

President Soraya M. Coley
2022 President's Fall Conference Address
"The Thread that Binds Us"
Monday, August 25, 2022

Thank you, Billy and all those who ran to Fall Conference today!

And hello again — my friends and colleagues — and welcome to the start of Fall Conference 2022!

Whether you're here in Kellogg Arena or watching via the livestream, I thank you for participating, and I thank you for being a part of the Cal Poly Pomona community.

I wish to recognize my husband, who after 20 years, retired as a Marine Corps officer and pilot, then served for 21 years in the University of California system, first at UC Berkeley and retiring as Vice Chancellor for Administration at UC Riverside. But then, two of my CSU presidential colleagues needed an interim Vice President for Administration, while they conducted year-long searches; first, at CSU Dominguez Hills, and this past year at CSU Fullerton.

He has informed me that, while he loves the CSU, he is absolutely, unequivocally fully retired now! And this past Thursday, we celebrated our 43rd wedding anniversary, I am pleased to introduce my dear supportive husband, Ron Coley!

One of the myriad benefits we gain from our connection to higher education is that — regardless of our role — the year has a natural flow timed with the seasons. Each fall brings both a sense of anticipation and renewal. And as we come together today, as a campus community, I am pleased and honored to share this moment with you.

Let me begin by thanking all those who planned and organized today's event, along with all those participating in the program.

Headed by the Nicole Hawkes, would the planning committee please stand?

The Land Acknowledgement that opened today's event was offered by Erica Ben, a member of our staff in the Department of Ethnic and Women's Studies and a Cal Poly Pomona alum. I thank her for inspiring us with her sentiments and in making us proud as her alma mater.

I also thank and recognize all those offering words of welcome from units that represent our faculty, staff, and students. Your advocacy on behalf of those who make Cal Poly Pomona a unique institution is essential to our mission. I thank you for your leadership and commitment.

Fall Conference serves an essential role for our university. It is a time to come together before the start of an academic year to unify as a community, celebrate our progress, and reaffirm our collective commitment to our students and to the exceptional scholarly, research, creative contributions of our faculty and the range of impactful work by our staff that defines and enriches our campus.

But while each Fall Conference unites and fortifies us, today is a milestone. It is the first time since 2019 that we are holding this annual event in-person.

I don't think we can overstate the impact of the pandemic on our individual lives, our families, our communities, and the university where we work.

I recall my message to campus, dated March 4, 2020, where I noted that we were closely monitoring developments related to what had been named COVID-19 and that we were following all recommendations from LA County Public Health and the CDC.

At the time, less than 200 cases had been identified among the more than 10 million people living in Los Angeles County.

Now, two and a half years later, we are left to grieve the devastating impact of the virus and assess how we've changed.

During that time, I've taken numerous opportunities to reflect on the sacrifices being made by our students, faculty, staff, and managers. Time and again, you have inspired me with your commitment and ingenuity. In the face of historic challenges, you have made Cal Poly Pomona stronger than ever before.

And you have done it in a way that exemplifies our campus values and commitment to ensuring everyone is welcome and can succeed at Cal Poly Pomona. In that same message I sent in March of 2020, I asked for “flexibility and compassion” as we addressed the everchanging reality brought on by the pandemic. More than anything, that “flexibility and compassion” has defined your response to the pandemic. And by so doing, you’ve strengthened our campus culture and built an infrastructure of camaraderie and mutual support that will serve our university for years to come.

I must admit to getting emotional when I consider the sacrifices you have made. With so much remote instruction and remote work, it has been easy to feel far-flung and isolated — not only geographically, but emotionally as well.

As we are returning to the campus, I have been more attuned and have appreciated the nuances of the interactions that take place at our university. Regardless of our role, we each contribute to Cal Poly Pomona’s ethos.

In the days and weeks to come, I ask that you take some time to acknowledge just how momentous of an achievement it has been to carry forward the work of this university over the last two and a half years. I hope you will see how you are stronger and be reminded of how you have helped and been helped.

Of course, one of the highlights of Fall Conference, is the opportunity to welcome our newest Broncos.

