

Fall Conference Speech
President Soraya M. Coley
Monday, September 19, 2016 | 9 a.m. | Bronco Student Center

Good morning! And welcome to the start of the 2016-17 academic year. This weekend I had the great opportunity to be a part of the move-in for our students, and this year we are welcoming to the largest class ever, and so I am so excited to start this academic year.

I would be remiss if I didn't also acknowledge my wonderful husband Ron Coley, who is vice chancellor at UC Riverside. Last weekend was move-in on Saturday and he was doing Saturday move-in at UCR, so we're in this all together.

We have a wonderful program planned for you today, and while I'll acknowledge the committees that were involved, I must take a moment to acknowledge Gary Hamilton, my chief of staff.

Gary was so excited about the Investiture that he decided this was a part two.

Some of you will notice the pen lights in all of the seats. This is to light our way. We've talked about being on a journey and coming out of the cave. We also recognize that the time is getting ready to change, and so we hope you will enjoy that little memento.

Again, I want to take a moment to thank the members of the 2016 Planning Committee for their efforts in organizing this year's activities. They are all listed on the Fall Conference website and include the President's Office, Academic Affairs, Information Technology and MediaVision, Kellogg West, Graphic Communications, and of course the staff of Associated Students, Inc.

There are practical considerations for the changes this year, but there is an important symbolic intent as well:

This is a different year for Cal Poly Pomona — for you, for me ... for the entire campus community.

It's a year of change — change in the faculty ranks, among staff and university leadership, and change in the size of our student population, again the largest in our history.

And, of course, there is change in the campus landscape.

If you arrived this morning expecting to park in Lot C, you know what I mean.

The Student Services Building is under construction and is scheduled to open in Fall 2018. It is designed to improve students' lives with easier access to admissions, financial aid and related services. While these are not part of the direct academic experience, they certainly inform the quality of life on campus and play a significant role in student success.

The biggest change this year — even bigger than the new parking structure on the south end of campus or the progress toward semester conversion — is one of **perspective**.

When I first spoke to you in January last year, I discussed “My Journey to You and Our Journey Together.” To begin that journey, I knew that I needed to hear your views, so I launched my Listening Tour.

In the subsequent months I visited 93 academic and administrative units and met with more than 1,200 members of our campus community: faculty, department chairs, facilities staff, administrators and development officers, among many others. And I spoke to students in our cultural centers, as well as those living in our residence halls and suites.

What I heard inspired and motivated me.

Most spoke of their passion for and commitment to this university. Many told stories of their personal successes and challenges. And some asked tough questions.

I’m reminded of a staff member who takes public transportation and takes two hours for her to get here every day, one way.

I’m reminded of a student who lives in Los Angeles and comes by way of public transportation. It takes her 2 ½ hours to get here every day. But the education and her commitment to this campus makes it all worthwhile for her.

In addition to a ground floor/grass roots perspective of campus issues and the challenges, the Listening Tour provided us an opportunity to begin to implement some practical changes that will improve life on campus.

For example, I heard that the university’s travel policy was a labyrinth (that’s the polite description) that not only made life difficult but in some cases discouraged travel. This issue provided us an opportunity to apply our polytechnic skills, and as a result I launched an initiative referred to as “Creative Solutions and Process Redesign” of which travel is our first focus.

I have charged a steering committee co-chaired by Vice Presidents Danielle Manning and John McGuthry, with the assistance of an operation team of faculty from the Industrial & Manufacturing Engineering department and four students, as well as staff associated with the travel office, to re-imagine our travel policy and procedures utilizing process improvement tools including the use of technology.

On the Listening Tour I heard concerns from those who rely on public transportation that the nearby bus shelters were in bad shape (again, that’s the polite description!). So, our facilities people partnered with the City of Pomona, and now we have new bus shelters that make life much easier for those using public transportation.

I learned that some students wanted to take summer classes to expedite their time to graduation but were deterred by the cost.

So, this past summer, we offered classes at a reduced rate. Attendance grew 29 percent, the number of sections grew 19 percent — and students’ confidence in graduating earlier grew as well.

I also heard from members of our transgender community about the need for restroom accommodations. The restroom facilities at University Plaza are being upgraded to address these concerns.

In addition, I heard on several occasions about the need to maintain our inclusiveness and expand our diversity. With that in mind, on October 5th, Dr. Daryl Smith, Professor Emerita from Claremont Graduate University, will speak here in the BSC on Diversity in Hiring Decisions. On October 28th, we will be partnering with the CFA union for a workshop on unconscious bias.

I can also share with you that Linda Hoos, our Chief Diversity Officer and Assistant Vice President in the Office of Equity, Inclusion & Compliance, will oversee the charting and mapping of our campus diversity profile.

This is a process that attempts to identify where we are in regard to establishing a deeply embedded structure of diversity grounded in our values, our principles, our goals, outcomes and resource allocation.

Your important voices — and the contributions of many others — are helping to shape our journey.

The listening will continue.

Know that the Listening Tour is not a “to-do list” but rather it’s another useful tool to help effectuate change and to give substance to the perspectives we hear about. It is like the GPS system in your car, instead we refer to it as a strategic guidance system.

We can ill afford to wander aimlessly, despite the best of intentions, and we cannot go backward or in circles. We must sharply focus on the direction we will pursue and the values that will reflect our Cal Poly Pomona community.

The heart of the strategic guidance system is our strategic planning process.

As most of you know, strategic planning is well underway and is creating a path that we will follow to achieve the reimagined vision we are developing for ourselves and our campus.

