

**President Soraya M. Coley
State of the University Address
2020 Convocation
Monday, August 17, 2020
(Prepared Remarks)**

Hello and welcome to Cal Poly Pomona's 2020 Convocation. As the kick-off event to our annual weeklong Fall Conference and the segue to the academic year, Convocation is our moment to join together — to recognize our progress over the previous year, consider what is to come, and reaffirm our commitment to being an inclusive and diverse polytechnic university.

I'm speaking to you live from our MediaVision studio on campus. In preparation for today, we've planned carefully to ensure that we're following all necessary protocols and guidelines so that everyone involved stays healthy and safe. I'm grateful to our colleagues in Facilities, Information Technology, and MediaVision for their expertise and commitment to our campus community. I also want to recognize the approximately 537 full- and part-time staff who, due to the nature of their work, have continued to work on campus, and are doing so in ways that protect their health and the health of others.

I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Sandy Dixon, chair of our Department of Ethnic & Women's Studies, for introducing the land recognition that opened our broadcast and to Julia Bogany (BO-guh-nee), who serves as Cultural Consultant and member of the Tongva Tribal Council. Notably, she has been instrumental in preserving the Tongva language for current and future generations. We are honored to have her participate in our Convocation.

I also want to thank and recognize those offering their welcome in the video that helped to launch our Convocation ceremony. We are a large and diverse organization — both in terms of who we are and what we do. We are more than 2,400 faculty and staff, serving more than 26,000 students. But while we are surely and appropriately large and diverse, we are united through a shared mission and vision. Across our colleges, departments, divisions, and units, we are — as our Strategic Plan so elegantly puts — cultivating success through a diverse culture of experiential learning, discovery, and innovation. Regardless of our role, this shared goal is what continues to drive our progress.

Convocation is an event anchored in tradition. At a time when our normal operations have been so thoroughly disrupted, it is the “unofficial” things we share that become more important than ever.

First and foremost, we take a moment to recognize the newest members of our campus community. To all the faculty and staff who have joined us in the past

year, I offer my most sincere welcome. I hope that you have felt the sense of community that so defines our university. We normally take a moment so you can be recognized by your peers. And while we'll have to wait for such recognition, the sense of collegiality communicated through this gesture is the same. We are truly pleased that you have joined Cal Poly Pomona. Your expertise and commitment are essential to our continued success.

Convocation is also a time when we take a moment to reflect on those who are no longer with us. Such a sentiment seems more poignant today. Of course, each year, amid our daily joys and struggles, grief may find a way to rear its head. But today seems a greater challenge as the magnitude of the sorrow tempts us to see only numbers associated with the pandemic, and not individuals.

It is during such times that the observations of the English poet John Donne (DUNN) become so apparent — that none of us is an island. Alluding to the ringing from a church tower signaling a funeral service, he admonishes us, “to send not to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” Each lost life affects us because we are a part of humanity. And through experiencing our humanity together, we can begin to heal.

In May, we honored the memory of Student Affairs leader Kevin Colaner. Hearing stories of his life, I appreciated the lives he touched and the lives he changed. And we also consider the family members, friends, and loved ones of our Bronco family who are no longer with us. I know many of you are hurting today. I offer you my deepest condolences.

In remembrance of those who have died, I ask that you join me in a moment of silence in their honor.

[MOMENT OF SILENCE]

Thank you.

We have so much to be proud of as an institution. We continue to be a model of a modern, diverse, and inclusive polytechnic university. In my remarks today, I will take the opportunity to celebrate our recent accomplishments and point to a future that is bright. But this sense of hope and achievement does not betray an ignorance or a callowness about the reality faced by our campus community, our state, nation, and the world.

When we gathered for Convocation this time last year, I'm sure none of us could have imagined one year later we would be in the midst of a global pandemic — a scourge that has claimed nearly 800,000 lives worldwide and flattened the global

economy. Without a doubt, we all have been impacted in some shape or form — a truly heartbreaking reality.