When we call ourselves a “campus community,” we mean it. We are a host of individuals with unique backgrounds, expertise, and experiences united in a common cause and working together to transform lives, expand opportunity, and create and disseminate knowledge.

To all our newest Broncos, I offer my welcome, my collegiality, and my friendship. Thank you for being a part of our mission and vision. And thank you for choosing Cal Poly Pomona.

I know many of our new colleagues are watching via livestream, but I would ask that all those in attendance here in the arena, that if this is your first Fall Conference, would you please stand so that we can recognize you?

Thank you.

I do want to accentuate what was shared in the highlight video this morning and specifically acknowledge a few of the newest members of our university community.

Dr. Jennifer Brown began her tenure as our new provost and vice president for academic affairs in April.

She came to Cal Poly Pomona having held senior academic leadership positions at UC Riverside and Oregon State University and brings with her a clear record of success in supporting faculty and students, promoting innovation in teaching and learning, and fostering diversity and inclusive excellence. All this of course, along with her own achievements as a researcher and scholar.

Please join me in formally welcoming Provost Brown to Cal Poly Pomona.

Last month, we welcomed a new dean of our College of Environmental Design. Dr. Mary Anne Alabanza Akers spent the last 14 years as founding dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Akers.

And while we're on the topic of the College of Environmental Design, I want to add that the architecture program was just ranked as the "Best Architecture School in California" based on data from U.S. Dept of Education, ahead of UCLA, UC Berkeley, and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

Also starting at Cal Poly Pomona last month, Chief Linh Dinh is our new chief of police.

Chief Dinh most recently served as lieutenant at our sister campus in Dominguez Hills, and over the course of his career has demonstrated a passion for serving educational communities.

Please join me in welcoming Chief Dinh to Cal Poly Pomona.

Also joining us this year is our University Counsel Chelsea Epps. Ms. Epps previously served in a similar role at the CSU campuses in Bakersfield and San Marcos. Please join me in welcoming Ms. Epps.

We have a few alums who are also very active members of our college volunteer boards joining us today:

- Clark Rucker from the College of Engineering
- From the College of Environmental Design: Manuel Muñoz and Juan Villalobos
- And from the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences, Dr. Jose Gomez

And finally, please welcome from the National College Resources Foundation, Dr. Theresa Price and Veronica Kummerfeldt. The Foundation has been a long-time avid supporter of Cal Poly Pomona, and we're grateful to have Dr. Price and her team as friends of our university.

Thank you.

Prior to our meeting this morning, the annual Service Awards took place. This special celebration honors those colleagues who have reached milestones in years of service at Cal Poly Pomona, starting at 10 years of service and then in five-year increments beyond that term.

I am pleased and humbled to report that more than 200 faculty and staff received Service Awards this year — a testament to their commitment to the work of this university and to our students. Would all those who received Service Awards today please stand?

[Applause]

While Fall Conference is a time to celebrate together and look forward to the academic year ahead, it also serves a solemn purpose.

This is also a season to 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.

I think of Dean Lea Dopson, who we unexpectedly lost in April. As both a member of the faculty and later as dean, her passion for her chosen field and the success of her students and colleagues shown through in everything she did.

I think of Charlene Saunders, a member of our staff who dedicated two decades of her life to Cal Poly Pomona, serving first in the Office of Research and Sponsored programs before holding positions in two different colleges.

And I think of Ron Simons. Known as "Mr. Cal Poly Pomona," Ron started as a student, spent four decades working on campus, and then remained connected to his alma mater after retirement through the Rose Float program. Ron passed in August of last year.

Each of those we lost had their own story and their own unique connection to the Cal Poly Pomona community. We mourn their loss and offer our unending support to the loved ones and friends that remain.

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

Thank you.

The Thread that Binds Us

We enjoy a storied history at Cal Poly Pomona, one filled with achievement and a never-ending commitment to making a difference in our state and beyond. It is a history that has — and continues to — rely on individuals making the most of the opportunities before them. It was just such a moment — a meeting in fact — in the spring of 1938 that altered the trajectory to where we are today.