It will distinguish us and our mission from other universities and provide real strategies to accomplish our goal to become the preeminent **metro-urban polytechnic university with a global reach that serves as an epicenter for creativity, discovery, and innovation.**

A guiding principle of the plan is the theme: One Goal/One Team: Student Success!

Student success is measured not only in improved persistence toward graduation, but in what has long been a hallmark of this distinguished institution: preparing students for a lifetime of success in the workplace and in their community.

So I’m pleased to tell you that Provost Alva, Vice President Jarnigan and I are **sponsoring a Student Success Conversation and Workshop with Dr. Larry Abele** — an expert in national academic issues for more than a quarter of a century from Florida State University. His experience includes nine years as a department chair in biological science, the Dean of Arts and Sciences for three years, and Provost for 16 years. He will be joining us this Friday, September 23rd, from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. here in the Bronco Student Center to further our dialogue and strategies surrounding this important, mission-critical initiative.

On an equally important note, this year of change includes the addition of several new members of my Cabinet. I'd like to ask all Cabinet members to join me onstage.

And while they are making their way here, I'd like to introduce them:

- Provost Sylvia Alva, Vice President for Academic Affairs
- Danielle Manning, Vice President and CFO, Administration, Finance and Strategic Development
- Lea Jarnagin, Vice President for Student Affairs
- Tere Mendoza, Administrator in Charge of the Division of University Advancement, and
- John McGuthry, Vice President and Chief Information Officer
- Paul Storey, Executive Director of the Cal Poly Pomona Foundation

I'd now like to invite Provost Alva to talk about one or two of the major initiatives or goals this year in Academic Affairs.

[Cabinet presentations]

I hope you hear how excited I am to have this outstanding leadership team. I think that certainly with the talent, and the experience and the expertise, and most importantly with the values and the principles of leadership that they exhibit that we will certainly move towards our vision.

I'd like to use the rest of my time with you to talk about our future — about ***Our Ongoing Journey Together.***

The Listening Tour has been invigorating, and as you saw on the video, the accomplishments of the past year have been inspiring. But we need, with great intentionality, to take stock of where we stand and where we are going.

As I mentioned earlier, we have put into place a strategic guidance system to inform our decision-making, but we also need to recognize some of the opportunities and obstacles that lie ahead.

After years of recession, budget reductions, salary stagnation and limitations on what we could accomplish, we have emerged from a cave into the bright light of a new era.

It is a light that can impede our vision, or it can illuminate our pathway to greater success.

The series of unrelenting state cuts to higher education has hopefully ended, at least for a while, but new state dollars come with new expectations. Foremost among them is a requirement — ***yes, a requirement*** — that the CSU improves its two-year and its four-year graduation rates.

Given the demands outside the classroom that so many of our students face, along with ongoing class scheduling and advising challenges, improving the two- year and four-year rates is a formidable task, **but one which I firmly believe we have the talent, the values and vision to meet.**

The Graduation Initiative will remain one of our major priorities.

And I am happy to report that we are making steady, notable progress in our semester conversion activities.

Curricula have been adjusted and reviewed. Our technology infrastructure is undergoing an overhaul, and incoming freshmen and transfer students are being prepared for what to expect.

I want to take a moment to thank the Academic Senate, the Provost's Office, the faculty, department chairs and the deans for their continued good work. More remains to be done to ensure a seamless change, but we definitely can see the clear light of progress.

As we emerge from the cave, I recognize the challenges we will face in addressing our students' co-curricular needs. We have the opportunity and indeed the obligation to help expand their perspectives and perceptions of the world around them in ways that complement their classroom experience.

We want them to engage others in our diverse community and get out of their comfort zone. This is a good thing, because students who do so will be even more aware of their rights and responsibilities.

With that said, our university's strong commitment to free speech may be tested against our equally strong commitment to being an inclusive campus that values human diversity and the diversity of experiences and opinions. There will, no doubt, be teachable moments ahead.

Change is indeed taking many forms on our campus — in our vision, in our planning, in our commitment to our students.

These are exciting times, and I know you will join me and the Cabinet in being a part of the important journey of exploration and change.

Finally, we are addressing a question through strategic planning that lies at the core of our identity.

What does it mean to be a polytechnic university?

For decades, we have identified with “learn by doing” and “hands-on learning,” but what are the future implications of these concepts?

To begin this important conversation, I am pleased to introduce Dr. Peter Stokes, managing director of Huron Consulting Group, and his associate Mr. Michael Stallworth. Please welcome our guests. ...

[Strategic Planning]

Closing Comments:

I hope that you have enjoyed this year's opening Fall Conference. And thank you so much for your participation and engagement. I hope that you share my optimism, my enthusiasm and dedication to continuing to build upon the foundation of excellence that is Cal Poly Pomona.

I also wanted to take a moment to again thank Dr. Peter Stokes and Mr. Stallworth, as well as our distinguished speaker Dr. Carey. Thank you so much for being a part of this. And for our outstanding

faculty Dr. Lisa Alex and Dr. Martin Sancho-Madriz. They are a part of the Strategic Planning Committee and their input and perspectives have really enlivened our discussions.

I hope that you will come back and join us at 2 p.m. for our Service Awards Program. We are very excited about celebrating the years of commitment and dedication of our faculty and staff to the campus.

Have a wonderful start of a 2016-17 academic year. Please find time to engage with the students. I know certainly the faculty and the Student Affairs staff will, but others of you who ordinarily wouldn't have an opportunity to talk to students, please take a moment to introduce yourself and to let them know that you are supportive of them and their experiences here.

Have a wonderful year and thank you again.