

Spring 2016 Convocation Remarks
January 14, 2016

The Great City of San Antonio, started off 2016 with a bang! Through serendipitous good fortunes and karma myself and the campus Foundation board Chair detonated the downtown SA ceremonies with a bang on behalf of our incoming class of 1st year students. It was an explosive reminder of the positive energy and the importance of what A&M-SA is doing for the entire region and the overwhelming support that exists for our emerging university.

In 219 days on August 22, you will begin instruction for our first class of first year students.

Around you, are symbols that reflect a journey—a destination—towards becoming a comprehensive 4 year university. The fall semester brought a fast-paced period of change for our entire community to plan what I call the National Model for Student and Academic Success based on proven high-impact practices. We've invested financial resources, time and organizational energy with national experts to help us define philosophies, principles and practices that are intentional and deliberate using research based evidence. We will share highlights of everything we know, and the conceptual plans to ensure we meet the needs of our students and that we meet your needs.

I invited you here this morning, because your perspective and your voice is vital to our success.

Our university will not reach its destination without you. We cannot imitate our way to greatness—we have to challenge and out-innovate the traditional academic success models.

And collectively you the professoriate are the single most powerful force in guaranteeing our success. You play the single most important role in ensuring a student is successful and that every student who's appropriately completed the requisite academic coursework makes it to graduation day.

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As I've said to you before, you wear multiple hats, two important personas you share are architect and builder. You came here designing this great institution while simultaneously building it and I applaud all that you're doing in your classrooms, departments, research, publications and public service, student engagement and so much more. I ask you to consider that as we travel down this road, the role of shared governance is more critical than ever before. We each share in the responsibility to keep moving our university forward and one way you do that is by sharing in the governance process with your voice and unique perspective. Up to this point, you have each played a role in our institutional history and to a varied extent our institutional planning—As we move forward this administration cannot be effective in our decision making if your engagement is from the back seat. Our university becomes a better place because you play a role in decision making from the front seat.

I want to be abundantly clear that shared governance doesn't mean that you MUST Be at every meeting, participate in every committee or chair every task force that comes your way. That's impossible. What it does mean is that together we have to identify those areas that are most important to the success of our students and to your success. I again, invite you to participate, in a meaningful and deliberate manner. I need your help in ensuring that we identify what's important to you or your department, and that we identify those critical items that will be enhanced with the wisdom of your insights in the decision making process. We are small force but we operate with great agility. We must continue to capitalize on our collective strengths and they are right here in this room. We have to be equally careful to watch for the signs of organizational fatigue and protect ourselves from a systemic burnout.

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I also want to point out that your participation is only effective if you as a faculty member, have the opportunity to respectfully disagree, to respectfully listen to others points of view even when they differ from our own and to politely say “no” if you truly cannot participate at the level expected, and within the timeframe that is expected. And it goes without saying, that your perspective on a committee or institutional initiative does not correlate with a negative view on your ability to receive tenure or your workload assignments or in any way shape or form infringe on the academic freedoms afforded to you in your various academic departments. Governance simply means being engaged in the decision making process. And one of the fundamental outcomes of shared governance is that our institutions last longer, than any of our individual voices—but it is our individual voices that form the foundation of long-lasting integrity and wisdom for our university. Your voice matters.

I want to be abundantly clear that I’m challenging us all with audacious thinking and I know we’re pushing the limits of our success model—and we’re doing that intentionally, because our community needs it. We cannot afford to be slow and we cannot afford to be cautious—our community has invested in us, because we are a catalyst for this region. We are truly on the edge of an audacious and exciting – future filled with success and good fortunes. And we are building in solid planning principles, which translate to a need for your involvement as we move through a tidal wave of plans. We are at a nexus of a thoughtful academic plan, a new building plan, updates to our 10 year masterplan, and a new 5 year strategic plan. My office will take the lead on ensuring these plans are integrated and audacious—more to come on that.

Another area of importance is research, we have made strides in our commitment to the Water Research Agenda and we are examining further opportunities for research in cyber security.

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Much work is still to be done in the research infrastructure to ensure we can support the growing interest in more research across your academic departments.

We have carefully designed this morning's activities in such a manner to enable participation and to have you help us, the administration, identify areas that we, should carefully consider as we continue to plan for downward expansion and the growth spurt that is before us. You have my commitment to listen and to be responsive to your insights. I'm going to pause and ask if there are any thoughts or questions about anything I've said, before we begin the downward expansion discussions.

Thanks.