be unable to afford college. **[PAUSE]**

As you can see, we have a lot of great work ahead of us.

Focusing on the *How* as Much as the *What*

With so many important projects on our collective plate this year, it would be easy for us to focus exclusively on the **WHAT**, and not pay as much attention to the **HOW**.

After all, the University must fulfill its commitments, our teams will meet deadlines... and we, as individuals, will do what we say we will do.

But in the broader national and even global context we now find ourselves in — where seemingly every issue is politically charged and potentially divisive — I suggest that *how* we behave this year will distinguish the University as much as *what* we accomplish in 2018.

Throughout our nation's history, American colleges and universities have witnessed hate speech disguised as free speech... most recently on several colleges and universities in San Antonio and throughout Texas.

Last month, as a member of the Higher Education Council of San Antonio, I proudly joined fellow presidents of other colleges and universities to speak out against expressions of hatred, racism and bigotry... and to make a distinction between diversity of thought and disingenuous misrepresentation of free speech.

As we undertake our important work this spring, I challenge you to recommit to fostering diversity of thought and the free exchange of controversial ideas. We have an opportunity to build upon the great work that exists... by ensuring that our classrooms, offices and hallways are spaces where all voices are heard and opinions can be challenged in a visibly respectful manner.

In light of the recent events brought to the forefront by the media, I ask you to renew our focus on workplace behaviors and lead with the expectation that we are a community that is free from sexual harassment, free from discrimination and free of hostility. Here on our campus we have a special responsibility to ensure that our student community

witnesses visible leadership by each of you to reject inappropriate behaviors, to reject bigotry and violent forms of expression. Each of us has a special responsibility to create opportunities for constructive expression of diverse opinions. I refer to this as leadership with voice, visibility and respect.

None of us can achieve greatness on our own. We are many parts that make up a collectively strong University. Each of us is responsible for contributing to the campus environment and creating a culture that evokes diversity of thought, open-mindedness and respect.

I have no doubt that others will be impressed by all that we can and will accomplish this year. But perhaps more importantly, if we conduct our business in this manner, others will be struck — and inspired — by *how* we comport ourselves. That might very well be the most important lesson we could impart in 2018.

It is with the same spirit of diversity and inclusiveness that the President's Commission on Equity has been operating since its inception. Last semester, the PCOE launched a conversation that explored equity in our school systems through a case study and film entitled Stolen Education. They also launched the PCOE fund that is intended to enhance awareness, knowledge and capacity across our University community through many forms. These include educational, co-curricular or research activities that advance diversity, equity and inclusion at the broadest levels and more importantly directly impact the campus at large.

I assure you we will be hearing a lot more from the Commission this semester, including the initial round of funding awards in the next couple of weeks. Diversity, inclusion and equity are ingrained into our collective DNA, and these concepts should be intricately woven into the fabric of all that we do. I've empowered the PCOE to lead the campus in defining constructs and creating accountability.

And today I ask each of you to consider embracing or renewing an equity-minded focus to instruction, student support and professional engagement... and to join me in creating common language that embodies how we approach diversity, equity and inclusion. To achieve the excellence that we're striving for requires us to come together and work towards a common understanding.

Today, the PCOE is seeking your input as they advance our work. I look forward to a terrific outcome and a fabulous semester! I encourage you to fully participate and ensure that your voice is heard.

Please join me in welcoming Dr. Daniel Delgado and Sherry Patrick, members of the PCOE, who are going to guide us through the next steps in today's conversation.

Please help me welcome Sherry and Daniel.