

2019 Fall Conference
President Soraya M. Coley
State of the University Address

Hello everyone!

Thank you and welcome to Convocation and the start of Fall Conference!

Thank you all for being here and thank you for being a part of Cal Poly Pomona!

We succeed as a university because of your hard work, expertise, experience, and most importantly, because of your commitment to helping our students thrive.

This is a time of tremendous progress and opportunity at Cal Poly Pomona. We have achieved so much over the past year and have a year of tremendous promise before us. I am excited to share with you my remarks on the state of our campus.

Before I begin, please allow me to recognize just a few individuals.

Would all the deans and vice presidents please stand? These individuals play key roles in turning our vision of success into reality. Please join me in thanking them for their contributions to Cal Poly Pomona.

I'm also pleased to recognize one of our esteemed alumni here with us today. Clark Rucker graduated from Cal Poly Pomona in 1983 and has since built a distinguished career in the aerospace industry at the Boeing Corporation. He is also the incoming chair of the College of Engineering Dean's Leadership Board.

Clark, would you please stand?

I am pleased to announce that Iman Roberts will be serving a one-year fellowship at Cal Poly Pomona as part of the BOLD Women's Leadership Network. Iman will be based with our Women's Resource Center, focused on promoting student success among first-generation women in STEM.

Iman, please stand and be recognized.

And I, of course, want to recognize my biggest supporter, my husband, Ron Coley.

Ronnie, will you please stand?

It was this time last year that I was talking about Ronnie's recent retirement after a long career in the Marine Corps and then at the University of California. Well I guess he decided that retirement wasn't interesting enough. He's now down the road at CSU Dominguez Hills where he's serving as interim vice president for administration and finance. And while he is doing great work in Dominguez Hills, he is anxious to be back and more fully engaged here at Cal Poly Pomona.

On a brief personal note, Ronnie and I celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary this month. We have been on an amazing adventure together, one that continues today.

Convocation is an event steeped in traditions, some old and some new.

The most fundamental of these traditions is an opportunity to welcome the newest members of our campus community. A sense of shared purpose drives us as an institution. Regardless of your role, the guiding principle of “One Team. One Goal. Student Success” underpins all that we do and accomplish. To all our newest faculty and staff, I hope that you feel this shared sense of purpose and collaboration. We could not be more pleased that you have joined our community of excellence.

If this is your first Convocation at Cal Poly Pomona, would you please stand?

Please join me in welcoming the newest members of our campus community.

Among our newer traditions is the blessing offered at the start of this event. The history of our university is told by communities on and off our campus. This annual blessing adds to the earnestness of our event and connects us to our diverse region. Please join me in thanking Dr. Sandy Dixon, Kim Marcus, Dawn Valencia, and Erica Ben for sharing this blessing and history with us.

A tradition started this past year highlights our commitment to serving the full student. At last year’s convocation, instead of expending resources on decorative

centerpieces, our tables were decorated with canned goods that were then donated to the Poly Pantry. As you probably know, the Pantry is the ASI-operated campus resource that works to meet the basic needs of our students.

Once again, we've made sure to continue our commitment to the pantry. In the lobby of Kellogg Arena, we've displayed a portion of the goods being donated to support the critical work of the Poly Pantry.

Another cherished Convocation tradition is the unique pins we hand out each year. Starting last year, we began designing the pins after the theme of our Rose Float entry. This year's entry is titled, "Aquatic Aspirations," and features giant sea turtles, a sunken ship, and a 13-foot high octopus that will wave its tentacles to the crowd. So, if you didn't get a pin on the way in, please make sure you get one as you leave today.

The final tradition I'll touch on today, is a more solemn one.

As we come together at Convocation, we also take a moment to remember those members of our community no longer with us. We also reflect on those who may not have been part of our campus but were still part of our lives. I think of the family members, friends, and loved ones dear to our hearts. We take this moment to think on those we've lost. Among them is Hugh La Bounty, who spent four decades as a faculty member and administrator at Cal Poly Pomona, including 14 years as president.

