

Fall 2016 Convocation
Dr. Cynthia Matson's Remarks
August 18, 2016

Good morning! It feels like the beginning of the fall semester and what a significant year this is for our young university.

GAME CHANGERS

Today, we are living through a period that is truly a game changer for our great university. In various audiences, Congressman Joaquin Castro and HUD Secretary Julian Castro refer to systemic infrastructures of opportunity for underrepresented communities. Today, we demonstrate a stellar example of an investment that has matured from a start-up institution to a comprehensive university, one that illuminates a classic place of opportunity, in a historic region that was long underserved.

This university is a game changer for the state of Texas. As we mature from what primarily has been a transfer-student campus, we have truly become a university for all ages, –whether you're 17 or 70. This is a university that has planned and adopted a student-ready approach for traditional first-year students, non-traditional students and graduate students.

We've also raised awareness of our commitment as a Military-Embracing university. Over this busy summer, a small group of campus leaders led by Professor K.C. Kalmbach developed a hybrid program that helped us internalize what it means to be a Military Embracing campus. And our learning is exponential because as Dr. Kalmbach so eloquently states, many relevant approaches for military-connected students also apply to our non-traditional students. When we come together and learn as a community, we are developing a common vocabulary and a shared knowledge. This cohesive learning about various student group norms or unique experiences

work to create a broader understanding of inclusive excellence. The skill we are developing is called cultural agility and our expertise is on a continuum known as cultural proficiency. Cultural agility and proficiency shapes and informs our ability to provide equitable opportunities for all students. Yes, we are ready--ready for students of all ages and all backgrounds. Our student body reflects an inclusive representation of ethnicities, languages, all forms of individual identity, all forms of abilities and the broadest socio-economic diversity comparable to what we find within both San Antonio and Texas. And we know our students straddle many complex situations in their livelihoods—especially students who face issues of poverty. And as a system we are educating ourselves and preparing our faculty and staff to understand the impact of financial diversity. This knowledge catapults our capability to provide equitable support for all students.

We are just days away from implementing our status as a comprehensive four-year university welcoming a class of more than 500 first-year students, more than 1,000 new transfer students and nearly 200 new graduate students. These numbers indicate a 10% growth in student body compared to last fall. Tomorrow marks another game-changing moment as the inaugural class of first-year students begin what will be known as the Jaguar March from the Tower to the Fountain. Yes, I know it's August in Texas and weather is not always predictable, but in true A&M-System spirit we will march forward. This is a historical moment. Imagine our university in 50 years—our successors will have embraced and added their own generational twist to the traditions we are implementing today—and ceremonies like the Jaguar March and the transfer student “We Arise” tradition will be grander and more renowned than we can possibly imagine here today.

These proud moments are grounded in deep-rooted work and creativity. Your collective wisdom has guided us to this point. Perhaps we did not achieve 100% consensus at every juncture and maybe we veered one way when you would have preferred another, but —we did so with respect for each other, respect for an open process and respect for civil discourse. Even in our hurried journey to become a comprehensive four-year university—and during tense debates, we remained strong in our shared commitment for a full scaled student centered focus.

Today is a time to celebrate as we welcome a cohort of faculty and staff who joins an existing high caliber, motivated group of faculty and staff that have led this university to this point. Under the leadership of Academic Affairs, we have implemented a tailor-made orientation program for our new faculty and a customized program for existing faculty. The depth and commitment of intentional and deliberate faculty professional development is not the norm in higher education, even though research based evidence strongly supports faculty engagement and development are key as the key to such things as student academic success.

Under the leadership of Business Affairs and Student Affairs, we have implemented professional development programs for the staff who are supporting students, faculty and other staff. And we have implemented new learning programs to meet the growing needs of all of our talent—yes, it is a game-changing attitude when our institution values professional development, invests in it and delivers quality programs. We recognize that it's not entirely perfect, yet. With the best of intentions we pushed to design programs without the luxury of time or the benefit of extensive consultation and I ask you to recognize that this was done out of necessity and time-constraints. Under these unique circumstances, the individuals involved in content design and informational sessions did outstanding work.

