



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY STANISLAUS
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

**President Joseph F. Sheley's Annual Address
(Remarks As Prepared)
August 26, 2013**

Good morning everyone. Welcome. Thank you for joining me for my annual address to the campus community at California State University, Stanislaus.

A new academic year is upon us. Our students are here, ready to go. Our staff and faculty are here, too, ready to take on new challenges, to move our university forward and to create the success stories that will bring pride to us all.

We accomplished much in the past year, with a degree of relief from the economic pressures that have dogged us for so many years. We have much more to accomplish within a framework of community, respect and transparency. This is what I'd like to speak about today. First, I'd like to begin with some introductions.

Let us start the year right — would all faculty and staff members here today stand so that we may recognize you? I welcome especially new members of the faculty, staff and administration.

Next let me introduce my spouse, my partner in life, my rock, Dr. Bernadette Halbhook.

I also want to recognize a few campus leaders:

- Speaker of the Faculty, Dr. John Garcia (and other Academic Senate members in attendance);
- Associated Students Incorporated (ASI) President Mariam Salameh (and members of the ASI board in attendance); and

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- Emily Benefield, Chair of the University Student Union Board of Directors (and members of that board).

You know my administrative colleagues, of course:

- James Strong, Provost
- Russ Giambelluca, Vice President for Business and Finance
- Suzanne Espinoza, VP for Enrollment and Student Affairs
- Dennis Shimek, VP for Faculty Affairs and Human Resources
- Shirley Pok, VP for University Advancement

And our Deans:

- Reza Kamali, College of Science
- Oddmund Myhre, College of Education
- Linda Nowak, College of Business Administration
- James Tuedio, College of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
- Annie Hor, University Library
- Ashour Badal, the Stockton Center
- Chuck Gonzalez, Executive in Charge of University Extended Education
- Ron Noble, Dean of Students

We have some special guests from our larger campus community. They are here today to show their support for CSU Stanislaus.

From the California State University Board of Trustees, please welcome:

- Trustee Margaret Fortune, president and CEO of Fortune School of Education, advisor on education to two governors, known nationally for her leadership in the area of charter schools and closing the African-American achievement gap.

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Also with us today are:

- the honorable John Lazar, Mayor of the City of Turlock (an alumnus of our university);
- he is joined by Roy Wasden, Turlock City Manager;
- the honorable Garrad Marsh, Mayor of the City of Modesto;
- the honorable Luis Molina, Mayor of the City of Patterson and a CSU alum;
- Sharon Silva, CEO of the Turlock Chamber of Commerce (a Stanislaus grad);
- Cecil Russell, CEO of the Modesto Chamber;
- Dr. Sonny Da Marto, Superintendent of the Turlock Unified School District;
- George Petrulakis, of Petrulakis Law and Advocacy, APC; President of the CSU Stanislaus Foundation Board;
- Sheila Carroll, Secretary-Treasurer of Ross F. Carroll, Inc., 2007 25th Assembly District Woman of the Year, member of the CSU Stanislaus Foundation Board;
- John Jacinto, class of 96, president and CEO of VisTech Manufacturing Solutions, and chair of the CSU Stanislaus Alumni Council;
- Virginia Madueño, member of the President's Advisory Council, President of IMAGEN, LLC (and a Stanislaus communications grad);
- Dr. Kristen Santos, Stanislaus alumna in history, author, co-founder of the Turlock Historical Society, member of our Alumni Council;
- Jennifer Bethel, also an alumna of our university and owner of the very popular Bistro 234 Restaurant and Bar;
- Christine Ferraro Tallman, Stanislaus County Clerk and a social sciences grad of our university;
- Beverly Finley, former CEO of the Stanislaus Medical Center and Director of the County Health Services Agency — and a double alumna of our university (she is here today with her husband Peter, professor emeritus and former chair of our liberal studies program);
- Last, but definitely not least, I wanted to make certain you know we have many fine faculty and staff members who are alumni of this university. To represent them, I have asked Professor Steve Arounsack (Class of '99 and 2001) to join us. Steve is an assistant professor of cultural anthropology, director of the Keck Visual Anthropology Lab, and

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winner of a prestigious 2012 SONY Electronics Faculty Award for Innovative Instruction with Technology.

Thank you all for taking the time to be here today.