The fortuitous meeting took place at our sister campus in San Luis Obispo. At an open house event, the parents of a student from San Dimas happened to mention to one of the college's deans, that a beautiful campus in their hometown might be available. With great prescience of mind, the dean promptly took the news to the university's president, Julian McPhee.

They were referring to the “Voorhis School,” an educational institution founded by Charles Voorhis, and his son Jerry, as a school for underprivileged boys. Established in 1928, by a decade later Charles Voorhis chose to retire and close the school.

Seeing the new location as an opportunity to expand political support among state legislators for polytechnic education, President McPhee jumped at the opportunity. Enthused by the university’s commitment to learning by doing, Mr. Voorhis gifted the San Dimas campus in what was at the time the largest ever gift made to a state college in California.

By the following fall, the “Voorhis Unit” — as it was called — was ready to welcome its first students. And from that meeting just a few months earlier, Cal Poly Pomona was born.

And as they say, the rest is history.

When our doors first opened, we boasted a grand total of three courses of study — citrus production, ornamental horticulture, and agricultural inspection. Our first cohort consisted of just 110 students — all men.

By the end of the 1940s — and with World War II veterans flocking to the nation’s colleges and universities — the Voorhis campus bulged at the seams. A moment of philanthropy again arose to dramatically alter the course of our history as W.K. Kellogg donated his 813-acre winter ranch to the State of California in 1949 — a gift that has helped alter the trajectory of countless lives.

By 1956, our move to our home here in Pomona was complete. A decade later, we would formally separate from the San Luis Obispo campus, becoming the 16th campus in what would later be the California State University.

In 1972, we would formally obtain university status and receive our current moniker — California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.

Today — 84 years after a conversation at an open house — we are the nation’s most diverse polytechnic university, a comprehensive campus

carrying the full breadth of academic scholarship and working to transform the lives of nearly 30,000 students.

None of this has been by accident. It is the result of dedicated individuals acting with purpose.

Our eight decades have seen unimaginable change. But, in the midst of our dramatic evolution, one constant has persisted. A common thread ties together our entire history, connecting decades of progress and achievement. That thread — which binds our 84 years of history — is you, our exceptional faculty and staff, the people of Cal Poly Pomona.

Moment after moment — leading to year after year — the people of Cal Poly Pomona have built this university. Through your purposeful work, we continue to evolve into a more fruitful fountain of opportunity.

All told, our shared commitment to student success and excellence in research, scholarship, and creative endeavors defines us, and it draws to our campus like-minded and like-committed individuals eager to carry on the legacy you have perpetuated.

Make no mistake, the last two and a half years represent a historic and unprecedented challenge to our work. The pandemic was not a mere speedbump or a series of inconveniences. It has been a watershed. The context of “pre-“ and “post-pandemic” now defines the work we do.

Yet, despite extraordinary adversity, you lifted Cal Poly Pomona to new heights.

At a time when college enrollment shrank nationally, we enrolled our largest ever class of students.

When a dramatic move to online learning put intense pressure on student success efforts, we improved graduation rates.

While the debate over the value of a college education blared far and wide, we broke our record for most applications received — and then we did it again.

And no greater symbol of our work exists than the triumphant return of our Commencement ceremonies to our campus.

Last May, more than 8,000 graduates crossed the stage in University Quad to receive their degrees and credentials. Our newest alumni celebrated the occasion in front of more than 64,000 family members, friends, and supporters.

The festivities came after we had to cancel the event in 2020 and then hold it in a socially distanced fashion at Fairplex last year.

I say there is no greater symbol of our work than Commencement because it represents a culmination of all the work we do. Each of us play a role in the journey leading to graduation. We talk about being one team with one goal — student success, and Commencement is the ultimate touchstone for this affirmation.

And this past May's event proves to be even more indicative of your work when one considers the commitment necessary to get to a point where we could hold the event safely in-person and on our campus.

If you remember anything from my remarks this morning, please let it be these three words – you did this!

You make the lifechanging work of Cal Poly Pomona possible.

Each of you are integral to our success. We of course succeed together, but it takes each of us doing our part to live up to our responsibilities, to continually improve, and to carry on the legacy going back to 1938.