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

Thank you.

I hope you enjoyed the entrance video that opened our Convocation today. I never cease to be impressed by the creativity of our MediaVision team, and even more so by the dedicated and talented students of our Formula SAE team who built that race car from the ground up.

And while I hope the video contributed some levity to our gathering today, it also does something far more impactful. Over the course of just a couple minutes, it profoundly tells the Cal Poly Pomona story. It was created intentionally to give a glimpse into what makes us unique as a university. Each shot is an integral part of our story.

It begins and ends, of course, with our students. We have incredible students at Cal Poly Pomona. They are ambitious. They work hard. They are diverse. They want to make a difference. And they follow their dreams. The students who are part of the Formula SAE team spend countless hours building, refining, and tuning their car. They travel thousands of miles to compete. Their dedication is mirrored across our campus in students studying at each of our colleges and in all our departments.

After leaving the Manor House, the car bolts down Olive Lane, past the College of Engineering, which U.S. News recently ranked as the 5th best undergraduate engineering program in the nation in the “Master’s Category.” It then cruises by the College of Education and Integrative Studies, which has recently added vital and innovative new programs in early childhood and special education.

The next shot shows the car racing through the breezeway of our beautiful new Student Services Building, where John Gungon, an employment coordinator in Employee & Organizational Development & Advancement is giving new staff a tour of campus. Our staff do amazing work. You bring countless skills and immense knowledge to your jobs. And the work that you do changes lives. Thank you to Kayla, Michelle, and Jesus for representing our talented staff so well in that scene!

The car then moves by our Recital Hall where we see Professor Jessie Vallejo and Will Wright-Hooks, a recording and mix engineer, both from the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences. They are accompanied by students from our acclaimed mariachi ensemble. Prof. Vallejo started and leads the mariachi ensemble, which is one of the first such groups at a U.S. university. And Will was instrumental in the acquisition and installation of a state-of-the-art audio recording console. This new resource allows our students to learn on the same equipment found in some of the world’s most renowned studios. And I’m happy to report that you’ll have an opportunity to hear our mariachi ensemble when they perform at lunch today.

The next location is the iconic College of Business Administration building where Professors Kemi Sawyerr and Erkan Ozkaya are exiting the building with some of our students. Prof. Sawyerr is the founding director of our Student Innovation Idea Lab, more commonly known as the iLab, a program focused on fostering creativity and entrepreneurship among our students. And Prof. Ozkaya leads the NASA-CPP Business Startup Program, where students commercialize NASA technology to create innovative products that improve everyday lives. In the foreground you see Mike Miller and George Jones from our facilities staff, part of a team who work so hard to keep our campus running smoothly and looking amazing.

Now for anyone who knows our campus geography, the video demands that you suspend a little disbelief for the next scene. On the far other side of campus, the car races by Dawn Taccone, manager of the Farm Store, and Dave, director of farm operations, working with students in one of our grape vineyards. This scene reminds us that when we first opened our doors as the Voorhis Unit in 1938, our campus offered just three courses of study — Citrus Production, Ornamental Horticulture, and Agricultural Inspection. Our agricultural roots remain strong more than 80 years later as we continue to be the only four-year institution in Southern California offering bachelor's and master's degrees in agriculture.

In the next scene, the car zips past Professors Jill Adler and Steve Alas from the College of Science. Prof. Adler, a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, is a highly-regarded researcher and a dedicated mentor to our students. And Prof. Alas, who is engaged in cutting-edge cancer research, is

one of the 2019 recipients of the Provost's Awards for Excellence. The other two honorees this year are Donald Edberg in the Department of Aerospace Engineering and Xudong Jia, chair of civil engineering.

Truly, our faculty across campus are doing amazing scholarly and creative work and are showing a special commitment to our students' success.