In terms of Cal Poly Pomona, it is not hyperbole to say that the coronavirus pandemic represents the greatest disruption to our normal operations in the 82-year history of our university. The only comparable moment takes us back to the 1940s and World War II, when the campus closed completely for three years. The difference though is that back then, Cal Poly Pomona was still in its infancy, and the enrollment was decades away from the tens of thousands of students studying here now.

Compounding the effect of the pandemic are justified concerns over the subsequent and severe decrease in state funding and what it means for our university.

I mourn the impact that these circumstances are having on all of us. Like you, I have moments of deep contemplation about how you — our faculty, staff, and students, as well as our communities — are faring and coping. These are truly difficult times.

But, while we acknowledge the challenging times we face now and will face in the months and probably several years to come; today we talk of our collective progress and success for the simple fact that our students and our communities are depending on us.

We will nurture hope in the face of adversity because it strengthens our resolve to persevere. The past six months have shown clearly that we shun no challenges. We are taking this head on. Our guiding principle of “One Team. One Goal. Student Success,” has taken on so much more meaning as it has required greater sacrifice by each of us. And we understand that even as it is imperative that we focus on our students, it is also imperative that we focus on you; understanding the impact you are facing.

And as we look to the year ahead, we will move forward bolstered by each other, recognizing the challenges, while fortified by the knowledge that we are truly capable of great things in the most difficult of times.

Cal Poly Pomona *is* California

As this entire event will be posted online shortly after we close, I would encourage you to go back and look more closely at our “highlight video.” With all that has happened recently, it would seem impossible that we still have accomplished so much. But such is the drive of the Cal Poly Pomona community.

And, in true Cal Poly Pomona form, for each achievement noted in the video — from reaffirmation of our institutional accreditation to a Grammy Award to excellence on the soccer pitch — ten other accomplishments could have been acclaimed.

What is more, behind each triumph are stories of the people who make Cal Poly Pomona such a distinguished institution.

Allow me to delve into to just one example.

The video mentioned Cal Poly Pomona making history at what is affectionately referred to as the “Turf Bowl.”

Each year at their Golf Industry Show, the John Deere company and the Golf Course Superintendent Association of America hold a national competition that draws competitors from universities across North America to be tested on their knowledge of all aspects of the turfgrass industry. They’re grilled on everything from grass science to soil physics and from business management to pest control.

Going up against large research universities like Purdue, Penn State, and Virginia Tech, we consistently finish in the top ten.

This year’s Turf Bowl was held in January in Orlando, Florida, and for the first time, we won the entire competition. But that amazing result only tells a fraction of the story, a story that is uniquely Cal Poly Pomona.

- Since schools can send multiple teams of four students, we sent three teams. In addition to winning it all, two of our teams finished in the top ten and all three were in the top 30.
- We were the first school ever to place two teams in the top ten in the same year.
- We were the first school ever from the West Coast to win the competition.
- We were the first school ever with a woman as a team member to win it all. In fact, three out of the four members of the winning squad are women.
- And, we were the first school with a woman as the team’s faculty advisor to win the competition. So, I am pleased to send extra congratulations to Dr. Priti Saxena (PRIH-tee sax-ZANE-uh) in the Department of Plant Science.

And even as wonderful as this achievement is, success like this is happening across our campus. And so, more than anything, at this year’s Convocation, I want

to thank you all for your commitment to excellence. You are changing lives and changing communities.