I ask everyone involved in professional-development programming for faculty, staff or students to stand and be recognized. Please be seated. I sincerely thank each member of the faculty, staff and professional-development team for your efforts, persistence and willingness to learn together. I ask for feedback because it is your constructive comments that will help grow our internal professional development programs. I commit to you that we will analyze what worked and incorporate your feedback. Our faculty and staff professional development programs will evolve and we will learn together, because this cabinet is committed to your personal and professional growth.

Over the last year, our leadership began the journey to develop a national model for student and academic success. Dr. John Gardner, reminded us to “build on what exists and to enhance what we know about our student body.” Last spring, Dr. John Lin from McKinsey& Company was a member of our campus speaker series. He shared A&M System data in a talk called “Mindset for Completion” and he spent time sharing with our community thoughts about mindset and student analytics. We have used that information, along with other high-impact practices, as grounding for the programs we are now implementing.

What we are building here is all about mindsets, so let me tell you what Dr. Carol Dweck, Eaton professor of psychology at Stanford, has to say about the subject. She concludes that each of us has “a mixture of fixed and growth mindsets.” A fixed mindset is human talents that are static, whereas a growth mindset believes that individual talents or strengths continually develop through “hard work or effort, effective learning strategies and input from others.” Over the last several years, growth mindset has become operationalized into progressive organizational practices. As a university, we have developed a growth-mindset, as Dweck describes it with 3 organizational behaviors or practices:

1. We take organizational risks. Oh, do we ever! We're taking calculated risks on high-impact practices, success initiatives, internal learning programs, and creating new departments or programs. It will be up to all of us to decide which ones stay and which ones are modified.
2. We support collaboration across departmental boundaries. This is a practice that you all embraced, stacking committee work, consultation, task forces, day-long seminars, and new program development on top of an already busy and full plate of day-to-day responsibilities. You have all increased working across departmental and divisional boundaries and you did so for the betterment of our university.
3. We adjusted internal programs and cultural practices to support our organizational values. Small and large adjustments have occurred all over the university--from our existing support units in Business Affairs and Institutional Advancement we are adjusting to the changing needs of our university community and new types of internal support to each other—so that we are working in unison—we must prevent ourselves and our internal practices from creating silos.

Simply put, our university is changing, it is evolving and we are building on a well-established foundation for growth-mindset functioning and academic effectiveness with focused, targeted strategies and shared governance.

I am proud to say that our university has something no other campus has: you. You are motivational role models for each other and most importantly for our students. Because our faculty and staff work together, we are advancing further and faster, and it is the students who are the direct beneficiaries of your talents, your empathetic assurances and above all your vision

Let me turn to two of our graduates to explain what I mean: (video)

Culture of Excellence

Over the last 14 months there has been a herculean campus wide effort to prepare for a student-focused expansion and the outcomes have set the foundation for what I am calling a Culture of Excellence. Our campus community, together with our faculty senate and staff-council leadership, has shared “as-lived” experiences and common bonds that enliven our culture.

Some of you worked to ensure SACSCOC, the Texas Coordinating Board and individual departmental accreditation processes were followed. In each division we have examples of talented individuals hired to lead new departments. And nearly every staff or faculty member was engaged in the governance process for initiatives in academic affairs, student affairs, business affairs, and the newly formed division of institutional advancement. Your dedication, patience, collaboration and yes, GRIT, has inspired the broader community of A&M-System supporters here in San Antonio. Together with the entirety of the President’s Cabinet and our governance groups, we are building a reputation that symbolizes the culture of excellence that we as a university community are cultivating.