The car then zooms up Camphor Lane towards, The Collins College, which CEOWorld Magazine just named the #19 best school of hospitality in the world! And while on Camphor Lane, the car also drives past the College of Environmental Design, where the Landscape Architecture program is recognized with High Distinction as one of the best in the country; similarly, Urban and Regional Planning program was ranked second among all universities without a Ph.D.

And also critical to the academic mission of our university is our Library, where they have expanded student support and engagement with the Focus on Finals event and the innovative-maker space for which there is a special ribbon-cutting event this afternoon.

And before making its way to Kellogg Arena, the car rolls past the Arabian Horse Center and right along side our police chief, Dario Robinson, who epitomizes the spirit of service that defines our university. Additionally, some of the folks you don't get to see in front of the camera are the dedicated officers and staff of the University Police Department and Parking & Transportation Services who made sure the roads were kept safe while we drove a race car all over campus.

I mentioned the Arabian Horse Center. We recently announced John Lambert as the new executive director of the W.K. Kellogg Arabian Horse Center. John would you please stand and be recognized?

As the car pulls up to the arena, we are of course reminded of another tremendous year for our athletics program. The highlight video that opened our event today talked about some of the on-the-field and on-the-court success. Altogether, we were ranked #11 nationally for athletic success among all Division II programs. And our student-athletes excelled in the classroom as well, with an average GPA of 3.04.

Brian Swanson, our director of intercollegiate athletics, would you and your team please stand and be recognized?

When you put the whole story together, it is clear that Cal Poly Pomona is a special place. This video could not have been filmed on any other campus in the world. As the vision statement in our Strategic Plan so powerfully affirms, Cal Poly Pomona is, “an inclusive polytechnic university that inspires creativity and innovation, embraces local and global challenges, and transforms lives.”

Would all those who participated in the video please stand and be recognized?

We are part of a rich legacy of progress at Cal Poly Pomona. Over the course of 80 years, Cal Poly Pomona has transformed from a “unit” of the state’s polytechnic

school to a modern inclusive university. With a commitment to experiential learning fundamental to all that we do, we are among the nation's most effective engines of opportunity and our students leave campus uniquely prepared to succeed in their careers and in life.

This transformation has come about because year after year individuals across the campus community work to achieve the shared goals of student success, institutional and personal excellence, and continued improvement. We rise together because our individual success grows our institutional capacity, expands our collective vision of what is possible, and gives us the courage to make that vision a reality.

Prof. Winny Dong in the Department of Chemical & Materials Engineering has made empowering her colleagues and students in an atmosphere of collaboration the cornerstone of her academic career. A member of our faculty since 2000, Professor Dong has particularly focused on increasing participation among underrepresented communities in science and engineering, and she has been a champion for undergraduate research.

I have asked Winny to be part of our Convocation program today and to share her insights into how our polytechnic advantage fosters the success of our students and our university.

Winny, can you please come to the podium?

Winnie, thank you for those remarks, and thank you even more for your commitment to Cal Poly Pomona. And Brian, it so wonderful to have you back at Cal Poly Pomona.

This is a pivotal moment for Cal Poly Pomona and the CSU.

In January 2016, the CSU launched Graduation Initiative 2025, an ambitious systemwide effort to improve graduation rates and eliminate achievement and equity gaps. While each campus has received set goals based on their unique circumstances, we are all expected to go far beyond incremental progress. All things considered, the CSU is working towards doubling our systemwide 4-year graduation rate, achieving major improvements in 6-year and transfer graduation rates, and completely eliminating disparities around ethnicity and income.

Meeting the goals of the Initiative is certainly a challenge, but more importantly, it is an opportunity to demonstrate what we can achieve in terms of access, equity, and student success when we have even a moderate increase in resources.

And I'm proud to report, that because of your efforts across our campus, Cal Poly Pomona is making the most of this opportunity. While the system as a whole is making progress, Cal Poly Pomona was one of only two, out of the 23 campuses, to achieve progress in all six of the Initiative's core metrics this past year.