And when I think about the difference you make through your teaching, scholarship, research, and work, I'm reminded of an interview last year given by David Kirp, emeritus professor of Public Policy at UC Berkeley. He has written extensively on education policy and practice. Speaking of the CSU's efforts to improve graduation rates, he made a powerful observation about the role our graduates play in our communities across the state. He said:

"If all the University of California alums disappeared for a day, we'd soldier on. If all the [CSU] graduates disappeared for a day, this state would stop. Traffic lights wouldn't work, the weather system wouldn't work, there'd be no one teaching in the classrooms. There'd be no police, fires would just be burning. ***The Cal States are California.***"

This has never been more true. Recovering from the pandemic will require individuals who know how to think critically and compassionately, are experts in technology, and have a global perspective. Most importantly, our state will need individuals who have learned by doing, know how to apply theory to practice, and are ready to make an impact when they leave our campus. Each year, more than 5,000 of our graduates are prepared to do just that. After completing their time at Cal Poly Pomona, they move on to a host of opportunities in work, civic engagement, and public service. And in whatever they pursue they go with the skills and attributes critical to be leaders in their communities.

Each of you have a role in making this happen. At its core, Cal Poly Pomona is its people, and through our commitment and collaborations we are truly making a difference.

My Journey to You, Our Journey Together

Back in January of 2015, as I assumed the presidency, I gave my first talk to the Cal Poly Pomona community. I had spent months contemplating what I might say, asking myself, "if I were a faculty or staff member, what would I like to know?"

Those months of introspection became a theme that I have returned to time and again in the five years that have passed since then. I titled my message back then: "My Journey to You, Our Journey Together." I took the opportunity to express how my life and upbringing had formed the values and philosophy that would guide my tenure as president.

In laying out my journey to you, I talked about my family — my mother and father — and how the value of education was ingrained in me from my earliest years. I talked about growing up in a legally segregated community in North Carolina, and

attending legally segregated schools, and how those ignorant and racist boundaries instilled within me a lifetime of determination to do all in my power to eliminate the barriers that divide people one from another and seeks to perpetuate an inferiority mindset.

I talked about being among the first classes of coeds to attend Lincoln University in southeastern Pennsylvania, and how the mentorship of committed faculty put me on a trajectory to a doctoral degree and a career in academia.

It was just after completing my graduate work that my CSU journey began. First in Fullerton, and later to Bakersfield, before coming to Pomona and marking the beginning of our journey together.

Whether you have been here long before me or just joined our campus community, please know that it is the honor of my career to serve you and our students.

In that first address to campus, I asked us to imagine that we are climbing one of the peaks in the nearby San Bernardino Mountains. After years of economic fallout from the 2008 and onward Great Recession, we were scaling to a higher plateau where we could rest and regroup. It was at this figurative plateau that we engaged in a far-reaching campus-wide strategic planning effort.

With the University Strategic Plan, the Academic Master Plan, and the Campus Master Plan, we embarked on a broadly consultative process, drawing on the insights and expertise of our entire campus community, to lay out an ambitious blueprint for the future of our great university.

And indeed, working together, we did scale to even greater heights. Under the system-wide Graduation Initiative 2025, and with the leadership of Dr. Terri Gomez and the deans, department chairs, and staff in the colleges and other student advising units, including those activities led by Dr. Cecelia Santiago-Gonzalez, we were leading the way as one of only two campuses to show progress across all the key measures.

Over the past five years:

- Our 4- and 6-year freshmen graduation rates and 2- and 4-year transfer graduation rates have all gone up.
- First-year retention rates are up.
- And we continue to shrink the equity gaps factored by ethnicity.

We will always have more work to do, but your commitment and our teamwork is paying off.

And even with the extraordinary challenge posed by a global pandemic, we continue to climb that mountain. Truly, the reaction from the entire campus community—faculty, staff, students, alumni, and supporters—has been nothing short of miraculous.

