



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY STANISLAUS  
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

**The Investiture of President Joseph F. Sheley  
President Sheley's Remarks (As Prepared)  
November 22, 2013**

Thank you, Chancellor. Thank you to everyone who came out today to celebrate one of the finest communities ever, California State University, Stanislaus. You've met my wife, Bernadette Halbrook. Thank you, dear, for your remarks today and, of course, for your ongoing support and patience. You truly are my life partner.

And thank you, Jim Wright and Alex Gonzalez, for your friendship and your remarks. And thanks, too, for all of the greetings from members of the platform party.

I am very grateful, Chancellor White and Trustees Linscheid, Norton and Alexanian, that you are here today. The same for my CSU president colleagues, other president and chancellor colleagues, our university cabinet members, and all those in the platform party — I am grateful to each of you.

Some very nice things have been said about me today. I'll come down to earth soon, I am sure. I recall vividly when my parents took me aside and said, "Son, never believe your own press clippings." I was 3 at the time.

Seriously, I wish my folks were here. They passed away long ago, and I miss them. Like anyone else, I have three priorities in life: my family, my integrity, and making my parents proud of me. I hope they are today.

Members of our family are here. Our daughter, Claire; my sister, Norine Casey; my sister-in-law, Mary Sapp and her husband, Paul; my nieces, Loran Sheley with her husband, Cory, and Danielle Yandow; and my cousin, Tim Blankenheim and his wife, Lynn.

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We feel blessed that our good friends from our Sacramento neighborhood are here today. And so many old friends: buddies from my old neighborhood and grammar school — Mike Mann and I have known each other since we were 3 years old; friends from high school and college; graduate school colleagues; friends from my days at Tulane University; and many friends from Bernadette's and my years at Sacramento State who, in so many ways, helped us get here. Many good friends have come a very long way to celebrate with us. I am grateful ... and I am anxious, too. They know things about me, and they had better not tell!

Finally, we are joined today by so many new friends here at the university and in the region. Good friends who have reached out to make Bernadette and me feel welcome; faculty, staff and students who want to partner to make CSU Stanislaus even better; and regional civic and business partners who want to make this region and the towns within it succeed by extending educational opportunities to all.

Finally, this great day in my life and this celebration of community were made possible by wonderful donors and a huge number of university personnel who put hearts, hours and energy into it. I am humbled by today's ceremony and will appreciate forever what everyone has done.

Investitures are about a university community — internal and external members — coming together to reinforce formally the authority and responsibility entrusted to a new president. Stated that way, the job seems suddenly so immense, so dependent upon the goodwill of membership to extend beyond narrower interests toward common good — ultimately one university, one community. If public universities are to thrive, their presidents need the engagement of the entire community every bit as much as its grant of authority.

I would like to talk today about where we might go as one university, one community. There is much to be said for having an investiture more than a year into my tenure as president. I have learned a great deal about CSU Stanislaus and about the region. And that "great deal" translates to tremendous respect and pride. This is a very special university, with bright and eager students — most the first in their families to attend college. We have a talented, committed faculty and staff members who want this university to operate at its best. This is a very special region, too, at

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once proud and modest. The Central Valley makes huge contributions to California's economy even as we battle our own persistent challenges. Most of our students are from this region, and we want them, as graduates, to stay here and move the region forward.

Like so many of our students, I was the first in my family to go to college. Just 90 miles from here, Sacramento State launched me. I want even more for our graduates, even greater opportunities in life. And more for the region, which is pinning its hopes on those graduates to expand its economic base. To link student fortunes with regional fortunes, university and region must aim not just to be on the same page, but actually to write the page together, to be one in our approach.

It takes a lot of work to unite universities and regional communities — a lot of dialogue, a lot of planning, a lot of myths to dispel. Business and civic leaders and university personnel must agree on priorities. Articulating need is the easier part; we all agree that we need more teachers and health care professionals, for example. And we all agree that internships and service learning opportunities for our students are as critical to the learning experience as they are to business needs.

Times change, and the region now is part of significant global agricultural business growth that literally propels our economy. The university needs to be part of that, too, involving interested students — future business leaders — in matters of production, logistics, food security and regulatory systems.

How to do all of this? Resources matter, of course, but so does choosing two or three priorities and simply making them happen — the product of the combined forces of community will and determination.