To each of you, thank you for making this happen.

We still have much work to do, but I am confident that we have laid the groundwork and set the priorities in order to reach our goals by 2025.

I am confident because we are investing resources where they will have the most impact on student success.

- As part of our bold faculty hiring plan, we conducted 45 tenure-track searches in 2017/18 and 51 last year. 50 tenure-track searches have been approved for this coming year, and we are committed to improving our tenure density levels.
- We're also investing in our advising infrastructure. Using Graduation Initiative funds, we hired 8 graduation and retention specialists and an e-advising coordinator.

I am also confident we will reach our goals for 2025 because we are creating and bolstering a variety of innovative programs that make the most of our talented faculty and staff.

- We are implementing CPP connect, which utilizes data, early alerts, and predictive analytics to alert us when a student misses a success marker.
- Our "Take 30" campaign that sets students on a course for graduation when they first arrive is showing very positive results.
- For the second straight summer, we offered the immensely successful summer completion grants, which provide tuition, books, parking, and

meals to students 8 credits or fewer away from graduation. In this way, they are able to finish their degree during summer session rather than having to complete an entire semester in the fall.

- And we're even utilizing artificial intelligence through a recently launched texting resource called "Billy Chat." This tool communicates with new students regarding orientation, registration, placement tests, and more. Students can also ask Billy questions and get answers any hour of the day.

And I'm also confident in reaching our 2025 goals because we are closely scrutinizing our policies and procedures to eliminate administrative barriers to student success.

- One of the indirect benefits of our semester conversion, was that we spent years considering each of our policies and procedures. We then had the opportunity to make changes where necessary.

And while I'm on the subject, I want to take this moment again to thank and commend the campus community for your successful efforts to convert our campus from quarters to semesters. While we continue to work through some challenges with the Degree Progress Reports, the conversion effort has been a success and we are better positioned to serve our students going forward.

The timing of our first semester last fall could not have been more fortuitous. While the Graduation Initiative started in 2016, this fall marks the incoming cohort by which we will be assessed on our six-year graduation rates when 2025

comes around. With the transition to semesters and a strong student success strategy in place, I am positive we will be successful together in reaching our ambitious goals.

Leading our student success efforts is Dr. Terri Gomez and her team in the Office of Student Success. Terri, would you and your team please stand and be recognized?

While Terri has student success in her job title, each of us has it as part of our job. Regardless of your position on campus, we have a role to play. As you strive for continuous improvement in your sphere of influence and activity, we are strengthened as an institution. Everything we accomplish, we accomplish together. This is especially the case with Graduation Initiative 2025.

But even as important as the Graduation Initiative is, it represents just a piece of our overall determination to be a model polytechnic.

At the start of my presidency, we began three crucial planning processes — the University Strategic Plan, the Academic Master Plan, and the Campus Master Plan. The development of these interlocking endeavors has been a broadly consultative process, drawing on the insights and expertise of our entire campus community. Together, they lay out an ambitious blueprint for the future of our great university.

While each of these documents approaches our future from different vantage points, they also intersect at their most fundamental levels. One of these crucial intersections is the fact that at Cal Poly Pomona, ***our people are our most valuable resource***. Since our progress as an institution is wholly dependent on your success in your respective roles, a primary thrust of our strategic planning involves empowering and supporting your own continued improvement.

One of the five strategic initiatives in our University Strategic Plan specifically focuses on advancing organizational development and employee excellence. I'm glad to report that we're already seeing tremendous progress in this effort.