- When we announced on March 11, that all classes would be transitioning to virtual and remote modes of instruction, over the course of the following week, our faculty and staff moved more than 5,000 courses from in-person to virtual modes of instruction.
- In short order, the whole breadth of campus resources essential for our students' success — from Health and Wellness Services to Financial Aid — were transformed to accommodate a virtual campus.
- Our colleagues in Facilities and the University Police Department quickly adopted stringent practices to keep themselves and others safe while still maintaining our campus.
- With amazingly generous support from across our campus community, we had our most successful ever Giving Day, raising more than \$334,000 to support students in need of assistance.
- In the span of roughly two weeks, Jessica Wagoner and her colleagues in Enrollment Management and Services and across Academic Affairs, devised a system to quickly and safely distribute more than \$14 million in federal emergency grants to students experiencing housing instability, food insecurity, and other emergency situations.
- And I am particularly proud to report that with University Advancement and in partnership with our deans, we were able to identify additional funds in order to provide emergency grants to our undocumented students, who had been forbidden by law to receive grants through the federal program.
- As we quickly pivoted to preparing for fall, Dr. Victoria Bhavsar (BAV-sar) and her colleagues in the Center for the Advancement of Faculty Excellence and Kimberly Allain and her team in Employee and Organizational Development and Advancement developed an array of training opportunities and other resources for faculty and staff.
- And to top it off, 1,300 faculty participated in our Course Redesign for an Online Inclusive Polytechnic Education.

All this effort has brought us to this point. Classes begin in three days, and again, because of your committed effort we are prepared to live up to the high standards we have always set for ourselves.

In our response to the pandemic and planning for fall we have continued to keep two priorities as our principal concerns:

- The safety, health, and wellbeing of our campus community and those with whom we interact.
- And the ongoing success of our students.

I am grateful to Provost Sylvia Alva, the vice presidents, deans, and all their colleagues in administration and throughout the colleges for the extraordinary effort that has gone into preparing for this moment.

And while we've planned and prepared carefully for this semester and will continue our strategic approach in the semesters to come, one of our ongoing difficulties revolves around the pandemic's impact on the state budget and subsequently funding for higher education in California.

As I outlined in a message to campus last month, the economic effect of the coronavirus pandemic has opened a \$54 billion deficit in the state budget. As a result, what was going to be a \$199 million increase in state funding to the CSU has transformed into a \$299 million decrease.

For our part, our current projections show that we will need to close a \$20 million budget gap this fiscal year and likely next year as well. This situation has and will require that we make the hard decisions to protect our core mission of student success and academic and research excellence. As I mentioned in my message to campus, the decrease in revenue since our move to remote instruction has resulted in layoffs, furloughs, and compensation reductions within the Cal Poly Pomona Foundation and Associated Students, Inc. which are not supported by state funds, but rather must be self-sustaining.

On the stateside, to address the budget shortfall and prepare for potential reductions in the years to come, we are implementing a comprehensive tiered strategy that exhausts all options before considering involuntary measures. In particular:

- We are conducting a close examination of all campus reserves and modeling which might be used, in a fiscally prudent manner, to address campus needs. As part of the state budget, lawmakers added flexibility in the use of reserve funds, including deferred maintenance.
- For this fiscal year, we are putting a hold on some new and replacement recruitments and filling only those that align with critical needs and strategic priorities.
- And, we are reducing operating expenses and identifying areas that could yield efficiencies in our operations.

All told, we are taking strategic rather than across-the-board approaches to assure that we continue advancing our priorities.

Obviously, a great deal of our budget plans will depend on strong enrollment. Thanks to the outstanding work of our outreach programs under the direction of Dr. Reginald Blaylock and our financial aid counselors, overseen by Ms. Jessica

Wagoner, our projections for fall actually place us ahead. Continuing this trend will be essential to dealing with this ongoing challenge.

Make no mistake, the budget situation for the CSU and Cal Poly Pomona is serious. For many of us, the memory of the budget challenges of the Great Recession are all too recent. Please know that we are approaching each alternative with intensely measured care, keenly aware that each step we make impacts people's lives, and we are especially doing everything possible to maintain personnel during this time. I want to thank you for your continued commitment and perseverance during such unprecedented times, and I will continue to keep you updated.