In the wonderfully produced video that preceded my remarks, you may have recognized a few of the faces that joined our good friend Billy Bronco on his spirited run across campus to get to Fall Conference today.

In addition to just being fun, the video underlines the fact that the commitment to Cal Poly Pomona's success courses the length and width of our campus community. From the Spadra Farm in the south to Kellogg House in the north, from the Chilled Water Center Plant in the west to the Tractor Shop in the east, and everywhere in between — the mission,

vision, and values of Cal Poly Pomona infuse our work because each of you make it so.

As I had the privilege of coming into the arena today with a few of our colleagues, I felt inspired by the work you do and was reminded once again, for the thousandth time — and even more — of what makes us unique.

And thanks to you, we are now effectively positioned to move forward in a post-pandemic environment, leveraging our legacy of being an innovative, diverse and inclusive polytechnic university with the key insights we've gained over the past two and a half years.

The thread that has bound us together — our people — is stronger than ever before. Indeed, our meeting this morning is dedicated to you, with gratitude, for your perseverance. We are an exceptional university because you are exceptional.

On behalf of all those impacted by your work, I thank you.

I thank you for making a difference every day.

I thank you for raising the standard of excellence for Cal Poly Pomona.

I thank you for carrying on our unique legacy.

I hope you feel uplifted in all you do and know that your efforts are seen and appreciated.

And all I can say is thank you.

Our Strategic Progress

The highlight video that helped open our event today presented just a sliver of the tremendous accomplishments of the past year.

But while these achievements cover everything from launching a satellite into space to providing millions in student support scholarships, they share in common both the driving force of our collective efforts and expertise along with the direction of our strategic plan.

Built from the collective experience and insights of our campus community, our University Strategic Plan provides both a foundational framework and a clear path forward.

When we launched our strategic planning process in 2016, we could not have imagined the challenges we would face four years later with the COVID-19 pandemic. But the mission, vision, values, and initiatives delineated in the Strategic Plan have proven durable and resilient in providing direction to our ongoing progress.

The Strategic Plan is action-centric, with five Strategic Initiatives laying out clear outcomes, goals, and objectives. The first of these initiatives signals our commitment to deliver quality programs that promote integrative learning, discovery, and creativity.

As proof positive of this work, I'm pleased to introduce this year's faculty speaker.

Starting in 2019, we began inviting a member of our faculty to speak at Fall Conference to showcase the research, scholarly, and creative work on our campus and its impact on our students and the world beyond Cal Poly Pomona.

For this year's faculty speaker, I've asked Dr. Tara Sethia, professor emeritus in the History Department, to address Fall Conference. A member of our faculty for more than three decades, Dr. Sethia is an expert in the history of India and South Asia. In 2003, she founded the Ahimsa Center, a unique academic enterprise focused on interdisciplinary teaching and learning about nonviolence. Last year, Dr. Sethia was named the inaugural Shri Shantinath Endowed Chair in Ahimsa Studies.

Dr. Sethia . . .

Thank you Dr. Sethia.

Dr. Sethia and Dr. Kumar are here with us today. Would you please stand and be recognized?

Indeed, the work we do has transformative potential for our students and for communities far beyond our campus. And with Dr. Sethia's words, I

again feel a sense of gratitude for the opportunity to call each of you my colleague.

At Cal Poly Pomona, we pursue a holistic approach to student success, focused on preparing students to succeed in their careers and be leaders in their communities. Improving graduation rates and eliminating equity gaps — as emphasized in the CSU-wide Graduation Initiative 2025 — are central to this effort, but such metrics represent just a portion of our work.

Guided by our Strategic Plan, we have been engaged in a focused and concerted effort to better understand how we could more effectively prepare our students for the future of work and for human and civic engagement. As the nation's most diverse polytechnic university, and with our special commitment to learning by doing, Cal Poly Pomona is perfectly positioned to develop a comprehensive approach to put our students on the path to a lifetime of success.

The culmination of this work is “FuturePaths,” an innovative career and professional readiness model that embeds career and professional readiness competencies across curricular and co-curricular experiences.

We know from a wealth of research, that this effort is absolutely essential, especially in the post-pandemic world.