Against this backdrop, we recognize that, beyond priorities, what this region must develop is the educated workforce that will attract businesses here. This is not about specific professions but about universal skill sets. Let us start with a simple question: What is a college education supposed to achieve? And a simple answer: The tools to make a difference in a persistently changing world. These include the ability to:

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- think critically and constructively;
- identify and solve problems;
- act ethically;
- change, adapt and innovate, rather than simply drift passively;
- recognize the beauty and challenges inherent in a diverse, global society;
- lead when appropriate and follow when appropriate; and
- communicate well.

These features of a college education have been the hallmark of the liberal arts and sciences curriculum for generations. Every faculty member in this room is saying, “Yes! That’s what we do best.” And we do. We are good at this. We are justifiably proud. Could we do more? Could we do it better? A brief, historical walk will help answer that question.

In the years immediately after World War II, higher education began grappling with how to take what small, elite, liberal arts colleges did and put it into larger, less prestigious, public universities. Before it could solve that riddle, higher education’s attention shifted to another significant trend and a great national success: Huge federal investment in university science and social science programming and research in the 1950s and 1960s promoted and protected America’s leadership in world industry and political spheres.

Responding to this national initiative, by the end of the 1960s, American universities were emphasizing graduate programs, research productivity, grants and highly specialized expertise. Here is what we see in most universities today:

- far less attention to general education and the broadly “educated” person;
- far greater attention to the range of majors available to students than to their collective impact;
- general agreement that college graduates are not as strong as they should be in the basics, especially critical thinking, writing and communication skills;

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- undergraduate majors designed to provide the initial step toward graduate degrees — though few of our undergraduates will move beyond the bachelor's degree; and
- exceptional emphasis upon the specialized expertise of our faculty members.

In short, we are major-centric to the point that we have the public asking what job comes of graduation from a particular major, rather than what difference our graduates will make in life and in the region. In fact, we seek to have it both ways. We argue that employers will love our graduates no matter what major they choose, while we structure what we do as if the major is what counts most.

Here is my vision:

I am not going to channel John Lennon here and sing, "Imagine there's no major; I wonder if you can." I am going to ask you instead to reimagine the role of the major. Consider viewing it as an enhancement or extension of general education. Not the end, but the means.

What if we focused on general knowledge and skill sets and a smaller set of core courses within majors? What if each deliberately reinforced the other? What if we used the senior year to pull it all together? Imagine studying the significant issues of our time — water, immigration, health care, energy, food safety, international conflict, threats to the arts, even the role of sport in American society. What if our seniors explored — say, in three coordinated, culminating courses — a given contemporary issue across majors, rather than within a single one?

Is water in the Central Valley, for example, really just about politics? Or the economy? Or is it about politics, the economy, shifting global agricultural markets, geography, drought and suburban lawn culture? Can I really learn about water in California and bring to bear my critical thinking and problem solving skills via an elective class within my major? One pair of lenses only?

Specialist or generalist? Or specialist and generalist? Our society's capacity to collect, archive, and access information is growing exponentially. We can fit the world's data on the point of a

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pin and get to it by tapping our wristwatch. The future is here. Finding information is no longer the challenge. How to assess its integrity is. Ethical application is. Privacy is. Security is. Using information to make a difference is. We've come full circle. As Jim Wright noted, specialists with highly particular expertise are valuable only if they also possess more fundamental skills in working through the issues of a new age.

Where are those skills? They are the heart of the liberal arts and sciences curriculum. They exist in the incredible learning experience that comes from exposure to multiple perspectives articulated by multiple experts — just like those right here within our own great faculty.

Futurist-philosopher Marshall McLuhan once said: “As the unity of the modern world becomes increasingly a technological rather than a social affair, the techniques of the arts provide the most valuable means of insight into the real direction of our collective purposes.” He captures in a sentence my own confidence in the liberal arts and sciences.

I ask regional leaders to think about the skill sets that will move us forward. Communicate those to us. My vision for CSU Stanislaus is leadership in the education of a new generation of students not locked within the confines of specialization but free to take on any issue, civic or professional. Imagine this as our aim instead of our byproduct, the signature by which we are widely known and for which future students seek us out. We will be the institution that prepares the next generation of professionals who at once fear nothing as beyond them and respect the complexity of today's world. Our graduates will propel this region to the greatness that it seeks. Imagine CSU Stanislaus as the institution that keeps the best and the brightest at home, right here in the Central Valley.

A vision is only as good as the community's willingness to pursue it — not just the campus, but the whole region. Imagine! We are poised to pursue a signature vision. We are so close that I can see it. I can touch it. I have never been so confident about anything in my life: This vision of our one university, one community will be our legacy — if you will join me in its pursuit.

Thank you.