To cite just a few examples:

- We developed a new online resource called YourLife@CPP. Geared towards prospective faculty, this comprehensive webpage outlines the myriad of institutional support resources available to Cal Poly Pomona faculty and provides a wealth of information on living in the region. I am told we are the first CSU campus to develop a resource like this for faculty recruitment, and wish to commend the Office of Faculty Affairs, overseen by Dr. Martin Sancho-Madriz and others who worked on this.
- Also, in a short period of time Kim Allain and her team in employee and organizational development and advancement have greatly expanded the professional and personal development resources on campus. From the widely attended "Our Campus, Your Future" summit in February to the

dozens of instructor-led classes, the opportunities for supporting our staff have never been greater.

- And, in what I hope will ease administrative burden across our campus, we are implementing the much anticipated Concur program, our integrated and paperless travel and expense management system. When I went on a listening tour shortly after arriving at CPP in 2015, one of the most common concerns I heard was related to our travel and expense system. Concur is a direct response to that feedback and a concrete example of how our strategic planning is leading to results for our campus community. Building and implementing Concur has been a broad-based effort, but I want to specifically recognize Joe Simoneschi, our AVP for finance and administrative services, Michelle Cardona and her team in University Accounting Services, and Jorge Lomeli from the Division of Information Technology & Institutional Planning for their leadership and teamwork. Also College of Science Dean Alison Baski for serving as the test case, and vice presidents Danielle Manning and John McGuthry for their leadership and oversight of this initiative. Would you all please stand and be recognized?

These examples represent just a portion of the programs, opportunities, and resources arising from our strategic planning efforts. We are still in the early stages of implementation and the potential to advance our university is almost limitless. I want to thank everyone who has participated in our strategic planning efforts. Your insights and involvement are critical to our success.

The comprehensive review of our campus as part of our strategic planning has also served us in preparing for accreditation. As you may know, the accreditation team from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges will be making their site visit to campus in October. We submitted our institutional self-study last December.

It is easy to view the accreditation process as a chore. I see it as an opportunity. Going through the accreditation process not only presents a chance to closely scrutinize our institution, but also an opportunity to tell our story. It gives us the occasion to reflect on our achievements and showcase our excellence. So, I view accreditation less as a “Big Bad Wolf” and much more as a stage to demonstrate what makes us special.

Also part of our strategic planning, earlier this year we formally launched our initiative titled the Future of Work and Human & Civic Engagement. Underlying this work are the eight elements of an inclusive polytechnic university that our faculty developed as part of the Academic Master Plan.

As a public educational institution located in one of the most dynamic and diverse regions in the nation, Cal Poly Pomona is perfectly positioned to be a national leader in understanding the future of work and its impact on human and civic engagement. This project is looking far beyond just readying our students to enter the workforce when they graduate. We are seeking to understand what are the essential skills our students need to navigate the future and how do we teach

these skills. Likewise, how do we instill lifelong learning and civic engagement as a hallmark of a Cal Poly Pomona education?

This initiative is well underway with a steering committee, comprised of faculty, staff, and students, deeply engaged in analysis as well as campus-wide dialogues. With this innovative project, we are preparing students for a lifetime of success in their careers and in their communities.

One of the reasons I look forward so much to Convocation is that it is an opportunity to be reminded of why we all work so hard. This is a chance to consider what we're accomplishing together and to see just how committed we are as a team. Most importantly, we can reflect on the "who" of our efforts, that "who," of course, is our students.

At Cal Poly Pomona, "One Team. One Goal. Student Success." isn't just a catchy saying. It defines us. As a special treat, we've asked a few of our students to give us an entertaining reminder of the "who" of our work.

Last spring, the Cal Poly Pomona Music Theatre Workshop presented "In The Heights," the award winning musical with music and lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda. The musical tells the story of a cast of characters over three days in the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City. Ronnie and I saw the full production when our students performed it on campus last Spring. We could not have been more proud of our talented and dedicated students and the faculty and staff that guide and support them.

As a special treat, members of the production have agreed to share part of the performance with us today.

In the scene that our students will share, the character named Nina is back home in Washington Heights after her first year away at college. Due to financial strain, she has decided to leave school. She and her close friend Benny walk along the streets of their old neighborhood, taking in the sights and sounds of their home. As they wander, they come across others who call this neighborhood home.