My friends and colleagues: it's been just over five years since I first asked you to climb this mountain with me. I could not ask for better companions to share this journey. It is during the challenging times that you inspire me the most. And while we now have a steep hill before us, please remember that we are traversing it together. Let us continue to support one another and look for ways to strengthen and encourage, because as we do, we are reinforcing our foundation for generations more to come.

Why I'm Cal Poly Pomona

A recent experience gave me yet another reminder of the character of our Cal Poly Pomona community.

As some of you may know, I have an Instagram account. It's an opportunity to show what I'm up to and share important updates. If you don't happen to be following my account, I would humbly invite you to do so. You can find me at @prescoleycpp.

Over the course of having my account, I've made roughly 150 posts. It's always interesting to see how folks react and what interests people the most. I was particularly touched to see what was my most "liked" post — the one that garnered the most attention and interest.

There were certainly a lot of trademark Cal Poly Pomona moments to choose from.

- But it wasn't a photo from one of our magnificent Horse Shows or a special exhibit commemorating the life and work of John Lyle.
- It wasn't the photo of me making chocolate treats in the iLab or a happy moment with one of our supremely talented mariachi ensembles.
- It wasn't the Hot Dog Caper, the opening of the Project Blue Riparian (ruh-PAR-ee-un) Habitat behind Building 1, or Halloween at the Child Care Center.

The most liked post was from July 9th of this year, when I announced that the CSU had joined the lawsuit to protect our international students from a misguided federal policy that threatened to prevent them continuing their studies in the U.S. I think this resonated with individuals, because it was a public affirmation against the denial and limiting of access and opportunity to education. And it is vital that we remain equally vigilant for those who remain under-represented within our country.

While not the most scientific of samplings, this certainly reaffirms what I see among our campus community each and every day. Our faculty, staff, and students are engaged with each other, with their communities, and the world. We oppose injustice, and we seek to live our values.

As an institution so committed to student success, inclusion, diversity, and social responsibility, Cal Poly Pomona attracts and nurtures this kind of sentiment. And I believe it is one of the primary reasons that we have such remarkable faculty and staff at Cal Poly Pomona.

In preparation for Convocation, we asked a few members of the campus community to talk about their experience at Cal Poly Pomona. We've taken a few of their responses and produced a video that, while showing different experiences and perspectives, at a fundamental level it illustrates what unites us as a university.

Please enjoy.

[VIDEO PLAYS]

Thank you to all those who shared their thoughts and experiences for this touching video that exemplifies what it means to be a Bronco.

We all have lives, interests, and passions outside of work, but working in higher education adds such meaning and purpose to our careers. I have seen in my own life the power of education. I saw it growing up in North Carolina. I've seen it day in and day out over my 30 years with the CSU. And I especially see it at Cal Poly Pomona where, thanks to you, our students are exposed to world of knowledge and activities that are aimed at opening countless doors of opportunity.

Without a doubt, our holistic approach to student success has made us one of the most effective engines of social mobility in the nation. To cite one measure, in the most recent CollegeNET Social Mobility Index, which measures how successful a college or university is at enhancing the economic mobility of its graduates, Cal Poly Pomona ranked No. 10 in the nation. We've been in the top 20 for the past six years in a row.

It is this same commitment that animates our campus-wide Future of Work, Human & Civic Engagement initiative.

Even before the pandemic, it had become clear that disruption is the new normal in the U.S. and around the world. According to some researchers, today's college students may have upwards of 17 jobs across five industries over the course of their career.

Ubiquitous disruption is showing the ever-increasing importance of what I call essential skills. More than anything, skills like collaboration, team building, empathy, and negotiation are becoming more and more prominent as routine, as well as data management and analytics.

This actuality is exponentially more urgent during and what will come after the pandemic. Our Future of Work initiative is aimed at cataloguing, creating, and promoting the activities and programs that will prepare our students for the workforce today and for years to come and also give them opportunities to be confident and principled leaders in their communities.