This academic year, I am focused on crystalizing our emerging strategic plan—and around our core values: student focus, excellence, opportunity, collaboration, and of course, audaciousness. These themes and values that emerged are a common result of a cross-section of campus-wide efforts that captured the spirit of the Supergroup, the Student & Academic Task Force committees, the Foundations of Excellence, the Strategic Planning Committee, the faculty senate and its subcommittees and the work of staff council and many more.

I know our culture is evolving and I am asking you to jointly embrace the common values that bind us together and transcend our university to a macro culture of excellence that is pervasive, intentional and purposeful in all that we do to ensure student academic success.

Over this academic year we will remain focused on implementing what we have started with the comprehensive expansion and the national model for student and academic success. Fortunately many of our special committees and task forces will complete their work and we can expect a manageable yet agile pace. Growing a culture of excellence takes purposeful leadership and time. The future of our university does depend on your continued leadership in the various roles and responsibilities you have on campus, at a steady pace. This fall, we will complete our strategic plan and the campus-wide master plan. Yes, we have a list of work in progress and committees that are already underway, that must be finished, such as the super committee and the foundations of excellence both of whom will conclude its work at the end of the academic year. We are now implementing to scale JagX, Jag Tracks, the University College model and we will ramp up our experiential learning curricular initiatives and the experiential transcript model across the campus. We will need to monitor this work closely and assess our progress to ensure we are meeting our expectations for student academic success. There are new technologies already underway that must be completed, such as the student-success collaborative analytics model, the e-portfolio and attendance tracking tools. Yes, we have enough underway to keep us working—at a manageable pace.

I am frequently asked, “When will we field an athletics program?” Identical to other initiatives that are underway we must develop a thoughtful plan that is appropriate for our unique university. To that end, my office will soon begin an athletics study. And the most important new initiative will be the development of the academic plan, under the leadership of our provost

Mike O'Brien, and Professor Robin Kapavik from the College of Education. Yes, we still have much work before us, please recognize that together we are building distinction in the A&M system and it starts with a culture of excellence.

We have moved at a Jaguar pace and now it's time to pause and celebrate! This morning I invite you to refill your internal reservoir with positive feelings and pride. This is a time of celebration and it is a remarkable game-changing moment. We should collectively 'breathe-in' to enjoy celebrating this moment, which we coined with our recruitment tagline of "Be First" (Video).

"Be first!" Well, let me tell you we are welcoming our first cohort of faculty primarily hired to teach our first-year classes. On July 5, we welcomed 37 new faculty members to the University for the expansion and 18 replacement positions; they have come from across the country. We have also added 37 staff for the expansion and 26 replacement positions since our last convocation, most who maintain the essential business of running the University and who will lead efforts to support students. Some of our new staff are creating inaugural departments for this next phase in our growth across each and every division.

I ask all new faculty who have joined us since July 1 to please rise. Welcome. Now I ask that all who have joined A&M-San Antonio since our last fall convocation to please stand.

If you've been with the university for more than 12 months but less than 5 years, please stand.

This is the group in which I belong. We are a group that is proud and familiar with the University. Thank you for all you've done.

If you've been with the University for more than 5 years, please stand so that we may recognize you. These are the A&M-San Antonio founders. Thank you.

I also invite Deans Hurley, Bala, and Kearney to please stand. For those who have not met Dr. Kearney, he recently assumed the position of interim dean for the College of Education and Human Development while Dr. Lopez completes his year-long ACE Fellowship at Montana State University. And I'd ask our faculty chairs to please stand and be recognized. This is the inaugural class of a cadre of chairs who now represent each college! They are game changers for our academic administration.