It's hard to believe it's been a year since I spoke to you as your then-interim president. I am grateful to you — and obviously to the Board of Trustees and the chancellor — for your support, your confidence and the chance to serve you without the “interim” qualifier. I am fortunate, for as you hear me say often, this is a great university that has accomplished much and will accomplish even more.

A year ago, we were focused on Proposition 30 — very worried, fairly certain that we were about to be hit with another round of truly devastating budget cuts. Standing here on this stage, I asked for your patience. I asked that our challenges not splinter us, and that we find our strength as a community. I emphasized pride in what we've done and in our promise. I asked that we connect with our region, from which so many of our students come and in which so many of our alumni live and work. Our region — including its business and community leaders, our alumni, the families of everyone in our campus community — is our best advocate, and we go nowhere without its support.

We awoke the day after the polls closed last November to find that we'd been given a reprieve through the passage of Prop 30. The people of California finally said, “Enough is enough!” We must not kid ourselves, of course. There's a significant difference between not having to make cuts and being flush. We are not out of trouble. Prop 30 simply calmed the waters temporarily; it will be revisited in four years.

Governor Brown put in place and the legislature affirmed a four-year plan to bring CSU funding back to 2008 levels, which represents some progress. We can begin making plans, not just for how we're going to scrape by for another year, but for what we want to look like four or five years from now and how we will get there. We're still going to be in a fight every year for

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continued funding, but I am hopeful our situation will continue to improve as an economic recovery begins to take hold.

So where to now? I'd like to speak this morning about budgeting, strategic planning, advocacy, and most of all, partnerships — between our university and the community as we combine our strengths to uplift our region, and between divisions on campus as we focus our efforts to improve the success of our students.

Let's get back to budgeting for a minute. I'm happy to report that we've been funded to increase our enrollment by 2.4 percent this year. That is very good news for regional students' access to higher education, and it will inspire confidence in our university and its mission.

Our budget for the new fiscal year will permit us to begin to address some of our more significant needs, most of which involve hiring. We are doing this systematically and strategically — neither getting ahead of the state's pace of recovery nor lagging behind it, focusing on divisional priorities, and building a modest and prudent financial reserve to weather any slippage in the state's situation.

Let me take a moment to thank the vice presidents and the members of the University Budget Advisory Committee (UBAC) for what they did for us in the past year. Each vice president has a list of honest needs that is pages long. I asked them to work within their divisions to narrow their lists to four or five priorities for 2013-14. I asked them to go into a room for however long it took, to argue and to push each other so that they emerged with a package of priority recommendations that they stood behind as a team. (If you understand universities, you know that this is practically unheard of.) And they did it!

I asked the same of UBAC: Push those VPs. Vet those priorities. Give the university community the sense that, even though the pace is slow and we're not all getting everything on our wish lists, the process is sound and trustworthy. And UBAC did it! And I am asking UBAC and the vice presidents to keep on doing it.

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The emphasis on overarching priorities begs for clarity and planning. Our university's strategic plan, which should help guide those decisions, was written in 2008, when the fiscal condition of the state and university was much different. We need a new plan.

We need to make certain our stated mission remains relevant and inclusive, and that we stay true to it. Our goals must be clear and achievable, or the plan will do nothing but gather dust. It must be practical, with a clear sense of where we are going in the near future. Our new plan will shape our direction, influence our priority-setting and provide the standard against which we measure our progress.

Our new strategic plan will be developed consultatively. I am asking Provost Strong to chair our strategic planning effort.

The tough financial times from which we are emerging showed us clearly that we need advocates. But people can't advocate for us if they don't know our story — and know it well enough that they can tell it to others. All of us at the university need to tell that story such that people understand why an education at CSU Stanislaus matters to this region and beyond.

First and foremost, we are about student success; we do not bring students here and let them down. Second, we are a part of this region, both as a point of access to higher education for students and as partners in economic and social development. Third, our primary focus is on undergraduate education, complemented by selective, high-quality postgraduate programs. Fourth, our students receive a strong, general, foundational education. Finally, we are about more than classes and degrees; our students should engage in a broader university experience that benefits them for life.

We cannot afford to wait around for others to discover what we do well. I noted last year that it was time to stop being so modest — we can talk publicly about our accomplishments and the difference our graduates make in their communities. We can state with pride that our region matters and CSU Stanislaus matters.