To guide our work, we established a campus-wide steering committee and conducted a landscape analysis to understand what we were already doing to prepare students for the future of work and how to leverage these efforts in creating a "Career Readiness Model" that creates a stronger connection between education and the future world of work by fostering lifelong learning and promoting civic engagement.

A central piece of this effort involves what we are calling, "Signature Polytechnic Experiences" or PolyX for short. Covering a wide range of opportunities, these experiences operate beyond the classroom and engage students in creative and innovative solutions to problems with particular emphasis on collaborative learning and intense mentoring.

PolyX includes service learning in a community garden, externships with CalFire, research experiences in our *Learn Through Discovery Projects Hatchery*, and volunteerism through our one-of-a-kind Rose Float Program. And thanks to the ingenuity of the faculty and staff working on PolyX, our students continue to engage in these lifechanging projects in virtual formats.

The bottom line is that we are bolstering opportunities for our students at a time when a Cal Poly Pomona education has never been more important.

And as California looks to take a leading role in this endeavor, Cal Poly Pomona's success is being noticed.

Because of our leadership on this issue, last fall I was appointed to serve on Gov. Newsom's Future of Work Commission. Led by California Secretary of Labor Julie Su, the commission's purpose is to make recommendations to the governor and other policymakers about harnessing technology, innovation, and lifelong learning to promote jobs and improve working conditions across the state. The commission has a particular focus on ensuring that the benefits of economic prosperity are shared across society.

I think it important to mention that only three universities are formally represented on the commission — Stanford, UC Berkeley, and Cal Poly Pomona.

The commission began our work last September and submitted a progress report in April, which allowed us to consider the entirety of our work in the context of the massive social and economic disruption of the pandemic.

One underlying principle that has defined the Commission's work is that the future of work is not inevitable. We have the power to shape it through our actions, policies, and choices. Cal Poly Pomona is a key player in shaping this future — one of the many reasons that I find such fulfillment being part of this community.

Our Place in the Community and the World

I now would like to talk about Cal Poly Pomona's place in our communities and the world.

It is a bittersweet dichotomy that a time filled with such challenges would also produce immense opportunity. In the midst of a global pandemic where societal racism and the resulting social and economic inequities are placed in even starker awareness, the importance of education, scholarship, and the pursuit of knowledge has never been more evident. And from the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others has come a global reckoning on systemic racism.

At this unique moment, Cal Poly Pomona, like so many other institutions, organizations, and businesses are at a crossroad. We, like them, can serve as a catalyst for what is possible.

It was exactly one month ago that the world bid farewell to Congressman John Lewis — a Civil Rights icon, lifetime public servant, and American hero. A man of great courage, at age 21, he was one of the original 13 Freedom Riders who rode an interstate bus from Washington, DC, to New Orleans to challenge the system of segregation that he and I both lived under. On August 28, 1963, a 23-year-old John Lewis spoke of freedom on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, just moments before Dr. Martin Luther King would share his dream. Two years later, his skull

would be fractured by a state trooper in Selma, Alabama, as he crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge. He would go on to serve as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for three decades up until his death last month.

In a final statement to the nation that he wrote days before his passing, and not to be read until his funeral, he gave us all a challenge, he said:

[Quote] “When you see something that is not right, you must say something. You must do something. Democracy is not a state. It is an act When historians pick up their pens to write the story of the 21st century, let them say that it was your generation who laid down the heavy burdens of hate at last and that peace finally triumphed over violence, aggression and war. [Unquote]

And universities play a unique and critical role in society. By design, they question convention and established thinking. Whether it’s finance, literature, physics, hospitality, or civil engineering, we examine all the assumptions in the pursuit of knowledge. And public universities play an even larger role considering our special commitment to ensuring all have an opportunity to learn in an environment that is welcoming, inclusive, and affirming.