The most recent survey of employers conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that the top skills sought by employers aren't technical skills related to engineering, software coding or database design. Instead, the in-demand proficiencies are problem solving, analytical and quantitative skills, teamwork, written communication, and the ability to take initiative.

Future Paths engages students in career readiness before they even take their first course on our campus, integrates essential skill building in all aspects of their Cal Poly Pomona experience, and continues with them after graduation through ongoing career coaching and credentialing opportunities.

At the center of FuturePaths are “signature polytechnic experiences” or “PolyX.” These experiences combine experiential learning, multi-disciplinary perspectives and collaboration as part of formal projects that

extend beyond the classroom, resulting in unique professional readiness opportunities for students. We are actively focused on providing students with at least one PolyX during their time here.

And the impact is unmistakable: a recent survey of students uncovered that those who engaged in experiential learning, like PolyX, graduated at twice the rate of those who did not. What is more, among those who participated in experiential learning, we found no significant equity gaps between URM students and non-URM students.

The National Science Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education have provided \$8 million total in grant funding for development and implementation of FuturePaths. These funds have been and are essential to the success of FuturePaths, but those grants only allow us to implement the program with students majoring in the STEM fields.

To make FuturePaths available to all of our students, regardless of which field they pursue, we will be investing a portion of the funding provided by the historic philanthropic gift bestowed last year by MacKenzie Scott.

Colleagues representing the full breadth of the program's collaboration formally introduced FuturePaths to our university community at last April's Campus Conversation, and we will continue its rollout during the current academic year. And I want to recognize Dr. Kemi Sawyer for her leadership in unfolding FuturePaths.

FuturePaths represents a bold and exciting fusion of all the various qualities, projects, and programs that make Cal Poly Pomona remarkable. And like everything else we do, it will succeed because you — the people of Cal Poly Pomona — are making it work.

Another central component of our Strategic Plan involves fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive campus climate. We are committed to cultivating a campus built on mutual respect, where all feel welcomed and where each of us is empowered to reach our full potential. This endeavor is absolutely essential to our success as a place of higher learning.

I know many of you have heard me talk before about being a Geiger counter for talent. Just as Geiger counters measure subatomic particles

and electromagnetic radiation emanating from the nucleus of an atom, so too can we be Geiger counters for talent.

Each of us can help find and nurture the talent in each of our students. By maximizing their potential, our students make creativity, discovery, and innovation a reality of their educational experience and they get set on a course to success long after they leave our campus.

But we can't find this hidden potential without deliberate action aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion. The doors of opportunity must be thrown open and torn off the hinges. It takes deliberate action because all too frequently, talent has languished because of false barriers constructed by law or by society.

Poverty hides talent.
Racism hides talent.
Sexism hides talent.
Homophobia hides talent.
Religious bigotry hides talent.

But, as individuals and as an institution, we can intentionally create opportunities for education, discovery, and work that are available to all . . . where talent, wherever it resides, can be discovered and empowered.

In this way, we become Geiger counters for talent. We can find, inspire, and foster talent wherever it may be.

It is telling that our mission, vision, and values all specifically reference our commitment to being an “inclusive polytechnic university” with a “diverse culture,” affirming that our “diversity across multiple dimensions reflects and enhances our community.”

Our human diversity, along with our diversity of thought, experiences, and contributions are, in fact, among our greatest strengths, and our ongoing progress as a university depends on purposeful and collective dedication from each of us to building diversity, equity, and inclusion at Cal Poly Pomona, which requires fostering an environment where faculty, staff, and students do not face microaggressions.

With former interim Provost Iris Levine and Provost Brown, the team in the Division of Academic Affairs is taking leadership in this work in a variety of ways, including a purposefully designed cluster hiring program and strategically-focused recruiting and hiring practices that have resulted in the most diverse incoming faculty cohort in the history of our university.

And also working hand in hand with our efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion at Cal Poly Pomona are Vice President for Students Affairs, Christina Gonzales, and our Senior Associate Vice President Dr. Jonathan Grady. Moreover, the entire President's Cabinet is committed to fostering and maintaining a safe, diverse and inclusive campus.

