



College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences

August 19, 2025

Welcome back!

I think back to my first fall conference – slightly derailed by a hurricane – and how I felt facing a room of strangers. But today? Looking across this room, I just see familiar faces. People I have gotten to know over the past two years – who I’ve shared meals with, laughed with, listened to, talked with. Colleagues I trust and admire. Colleagues who have trusted me as the College has tried new things and done our best to navigate all of the things that have happened. It feels good to be in this room with you, right now. The energy in this room is going to help us not just survive, but do great things this year.

As some of you know, this summer, I took my first real vacation in 2 years and traveled to Slovenia, part of Ivana’s native country to climb mountains. I logged out of Teams and outlook and lost track of the day of the week. (Thank you to Brianne and Nell and the office staff for making that possible).

I’ll be honest, it was not without trepidation. I joined a tour group, but I didn’t know any one in the group before we left – I didn’t know anyone in the country.

I had prepared, but, I didn’t entirely know what to expect.

Every day was a mountain pass, a summit, a trail, where the focus was on the basics: the next step, staying hydrated, not tripping, not falling on my butt. I had a great guide and hiking group. I had Snickers bars and coffee. And, it was hard. It was steep. I did stumble. I did fall. I did need help (though I hated to accept it). It rained. It was cold. It was hot. It was longer than I expected.

Going up was hard – coming down was harder.

And, you know what? I loved it. Because I like to do hard things.

Over and over, that hard work was rewarded with epic and breathtaking views that astounded and surprised me.

It’s called Type 2 fun. Views made better because of a feeling of effort and accomplishment.



Now, this isn't just an excuse to show you my vacation photos ...I do have a point.

I am not the only one who did hard and fulfilling things this summer. I know that the people in this room also did hard things. They:

- Wrote books
- Responded to dreaded Reviewer 3
- Took care of parents
- Lost loved ones
- Bought homes
- Moved to California
- Went to Disney World, in August, with a young child

Everyone in this room did hard things, because they had to, because they wanted to, because, they could.

And because, and this might surprise some of you, you are optimists like me.

I am an optimist, who believes that things can be made better, and I like to do hard things.

To be an educator is to be an optimist about the next generation, about the capacity for change, for making things better.

To be an educator and serve our deserving and brilliant and needy and resilient students, you must be willing to do hard things.

Because, just like mountains trails, you know that after the hard work, after all the effort, there will be views that astound and awe you.



Now, I read the news. I know that there are so many hard things happening in the world, in our country, to our community.

But standing in front of this community, I am optimistic about the good that we will do.

Some of you have heard me say this before – that we stand together before a giant puzzle and all we can do, what we should do, is focus on the pieces before us. That there are other people, other like-minded people, that you will hear from today, who are also working on their parts of the puzzle, and we must trust them to do their parts, as we do ours.

We cannot forget that as staff and faculty in the California State University system, we hold important pieces of that puzzle. We hold power.

We have a direct connection to the lives of students and their families.

Through the disciplines that we teach – the skills and knowledge that we lead students to – we not only change the lives of students but also create the leaders who will sustain, rebuild, and elevate our communities.

Yes, they are trying to make invisible our students, our community – and we will continue to teach our students how to give voice and argument and vigor to their experiences and dreams. Our students are *diverse, first-generation, Dreamers, Pell-eligible, undocumented, gay, lesbian, queer, transgender, non-binary, female,*

disabled, Black, Hispanic, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Arab, women, multicultural, underrepresented, minority, underprivileged, feminist, marginalized, privileged, stereotyped, underserved, advocate, ally, and activist.

These are our students. This is our community. No banning of words from grants will change the fact that these are the people we help succeed.

And when we help these students succeed, we are resisting.

So, I'm not asking us to ignore all that is happening in the world that we cannot control.

I'm suggesting that we focus on the trail in front of us – one step at a time – the things that we can control.

And, I'm asking that each of us take responsibility for the care of this community – that we show up for each other, that we have our office doors open for students, that we show empathy, that we recognize that we share a common goal.

Today, on behalf of the College, I am honored and privileged to welcome the faculty to the new academic year.

As I do so, I want to thank the department coordinators, dean's office and technical staff, and the department chairs. They have been here all summer, preparing for the return of students, assisting with orientation, and laying the groundwork for

an amazing year of CLASS events and initiatives.

Over the next few hours, we are going to celebrate each other and we're going to talk about the things that we have control over – what we can do to make the individual lives of our students better and what we can do to make the lives our colleagues better.

Welcome to the new academic year, on behalf of the amazing CLASS Dean Team, I'm excited and honored to serve with you.

Camille Johnson

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