



Fall Convocation Remarks  
Thursday, August 24, 2017  
10:30 a.m. – Auditorium

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In the atmosphere of higher education, August is a powerful month. I empathized with mixed emotions as parents moved their students into Esperanza Hall, and witnessed the nervous excitement from the second cohort of first-year students, I was inspired by many of our incoming transfer students at the Arise ceremony and I had a glimpse into our future with another promising class of new faculty. Much like the cosmic phenomenon of this week, our bright moments are momentarily overshadowed. Protective eyewear cannot shield the fact that our rituals are occurring in a sobering societal context. This morning, I ask you a challenging question. How can we position ourselves to act, not react, on the importance and powerful significance of a public university in today's complex narrative?

As a public university and as university citizens we have a special role and responsibility. Public institutions reflect the constitutional freedoms that we enjoy and symbolize. Principally, the capability to freely express all forms of speech, even when it is abhorrent. As a nation, we have evolved from historical periods of time in which repression or hate-mongering were the norm. Americans have taken to battle grounds to protect others and to defend our freedoms. Today, we are witnessing regressions and in some cases reminiscent images of periods in our history that we fought to reject.

We are a unique collection of talented people who come together to uphold the human spirit of a public university community. I have three requests that are intended to appeal to your humanity. Voice, Visibility and Respect. First, I ask that you join me in bringing to the forefront the responsibility of a public university to provide a platform for voice and more importantly to amplify your voice to reject bigotry, racism and violent forms of expression. As we teach our students to digest a variety of voices, we can stand against hate in proactive ways. Second, I ask you to embrace responsibility to be visible role models in maintaining a teaching and learning environment that nurtures constructive expression of diverse opinions. I know you do this well, I've seen it and I'm proud of your commitment. However, we must be visibly relentless in reflecting the core values of diversity and inclusion that America's public universities foster and revere. Third, I ask that you lead with a respectful attitude. Even with the best intentions, this is challenging especially in a contextually charged environment. We are constantly receiving information, sometimes from questionable sources that in some cases embolden disrespectful viewpoints. We cannot and should not shut out other people's experiences or perspectives. Together with our students, we have a responsibility to create an environment where we work together to maintain voice and visibility and always promote a culture of respect.

A&M-San Antonio is a public university that sits within a dynamic growing city and we must remain focused on a vision to serve as an economic, research and social catalyst for our region. I know you know this; and it bears repeating, to ensure 100 percent clarity. As a young university, we have a unique mission to provide an opportunity for degree attainment for every student that

attends and especially those who join us from historically under represented communities. And for all students to graduate, with minimal debt, if any.

Abraham Lincoln once said “The best way to predict the future is to create it.” And after an 18-month period we have adopted a strategic plan that outlines our future. We come together around five core values: excellence, student focus, audaciousness, opportunity and collaboration and four goals with measureable outcomes. We are focused on student academic success, building quality academic programs and engaging in partnerships that benefit faculty, staff and student engagement. Key to achieving these three goals is strategic enrollment management—the audacious thinking is to grow to a headcount of 10,000 students by 2021 while maintaining a student faculty ratio of 20:1 or less. We will continue with strategic initiatives that are underway, for each goal, directly linked to measurable outcomes which are spelled out in the handout you received. Today I am announcing the launch of a strategic planning fund of \$500,000 that will be open to competitive outcomes-oriented proposals.

As you may have noticed, a lot has happened on campus in the last 100 days—and a lot more is underway. The Convocation handout covers a significant amount of information that links to the mission, vision, values and goals of our university. I’d like to take a moment to share a few of the highlights.

Wow. Thanks to the president’s cabinet for contributing to the video and Jen Haft for producing it. Socrates once said, “The Secret of Change is not on fighting the old, but Building the new.”

I will unpack two concepts that Socrates refers to - change and building.

Yes, it is true we continue to experience healthy change and change that should be expected when building a new university. Our culture is evolving and making necessary adjustments to support a growing student body. We are changing because we have rising expectations for the students we plan to recruit and we have rising expectations for student achievement. We are also evolving to welcome and support new faculty, staff, and departments with new and expanded functions.

Everyone on campus has experienced some shift in every action from recruiting students, to basic logistics in how/when we schedule space, to changes in how we fundamentally support each other as internal users of services (like technology, business processes and marketing) and evolution is happening in our classrooms and in co-curricular support to students. In the coming academic year, you should expect healthy constructive change. We are building a data-driven culture and we are at the stage of creating information banks that widen our knowledge about students and our internal operating systems. We are making evidence based decisions that will result in healthy change. As you think about our core values, recognize that we are in the middle of building a culture of excellence, a culture that will focus on data analytics as core to how we think and make decisions about our future. The key as Socrates implies is to focus on creating the new and building excellence into our changing expectations.

### **Focus on the Future**

There should be no doubt in your mind, our cabinet is laser-focused on building our future. As Martin Luther King once said “If you cannot fly then run, if you cannot run, then walk, if you cannot walk then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.”

We are doing a lot. Standing still is not on our horizon. Different departments and initiatives are at various stages of the crawl, walk, and run cycle.

