

## REMARKS FOR COMMENCEMENT 2007

### President Ham Shirvani

Good morning. And what a glorious morning it is – to share this high point of success in the lives of so many: not only the students gathered here who are about to become graduates, but also their parents, husbands, wives, children and others who have supported them on their journey to this moment.

As we all look to the future, let me share just one brief thought with you about a central lesson that I hope you will take away with you from your days at California State University, Stanislaus.

One of my favorite reflections comes from American author and educator Ralph Ellison, best known for his groundbreaking work *Invisible Man*. Ellison had this to say about the nature of jazz as a musical form:

There is a cruel contradiction implicit in the art form itself. For true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment...springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest, each solo flight, or improvisation, represents (like the successive canvases of a painter) a definition of his identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity and as link in the chain of tradition. Thus, because jazz finds its very life in an endless improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazzman must lose his identity even as he finds it.

I invite you to try to live your lives as the jazz artist lives his. To take those solo flights of imagination that will lift you above the crowd. To improvise—and perhaps improve—upon tradition. And yet, as the best jazz musicians must, to also recognize that your contributions must come as a member of the collective, that some of our best music also comes from collaboration.

Be free. Continue to create. Work independently, yet with others. If you live your life as an inspired jazz musician would, I can promise you that the lessons of California State University, Stanislaus will find fulfillment in the music your life has to offer our listening world.