Benny reminisces about their childhood together as Nina struggles with the challenges of carrying the hopes and dreams of her family and neighborhood.

Here to perform “When You’re Home,” please welcome Lorraine Gomez, Jared Ferree, and members of the Cal Poly Pomona Music Theatre Workshop.

Thank you for that inspired performance. Thank you to Lorraine and Jared and the other Workshop performers. Thanks also to Susan Ali, Dave Kopplin, Will Wright-Hooks, Raymond Fong, and everyone who prepared this magnificent piece. Would you all please stand and be recognized?

And don’t worry, Nina decides to go back to college by the end of the play!

Our Strategic Plan asks us to look four, five, and six years into the future of Cal Poly Pomona. Thanks to a unique opportunity at the former site of the Lanterman

Developmental Center, located just southeast of campus, I would like to invite you to look 20 years, 40 years, into the future of Cal Poly Pomona.

In 1927, the State of California opened “Pacific Colony” in Pomona as a home for individuals with developmental disabilities. Covering 300 acres, it was a city unto itself. In 1979, the name of the facility was renamed in honor of State Assemblymember Frank D. Lanterman, a longtime advocate for the center’s residents.

In 2014, the state closed what had come to be called the Lanterman Developmental Center. The following year, the CSU Board of Trustees authorized CSU Chancellor Timothy White to negotiate the transfer for Lanterman to CSU, and more specifically to Cal Poly Pomona.

What followed was a thorough feasibility study considering redevelopment of the site. The study was finished in 2017 and the prognosis was clear: this was a profound opportunity for our university.

We are now earnestly engaged in creating the vision for this site. With the guidance of faculty, staff, and student leadership, and representatives from CSU and the City of Pomona, we have selected a developer to partner with us as we start a project that will ultimately take decades to completely unfold.

We have chosen a firm called FivePoint as the developer. FivePoint has worked on successful projects across California, such as the Great Park in Orange County and

the shipyard in San Francisco. In addition to their profound expertise, we chose FivePoint because their proposal had a deep respect and appreciation for the academic mission of this project.

As the next step in this endeavor, one year ago we established an advisory committee of faculty, staff, and students to work with FivePoint to launch the visioning process and engage the campus and local community in exploring interests and opportunities at the site.

To see how the vision for Lanterman is starting to take shape, we've prepared a video where you can hear from members of the advisory committee and FivePoint leadership on how we are moving forward.

When Cal Poly Pomona first opened its doors in 1938, there was great hope for what it would become. We will need to have that same kind of imagination as we sit at the origins of what the Lanterman site can turn out to be. I cannot fully express how grateful I am to be your partner as we look to build the Cal Poly Pomona of decades to come.

I close today on a topic of critical importance for our university.

One of our most important duties as an institution of higher learning is fostering a campus climate where everyone feels safe and welcome and can achieve their full potential. And while we strive to foster a warm and welcoming climate on our

campus, we are not immune from these challenges and the larger societal environment. I have reflected on how we can respond as a university.

With the new semester upon us, I ask for your help in strengthening our resolve to live our values of community, mutual respect, and inclusion, and to care for one another. Undoubtedly, we are stronger when we come together.

As one major step in this endeavor, I am announcing the creation of an “Inclusive Excellence Council.” Drawing from faculty, staff, and students, this council will serve as an advisory group to draw on our strengths, help us understand our campus climate challenges, work with the campus community to find solutions, and gauge our success moving forward. I look forward to sharing more details in the coming semester.

Thank you again for being here this morning and thank you for all that you do to make Cal Poly Pomona the impactful institution it is. We are making great progress because of your effort and commitment.

I invite you to join us for lunch outside and return into the arena for our annual service awards organized by our dedicated Staff Council headed by Rachel Dominguez.

To everyone: have a great day, a great semester, and a great year!

Thank you!