

2023 Fall Convocation

“Our Many Paths to Greatness”

Hello, and welcome to a Fall Conference that we will never forget. In an abundance of caution, we decided to cancel our in-person gathering — an event many people put a great deal of thought, work and talent into, and I, for one, am greatly disappointed that we were not able to re-connect in-person after our summer break.

But, as you know, a weather event, not seen in almost 85 years, affected our region, and difficult decisions had to be made. That being said, the school year is underway and I am looking forward to greeting our new students, faculty, and staff as well as connecting with you who are already a part of our campus community.

This rare weather oddity seems to coincide with Cal Poly Pomona anniversaries — I imagine that an event similar to this one was cancelled when Cal Poly Pomona was celebrating their first anniversary, and today, it coincides with our eighty-fifth. But putting challenging weather aside, we have an academic year to get underway.

For 85 years, Cal Poly Pomona has helped our students excel. This is a place where careers begin, mentorship thrives, and future leaders emerge and learn to lead.

There is no one right way to achieve greatness. There is no defined road map. No simple formula. No magic elixir that can ensure superior achievement. And yet, individuals overcome hurdles to take hold of their dreams every day, regardless of their backgrounds, circumstances and individual challenges along the way. And they are fortunate if there are others who work to lessen or eliminate the hurdles, who serve as a beacon of opportunity and success.

This summer, I spent a lot of time reflecting on our students, their paths, their journeys and the challenges they face. I spoke to parents, professors, staff

and our leadership team about ways we can do more to support and guide our students towards commencement...the day when they get to confidently cross our graduation stage, head held high, proud of their incredible accomplishments and ready to take flight into the world beyond Cal Poly Pomona!

This is our calling: to help anyone who dreams of success, achieve it. This is why we devote our talents to educating and mentoring the leaders of tomorrow; why we advise, engage, and serve our students, and contribute to a campus environment that is beautiful, enriching and welcoming.

I want to thank you all for being a part of the Cal Poly Pomona family!

And speaking of the CPP family, I want to recognize the efforts of our current deans and welcome our newest college leaders. The work of Dr. Alison Baski, Dr. Martin Sancho-Madriz, Dr. Mary Ann Akers, and Dean Pat Hawthorne has impacted our community and elevated our university. I also want to thank Terrie Taylor and Lisa Xue for their interim leadership in CPGE.

Now, joining the Academic Affairs Division are five newly-appointed deans: Dr. Camille Su-Lin Johnson, dean of the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences; Dr. Sandeep Krishnamurthy, Singelyn Family Dean for the College of Business Administration; Dr. Andrew Ketsdever, dean, College of Engineering; Dr. Jenelle Pitt-Parker, dean, College of Education and Integrative Studies; and Dr. Margie Jones, the now permanent dean of the Collins College of Hospitality Management.

Their work and commitment to our students will help us further advance our mission to transform lives for many generations to come.

I also want to acknowledge and thank Ms. Stephanie Pastor, the president of Staff Council and Dr. Rita Kumar the new chair of the academic senate for their commitment to our people and institution. And since our last Fall Conference, Dr. Cindy Pickett has joined our campus community as the presidential associate for inclusion and chief diversity officer. While here for

a relatively short period, I applaud Cindy's commitment to and focus on the "valuing of the diversity" within our campus community!

Lastly, I want to thank the love of my life, my biggest supporter, my husband, Ron Coley, we just celebrated our 44th wedding anniversary! His commitment to our campus community, our students and myself is unparalleled, and I am truly grateful for his wisdom, tenacity and passion for changing the lives of students. We both see our own trajectory of overcoming social, political and economic barriers in this country.

The familiar rhythm of the academic year brings a certain sense of comfort to our lives. Graduation always leads us into summer, and then, as the Fall semester and academic year starts, we gather — unless there is a once in 85-year hurricane! — to ensure that the next class of Broncos is prepared to graduate with confidence, with a knowledge of campus-wide support, and the array of experiences both in and outside the classrooms that are affirming and serve as a catalyst for their academic and personal growth and professional readiness come spring.

Fall Conference serves an essential role for our university. We come together to embrace the start of a new journey. To unify as a community. And to celebrate and reaffirm our collective commitment to our students and to the exceptional range of impactful work by faculty and staff that defines and enriches their experience and our campus.

But while each Fall Conference unites and fortifies us, today is also a great milestone. Today, we celebrate Cal Poly Pomona's 85th anniversary.

For 85 years, since 1938, the faculty and staff of this university have challenged, shaped, and propelled our students, helping them achieve their unlimited potential. Collectively, we work tirelessly to make dreams realities.

No matter who we are, where we come from, or where we want to go in life, all of us here at Cal Poly Pomona — students, faculty and staff — aspire to be not just good, but great. To succeed in our own way. To achieve our goals and define our lives rather than being defined.