This is a matter of utmost importance and urgency. As Interim Chancellor Jolene Koester noted in a message to the entire system last June, recent media reports have made clear that the CSU has fallen short in our effort to ensure that students, faculty, and staff can learn, teach, and work in an environment free of discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct.

In response, the CSU Board of Trustees launched a systemwide assessment of Title IX policies and practices. Starting with Fresno State, a legal firm with expertise in these matters will move from campus to campus to conduct methodical and comprehensive analyses. Our campus site visit is planned for this coming December.

It is important to note that this assessment is not simply an audit to make sure the campuses are in compliance with relevant law. The goal is to create both a culture of compliance AND a culture of care, respect, and the valuing of diversity.

This means we will improve policies and practices, better educate our campus community, ensure access to resources by survivors, enhance prevention and awareness campaigns, and dismantle the systemic social issues that perpetuate sexual violence.

Allow me to be very clear on this.

It is the policy and practice of Cal Poly Pomona to actively prevent, address, and stop discrimination, harassment, and retaliation, including all forms of sexual misconduct.

Likewise, we support and encourage the prompt reporting of sexual misconduct to the Office of Equity and Compliance, where all matters are diligently assessed by trained Title IX professionals.

Our Office of Equity and Compliance is supervised by Dawnita Franklin, who serves as our Title IX Coordinator, and we are fortunate to have her as part of our team!

This next point is very important to remember.

Any employee who knows or has reason to know of allegations or acts that violate sexual misconduct policies must promptly inform the Title IX Coordinator.

There are very few exceptions to this reporting requirement — mostly for physicians, counselors, and survivor advocates. But again, these are few.

For the vast majority of us, it is essential that we report any allegations or acts that come to our attention.

I ask that you take careful consideration of the required training on these matters and also take time to affirm your commitment and fully understand the role you play in protecting our campus community.

While it is a university's fundamental responsibility to protect the safety and well-being of the campus community, we still each have an individual responsibility to provide an inclusive, caring, respectful and welcoming environment in which to learn, work, and thrive. And it is not an environment that is policy-driven, mandated, or legislated. Rather, it comes from being intentional and bringing our individual and collective values of respect for human dignity and an acknowledgement that we ALL matter!

Together, we keep Cal Poly Pomona safe and welcoming.

And as we look forward to this new academic year, in so many ways, our strategic progress over the past year lays the groundwork for our work ahead.

And even as successful as our strategic planning efforts have been, we know that we must continually assess and recalibrate based on

circumstances, not the least of which involves dealing with a global pandemic.

That said, we will be working toward preparing for a refresh of our Strategic Plan in the fall semester. It is critical that we revisit the plan for Cal Poly Pomona's future, assess our progress, and identify changed and emerging priorities to guide our actions.

I will, of course, continue to update and engage with the campus as this process moves forward.

One Team Award

To introduce the finale for today's event, I direct your attention to the arena video screen:

Launched last year, the One Team Award is the newest tradition for our annual Fall Conference.

We created this honor as a way to recognize and celebrate cross-divisional collaboration that closely aligns with the core university values delineated in the Strategic Plan. The nominated teams exemplify the creativity and innovation so central to our success and provide the meaning behind our ambition: One Team. One Goal. Student Success.

This is a truly high honor and acknowledges the very best work that we do.

Last year's inaugural award went to Project CAMINOS. This intensely collaborative project helps prospective students and families with their college selection and transition.

It is now my honor to announce this year's winner.

The 2022 One Team Award goes to . . . Fearless Classroom!

Here with us are those who helped make Fearless Classroom a success. Would you please stand?

- Peter Kilduff
- Juan Cañedo
- Marybeth Murray
- Sara Langford

- Nichole Dwyer
- And Ron Heimler (who could not be with us)

Please join me in congratulating our colleagues on this honor.

The Fearless Campus project encompasses 32 academic departments in 8 colleges, the University Library, Employee and Organizational Development and Advancement, and the Center for the Advancement of Faculty Excellence. Truly, this a truly one-of-a-kind project focused on creating a psychologically safe classroom environment defined by trust, mutual respect, empathy, and compassion all in order to enhance student learning and success.