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By the way, did you notice the fashion statement we've started? Anyone who is anyone wears a CSU Stanislaus pin! It is a declaration of pride.

If you were able to attend commencement in May, you felt some of that pride. You watched with thousands of others as 2,500 graduates received degrees or credentials and marched out into the world to make a difference. And you felt the pride when we were joined that day by our Golden Grads from the Class of '63, who reminded us that the special bond between alum and alma mater is about tradition, legacy and lifelong affiliation.

The university let its official advocacy and advancement capacity decline during the past decade, and I am working to repair this by rebuilding the division responsible for these functions. But structure and staffing are only part of the challenge. The bigger part lies in explaining our curriculum. Nearly every day, people ask me about specific degrees in relation to the state's job market. They feel we need to produce more scientists, health professionals, business leaders, teachers ...

This is correct, of course, and we should be proud of the great job we already are doing in this regard. But the majority of our graduates do not choose these areas of study, and they nonetheless move the region forward. This room is filled with successful people, many educated on our campus. Their majors may surprise you.

Mayor Lazar, civic leader and successful realtor — he was a speech and political science major. CEO Silva, organizational communications. Professor Arounsack, anthropology faculty, biology undergrad. Mayor Molina of Patterson was a liberal studies major. Restaurateur Jennifer Bethel majored in English. Public health leader Bev Finley was an economics major. Trustee Fortune, educator, I believe you majored in political science. Dr. Halbrook, a counselor education Ph.D., was a philosophy undergrad. And, of course, our own Provost Strong — former business faculty member and dean, MBA and Ph.D. in marketing — was an English major.

These folks are notable, but they are not alone, and not by a long shot. In every business I visit, including our own campus, employers tell me about our smart, practical, adaptable graduates.

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Regardless of major, our alumni possess foundational skills — critical thinking, comprehension, communication, and not just problem solving, but problem identification. They've honed those skills within their specific major, be it professional or in the liberal arts and sciences. The major extends the foundation, but the foundation carries the day.

Help me tell that story, civic leaders and employers. Help me tell that story, alumni. Help me tell that story, faculty and staff members. Only by collectively telling our story again and again will it truly begin to take hold.

Our recent tough times also made clear that we need to be partners in regional development. We at the university can do more to extend the tremendous contribution our region's agricultural industry makes to the state's economy. We can support local businesses. Shop in Turlock, Modesto, Patterson — but shop in your red and gold so that people see the difference our patronage makes.

In turn, businesses can offer our students valuable internships — a mutual benefit, by the way. We can partner with local governments to pursue funding opportunities. We can pool our resources to help those in need, as many of our faculty, staff and students do with United Samaritans. The Wellness WORKs program in Stockton is another great example — our School of Nursing joining forces with San Joaquin County to help people on welfare get back to work. Great partnerships produce great advocacy.

I can't stress this enough. All of us in this region should be partners for student and regional success. The university, the community college, the school districts, the cities and counties, the businesses and community groups — each segment has its own strengths and limitations, but, united in common cause, we make the greater difference.

Partnerships also need to happen on campus if we are to achieve our primary goal: student success. At commencement, I asked students to stand who were the first in their family to graduate from college — I, in fact, was one such student. At least 75 percent of the graduates stood. I expected high numbers, but even I was awestruck. I wasn't alone.

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Many students — even transfers from community colleges — whose family members did not attend a college or university feel absolutely lost when they first arrive here. They have the support and encouragement of strong families, but what about sound advice and direction based on experience in higher education? Or an emotional support system on campus when obstacles are encountered? These are the students who will uplift our region when they leave here as graduates. We owe it to them to make sure that guidance is available.

On the more formal side, I am asking our faculty and student affairs colleagues to engage in an honest and productive dialogue concerning whether we are maximizing our strengths in advising our students. I know that our effort is not as even or as well integrated as it might be. I know that we have a committee looking at the matter, but I'd like to see an even greater push. I know, from watching the superior effort of so many of you in this area, what a difference this could make in our students' success.