This week, we will welcome students into our classrooms: each one aspiring to change their lives, break barriers and redefine their vision of who they are. For some, a college degree still seems out of reach. They are on the path, but the road is long and full of obstacles — some are single parents who will be working and studying while balancing bedtimes and putting food on a table. Most will be the first in their families to ever step into a lecture hall, wear a lab coat and purchase college textbooks.

You will meet students facing seemingly insurmountable pressure — sometimes from the people they trust the most. You will greet students struggling with acceptance, belonging and coming to terms with who they are and who they want to be.

I ask you today, and every day, to put yourself in their shoes. Empathize and care about their struggles. Care as much about their dreams as they do — as their families and supporters do — as I do.

At the conclusion of my remarks, you will see a short video highlighting three inspirational Broncos. Each had their own dreams of success and are now on their path to greatness, thanks to the culture of care and mentors at CPP who helped them along their journey.

But now, let's hear from one of the many professors that work to support, challenge and elevate our students here at Cal Poly Pomona — Dr. José Aguilar-Hernández.

[Video played of interview with Dr. Aguilar-Hernández]

Professor Aguilar-Hernández knows about the power of hopes and dreams. Hopes and dreams inspire us, unify us, and keep us going amid life's inevitable setbacks. Where would we be without hopes and dreams — what would fuel us to persevere? To accomplish what was once unattainable. To change the world for the better.

It has been said that “Education offers the greatest opportunity for improving one generation over another.” We must continue to build upon our campus’ legacy of providing opportunities for those looking to transform their lives.

Through our impactful legacy, you have witnessed first-hand how our polytechnic experience propels students into the careers they might never have dreamed of. You have watched as they learn about industries, companies and employers that they never knew existed. You have helped them grow, mature and realize their limitless potential. You have supported their seeking graduate education. Thank you for broadening their minds and enhancing their ability to dream big. Thank you for promoting a student-centered experience and for maintaining a campus setting that is welcoming and engaging.

Today it feels more difficult than ever for many of us to dream big — to see ourselves overcoming the numerous daunting challenges we face in our lives and in our society, yet we must persist. We must continue to inspire, to keep moving forward, to keep believing in ourselves and the greatness of those we teach and support.

And beyond inspiration, we must celebrate dreams. Celebrate when our students excel and when they rise up and achieve. Dreams are elusive, especially for many of our students. They may not have dreams, or big ones when they get here. Maybe just getting into Cal Poly Pomona was their dream, and now they don’t know what to dream of next. It’s our job to help them dream ever bigger and realize their potential. Our shared purpose is to help anyone who dreams of success achieve it... Anyone!... We are mentors, coaches, and when needed, necessary motivators.

I ask you to recognize both the obstacles young people within our communities, our state, our nation, and across the world face today, as well as the opportunities before them — and their very real need for our unmitigated support. You are contributors to what they can and cannot accomplish. You are a critical catalyst for helping them to launch careers and elevate their hopes and dreams for their lives.

When I walk across our campus, when I speak to faculty members, interact with our staff at events and meet with our students, I see the greatness of this community. I see the rewards of your work and am truly grateful for every one of you.

As part of our continued work in recognizing you and your work, I get the pleasure to announce our annual winner of the One Team Award.

This award celebrates cross-divisional collaboration and those teams that truly align with our university values. This award honors the truly best work and achievement from this community. Thank you for all the submissions and thank you for the myriad of collaborations across our campus. And now, the winning team is...

Farm to Pantry! Farm to Pantry is a partnership between the Poly Pantry, the Lyle Center and the College of Agriculture. This grass roots program donated over one-thousand-seven-hundred-and-forty pounds of produce to Poly Pantry this year and over four-thousand pounds over the past years. Thank you for all the work you have done in helping food insecure communities thrive.

Before he was President, Barack Obama gave a commencement address to Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, where he said, "So let's dream...let's imagine together what we can do to give every person [American] a fighting chance."

More than ever, higher education faces serious challenges. Fewer students are graduating from high school which leads to fewer applications and enrollment challenges, along with the associated reduced revenue. And when students do arrive, some of our students experience unwelcoming climates or communication that is non-affirming.

In addition to troubling graduation statistics, Cal Poly Pomona, and universities across the nation, have experienced challenges attracting and retaining talented and diverse faculty and staff. Additionally, we must seek the resources to continue modernizing our campus and facilities.

We must embrace the tasks that lie ahead and continue to pave the way for students from every background to achieve greatness. We must not, and will not fall short, for our calling is too great.

Dolly Parton once said, "Find out who you are. And do it on purpose." Well, I know who we are. We are educators and caretakers of the future. We are builders, dream makers and life-long learners. We are Broncos.