In a Fearless Classroom, students feel supported in their efforts to succeed and are comfortable in expressing their opinions and insights. Students are empowered to ask for help when they need it, and they feel a sense of belonging.

Thanks to the team's concerted efforts to scale and institutionalize the project, an amazing 9,000 students have enrolled in Fearless Classrooms since its launch in 2019. Indeed, their ambitious work means that all faculty can create Fearless Classrooms en route to building a One Team Fearless Campus.

Again, thank you for your efforts, and for your commitment to our mission, vision, and values, and for leading Cal Poly Pomona now and into the future.

Closing

In closing, I want to mention something that's probably on the minds of many. As you may have noticed, our skyline has changed.

The CLA Tower — easily our most recognizable on-campus structure — was demolished over the summer.

Its location on a seismic fault along with a host of other issues, really gave us no choice.

But its absence — the seemingly empty space as we look towards the mountains — serves as a powerful reminder... It reminds us that we have

changed dramatically over the course of our history as a university. We will continue to change. But what will never change — what has been and will remain the constant, indeed the thread binding our university — is this simple fact: the people of Cal Poly Pomona make this university remarkable.

YOU make this university remarkable!

When you peruse the new green space where the CLA Tower used to be, I hope that you will be reminded not of a pointy building, but rather of being a part of the legacy of “difference makers” at Cal Poly Pomona.

When you consider our former landmark, I hope you think not of the bricks and small windows, but rather, I hope you think of the students whose lives you each change.

I hope you think of Elijah, an African American aerospace engineering student who sent a thank you note to Jessica Wagoner, our AVP for Enrollment Management, expressing his sincere thanks and gratitude for the COVID relief grant.

He shares that when he started attending college 10 years ago, he and his family were homeless; and while no longer homeless, he still did not have the financial stability that would support his continuous enrollment in college, so he would stop out to work and acquire the funds to come back for as long as the funds allowed.

He shared that this past Spring semester was particularly challenging as he was paying out of pocket and with loans and stated he had no idea how he was going to make it to the end of the year, until he received the Covid-relief funds. So, after 10 years, he graduated this spring and has accepted a full-time position in the aerospace industry at Northrup Grumman!

I hope you think of Emma Espinoza.

Brought to the U.S. from Mexico when she was a child, Emma spent her childhood alternating between an abusive homelife with her mother and a seemingly endless series of foster homes. At the age of 18, unwilling to let her dreams die, she enrolled in community college. When she aged out of

the foster care system five years later, housing and food insecurity — for her and her son — became her new reality.

Despite unimaginable obstacles, she persevered.

Then, in 2020, after nine years of diligently pursuing her educational goals, and in the midst of a pandemic, she transferred to Cal Poly Pomona.

While here, she worked with the Renaissance Scholars program, mentoring former foster youth like herself. She also got involved with Prof. Renford Reese's prison education programs.

And on May 21 of this year, when so many times she would have been justified in giving up, Emma received her bachelor's degree in sociology.

True to her form, she aspires to be a social worker and plans to pursue a master's degree at Cal State LA.

Speaking of her educational experience, Emma said, "I always knew that education was my *safe* space where I felt acknowledged and felt safe."

And then speaking specifically of her time here at Cal Poly Pomona, Emma makes us proud, saying: "Cal Poly Pomona is a school that heals. It's just something about the faculty, the staff, the students and the aesthetics of the campus itself that heals. We have so many supportive programs . . . [e]veryone who has a challenge on this campus, there is a place for you."

And so, to each of you, thank you for making a place for Elijah and Emma on this campus, for contributing to their feeling safe and affirmed. Their talent could have been forever hidden behind their circumstances.

And thank you for continuing to be the Geiger counter that seeks out and makes a place for EVERYONE on this campus.

Thank you all for participating today, whether here in person, watching remotely, or those who may be watching after the fact. Thank you for making Cal Poly Pomona a consequential institution where lives are changed.

May you have a happy, healthy, and successful year! And regardless of your role or position, may you be inspired by your individual and collective contributions! Wishing you a wonderful fall semester.

Thank you.