So, in our never-ending pursuit to, examine systemic racism and the myriad of ways we exclude and deny because of the many dimensions of our human diversity, we will, as Congressman Lewis writes, “do something.” Cal Poly Pomona will be at the forefront, upheld by the pillars of knowledge, opportunity and action.

I applaud the Academic Senate, the College of Letters, Arts and Social Science, the College of Science, and my Cabinet, in which we put forth actionable statements. Our commitment to “do something,” must also be matched with an assessment of what is done and what is achieved. We also understand that our work must be ongoing. The following are just a few activities underway:

- We created an Office of Inclusive Excellence & Diversity with the mission of cultivating a diverse, inclusive, welcoming and respectful campus community.
- Developed the Inclusive Excellence Council as a standing, representative body of faculty, staff and students to advise the campus on strategies to cultivate and enrich an inclusive and diverse campus community.
- Incorporated Unconscious Bias Training into the campus’ training schedule.
- And launched the Campus Equity Dialogues series co-sponsored by Academic Affairs and Student Affairs to address persistent equity gaps in higher education.

We will continue to pursue change and achieve progress, and we know that this work is only accomplished through individual commitment and collective action, including understanding the insidious nature of, and impact on, those who experience micro-aggressions on our campus.

#CPPtogether

In closing, I share with you this photo of two of our newest “Broncos.” On the left is Wenda. On the right is Brooklyn. These two foals were born at our renowned Arabian Horse Center during the pandemic. To me, these two beautiful creatures are ongoing reminders that the work of our university goes on. The challenges we face are not easy. But it is our intentionality that propels us forward, united in a shared vision.

I again express my gratitude to your ongoing commitment to Cal Poly Pomona. Over the course of my remarks this morning, I’ve used the phrase “campus community” a dozen times. This is not an empty phrase. “Campus Community” defines who we are and explains why we are successful.

Speaking of community, I hope you have had the opportunity to enjoy the regular installments of #CPPtogether. Launched after we moved to a virtual modality, these communications have reminded us that we remain a community even when we are physically separated. From a socially distanced Pep Band playing the CPP Fight Song to tips on using our Blackboard learning platform from Chemistry Professor Laurie Starkey to Collins College Chef Sheree Mooney’s recipe for “quarantine pizza,” #CPPtogether has been a welcome reminder of the sense of community so essential to our campus.

Of course, normally after my remarks we would be hosting the Service Awards — our annual event hosted by Staff Council that honors faculty and staff for their years of service. Like today’s broadcast, I invite you to enjoy a virtual celebration by visiting a special website that lists each of this year’s honorees and their years of service. The link can be found on the Fall Conference website.

And speaking of Staff Council, I want to take a moment to recognize and thank Ms. Rachel Dominguez, who has served for many years as President of the Council. As she retires, I want to thank her for the care and commitment she demonstrated not only in her staff role, but also with the Council. I am pleased that Stephanie Pastor in the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry has agreed to take the reins of the Council, and I know she will continue to be supported by a committed group of individuals. We thank all of you for contributing to a greater sense of community!

And as a finale to our Convocation, please enjoy a musical piece performed by our very own Cal Poly Pomona Wind Ensemble, conducted by associate professor of

music and director of bands, Dr. Rickey Badua (buh-DUE-uh). They are performing Johann (YO-hann) Sebastian Bach's "Prelude in B-flat Major." This beautiful piece will accompany readings of messages posted on the Cal Poly Pomona "Thank You Wall," which was created this summer to give our campus community the opportunity to express gratitude to colleagues.

As always, I ask that you please take care of yourselves and others. I truly miss seeing you. I miss our conversations in the elevator or waiting in line at the Poly Trolley. I miss the selfies in the Quad and at athletic events. But this longing only strengthens my resolve to persevere — as I hope it also does for you.

Again, thank you for making Cal Poly Pomona a truly unique institution and I wish you all the best for a healthy and successful year.