On the less formal side, I am asking that all of us — administrators, faculty, staff — reach out to at least one student. Be there for him or her. You may not know the solution to a problem, but you probably know whom to call. We can't reach everyone, but we can reach many. What if more professors joined the Faculty Mentor Program? What if each staff member could adopt a student, just to help them out when questions arise? What if our alumni were more active in mentoring our current students? What if our employer partners maintained their connection with students even after their internships are up? ASI and USU leaders, what if each of you took a freshman under your wing, and that student pledged in turn to do the same for others later?

Nothing tricky, no special training required — just proactively be there for someone. It really could be that simple. We want to raise the graduation rate, of course, but just as important, we want our students' journey to the degree to be as rewarding as the degree itself. The campus community can make that difference.

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Let me finish with one last appeal. I have spoken about advocacy, our foundational curriculum, regional partnerships and a greater commitment to student success. I have been searching for something that very directly ties all of these together.

I found that something by listening to faculty members long for what appears to be a skill in decline — and to employers describe what, all else equal, cinches a hiring or promotion decision. It's a skill that makes the difference in almost every course taken, both in the course grade and in the actual learning. It enhances critical thinking skills. Without it, comprehension is limited. With it, comprehension and exposition increase exponentially.

I am talking about effective writing and the doors to success that it opens. Good writing is not just about mechanics — where to put punctuation and how to make subjects and verbs agree. Good writing requires and enhances the ability to think critically, to research, to formulate arguments, to persuade, and to empathize with one's audience, whether that audience is an employer, a customer, a constituent, a professor or a student. Writing is a skill that can benefit nearly anyone in nearly any circumstance, professionally and personally. And it is a lifelong practice. The comprehension and expression that it entails forms the base of the liberal arts and sciences learning experience.

My appeal here is not for more formality or complicated curricular reform. We have already committed to writing in our curriculum and increased proficiency within disciplines. We have excellent stretch courses for students who need help. We have the appropriate senate Writing Committee. We have standards that must be met. We have faculty who push their students. We have dedicated and talented people in our Writing Center. We have tremendous outreach programs like the Great Valley Writing Project.

I am asking for something more basic. A small step: commitment. Let's pledge to move students' writing up a notch. Move a student from the C to the B level as a writer. Hone the B writer into an A. Even if we only help students on the technical side of writing, their increased proficiency will naturally free them to improve their comprehension and communication as well.

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And I am not speaking only of students. Every one of us can do better — faculty, staff, administrators, employers and workers. I have asked school district superintendents like Dr. Da Marto if we might work together to bring the writing skills of college-bound students up a grade to give them a running start. I am asking potential employers of our students to make clearer the worth of writing skills in their hiring and success. I am asking our alumni to commit themselves to continually improving their writing. I am asking every unit manager on campus to champion better writing.

In short, I am asking for both the symbolic and the practical. At their recent retreat, ASI and USU students were talking with me about how little known their university is outside of our local area, and how they are beginning to feel proud as our reputation grows. Perhaps we can move that needle a little faster. What if, five years from now, CSU Stanislaus — and by extension, the region itself — were known for its commitment to writing? A place where writing is not a box to check or hoop to jump through, but an institutional signature known far and wide. Commitment to writing is commitment to a foundational education. And it will show up time and again as the edge in life's successes for our graduates. Write better. Help others write better.

In closing, the more I know this university, the prouder I am to be affiliated with it. Bernadette and I continue to appreciate the warm welcome we have received. And we will continue to do our best for you.

I hope I've made clear today my passion for student success, my sense of the need to strengthen our advocacy base, my wish to join with equally passionate and vital partners to improve both the region and the university, and my belief that in pursuit of advocates and partners, ultimately it is our focus on the foundations of the liberal arts and sciences approach that carries the day for us. We are about excellence.

We have a great story to tell — we just need to tell it, and for this, I ask your help. We have willing partners in regional development throughout our community, but we need to reach toward each other. We provide access to so many for whom college might otherwise be beyond reach, but we need to ensure that access leads to success. We need to focus our efforts

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collectively on our students' success, through direct attention to their progress and to the most basic elements of their education — chief among them, writing well.

Our financial challenges remain, and we will see them through together. We are many people, with many histories, ideas, needs and interests. But if we are unified in our goals, we will also be unified in our achievements.

Thank you for coming today. Thank you for a great year and another one to come. Thank you for your support of CSU Stanislaus.

Have a wonderful day.