We will see many physical changes ahead, and when I envision our future, as a rule of thumb, I am planning on one new facility per year. Today there are two pieces of good news that I would like to call to your attention. The Science and Technology Building, is on schedule to open fall 2018, and it will be fully completed. The other piece of good news is that the total project costs are under budget and with the leadership of Vice Presidents O'Brien and Spindle we have been able to complete the programming exercise for additional space to support the sciences and our future programs in engineering technology and engineering education. This building was originally designed with a connector for an engineering expansion—we are now in design phase for that and construction will start in early 2018.

More good news. In consultation with Chancellor Sharp, he has approved programming and planning funds for Phase I of the next academic building. Programming will be completed later this semester, to be followed by a formal recommendation to fund up to \$25M for design and construction. I anticipate A&M System approval by the end of the semester. The building will be located south of CAB. Phase II will be an administrative wing. The intent is to remove the village of modular facilities as quickly as possible. This academic facility expansion is critical to our growth and we are on track for one or more new buildings per year, in line with our masterplan. I remain driven by our campus mission in guiding our destiny—and when I ponder about all that we need in connecting a constellation of resources—it is apparent that we have to spark the physical growth around us. I am working with elected officials and system leaders to develop our frontage land off of Loop 410 as another driver in moving our university forward. We are establishing criteria for land usage that guides our decisions, I'll keep you informed in the coming months.

As we continue to grow, I want to reemphasize my commitment to **Shared Governance** in decision making. There are two formal governance groups that I'm relying on: Faculty Senate and Staff Council. We will continue to work together to address campus hot-topics; in addition there are a few other formal groups worth mentioning.

I have asked VP Spindle to lead a transportation task force that will recommend parking and alternative transportation plans to support our growth.

Last spring I appointed a small work group led by VP Mahan and David Perryman to oversee our 10-year anniversary in 2019. The timeline is referenced in your convocation handout. Preparation is underway to celebrate and document our history. Later this fall, a Founders space will be designed in the Madla Building and the life size portraits that are in the Rotunda of the CAB will be relocated. In place of the portraits, we will design a historical timeline that captures key milestones.

A conversation about the future must include our fiscal management. The Appropriations Bill contained a 10 percent reduction in state revenues or a \$4.5M reduction over the next two fiscal years. I am working with the Chancellor and others to maintain our special line item funding as we grow. Strategic enrollment growth is vital to the future of our University and we are building a budget model in which we can sustain our growth—over time. It will be challenging to lose all special item funding, in one swoop, until we reach at least 6,000 FTSE, and we're about 50 percent there. I will be personally working with the president's cabinet and the University

Resources Commission to chart a course that leads us through this fiscal situation. For now, we will grow at approximately 1,000 students per year to maintain our revenue targets. We do not have the physical infrastructure or organizational capacity to grow much beyond that—we cannot grow our way out of a budget reduction—and we cannot “cut” our way to excellence. We will need state support for a few more years. Even if we remained flat in our growth, we lack the critical mass to self-sustain our operations. We need state support and continued system support to grow. And we need campus-wide strategic enrollment management—with targeted recruitment and a growth plan that the entire campus supports. This fall we will formally examine our admissions criteria and how we manage enrollment. We will not be driven by growth that leads us to bad decisions or poor outcomes for students.

As we tie together physical and fiscal infrastructure we are bolstering the significance of our diverse campus community. Last spring, I launched the President’s Commission on Equity, an important initiative, to formalize our commitment to equity across the campus, I’d like to share their progress. Thanks to the PCOE for their continued leadership, recommendations for awarding the new funding referred to in the video will be made by the PCOE.

We think big and work diligently to achieve our aspirations. Others have noticed what we are doing. I am pleased to announce, that yesterday the Regents approved the naming of the Mays Center for Experiential Learning and Community Engagement. Mr. Lowry Mays, former Chairman of the A&M Regents and the Mays Family foundation is personally committed to our university and the notion of experiential learning and community engagement. His gift of \$5M is a significant sign of support to our leadership and a giant step to enhance student learning.

In May, the Greater Texas Foundation announced an award of \$1.4M in scholarship support for graduates of early college high schools. We are the only San Antonio University and the only A&M regional campus selected. And this fall we will launch our first cohort of nine early college high school students from Three Rivers School District who will attend classes here.

The College of Education and Human Development recently received a combined award of \$850,000 for innovative redevelopment of the teaching model at Stewart Elementary.

You will soon be invited to the Grand Opening of our new downtown facility for Archives and Special Collections, including the DRT library holdings. This new partnership with Bexar County is a catalyst for research and archival collections.

This semester we awarded \$561K in scholarships including the first cohort of Greehey Scholars and a full-ride Toyota scholar. Under the leadership of VP Ortega, we will host our first fall scholarship luncheon to bring student recipients together to express appreciation to our donor community.

Yes, we are focused on our future and what we do today and what we accomplish this academic year is shifting us towards a residential learning community filled with vibrant students, faculty and staff. Thank you for making a difference at our campus. What you do matters.

In the words of the Dalai Lama, “If you think you’re too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito in your room.” I leave you with this—we are building a university of the future and every action you take today impacts that future—please do not set your sights too low or too narrow. What we did yesterday will not sustain us into tomorrow. If we build organizational silos, we will fail. We are building our future, together. And we need each one of you to bring

your best forward-thinking. Our collaborative minds and spirit of audaciousness across all divisions will set our university apart from others. I challenge you to be vocal, visible and respectful champions of Texas A&M-San Antonio - welcome to a great year!