I'd also like to ask to ask Laura Sanchez, president of Staff Council and Dr. Corinna Ross, Faculty Senate president, to please rise. These are the leaders whom we have before us for the coming year as we settle into becoming a four-year university we will rely on our governance groups to help us assess, revise and complete what we've started. I'd like to acknowledge immediate past Faculty Senate president, Dr. Lorrie Webb, and past Staff Council president, Sylvia Medel. Please stand and be recognized. These two women persevered through a fast-paced, hectic period of our planning this last year—without their leadership we would not be where we are today. I sincerely thank Dr. Webb and her work with the faculty senate in helping us to create an effective approach for several new initiatives. I'd also like to thank Sylvia Medel. Under her leadership the role of staff council and the participation of its members has increased. We would not be where we are today without the important work of each staff member and your staff council. I'd also like to introduce Dr. Ed Westermann, of the College of Arts and Sciences, who serves as the faculty advisor to the President's cabinet. This position is a temporary role that we added for this academic year. Because we are moving so quickly—we needed a means of trying not to miss any faculty voices.

We've also welcomed new members to the President's cabinet. You earlier heard from Dr. O'Brien, our new provost, and I'd like to now introduce Dr. Arturo Alonzo, our interim CFO,

Dr. Richard Ortega, our vice president for Institutional Advancement, and Dr. Melissa Mahan our vice president for Student Affairs.

Budget

This is the leadership team that is preparing the campus community for the coming academic year. This January we will enter the 85th legislative session, and we will start the process of preserving and securing resources to continue to support our university. At this time, the legislative body has requested that we submit a 2018-19 biennial budget that is 4% less than the previous one. We know it will be a constrained legislative cycle and I am working with the system office to preserve our budget so that we do not lose momentum on important initiatives. We remain the best value for a public university in San Antonio, and we know affordability is critical to the students and the region we serve.

In July, a budget memo was issued that highlights this year's allocations, and I encourage you to visit the University Resources Commission website for further details. As you might imagine, our requests were greater than available resources. Even so, we are in a very strong financial position. We have planned for approximately \$9.3 million in new revenue, with about \$5.8 million of that designated for debt service and other fixed-cost allocations. This leaves about \$1.3 million for salary increases and another \$2.1 million for new allocations. This new revenue is in large part due to our growth while keeping our tuition costs low.

Growth & Unity

As we continue to grow as a four-year university, the university leadership has made a strategic decision to relocate the Brooks Campus onto the main campus—it offers us the benefit of uniting at one location to better serve students and it will allow for more collaboration across the

academic programs. Plus it reduces our administrative costs and rent expenditures—which were a driver in the decision making process.

This fall you will see the creation of temporary facilities south of the Central Academic Building. Relocation into the new facilities will begin late this calendar year and we will open the spring semester together at the main campus. The plan that determines where everyone will be located is under development, and I assure you that Provost O'Brien, vice president Alonzo, and I will help guide these decisions with an open process.

Last year, the Master Planning and Building Programming Committee began working on the anticipated campus Master Plan to provide a roadmap for comprehensive growth that will occur over the next 20 years. We will share this work at a Town hall meeting on September 19 to get feedback.

Just last week, launched meetings with the architectural and construction teams who will design and build the Science and Technology Building. Because of rising construction costs, the team recommended that our project be submitted to the Regents at their February 2017 meeting with a groundbreaking shortly thereafter. This requires a fast-paced approach that has the benefit of occupancy for fall 2018. Potentially we gain more square footage to meet our program needs, on what is an extremely tight budget.

I'm sure you've seen that construction has started on our first residence hall, which is a public-private partnership with American Campus Communities. Construction began on July 1, and true to the Jaguar pace, we are planning for an opening that is ready for student move-in by August 2017.

We'll be hosting a residence hall dedication ceremony on September 6, and Chancellor John Sharp will join us to mark the special occasion. I invite you all to attend as we celebrate this momentous occasion.

Conclusion

In concluding my remarks, I again point out that it is not always easy to see our achievements as they happen, because we are busy moving on to the next urgent priority, but you should *all* have the deepest pride about where we've come in such a short time. We have many unsung heroes' among us who have moved this university forward. For example, we have a full-fledged Banner system, and an independent financial-aid system. Speaking of which, we are on track to disburse more than \$8 million in aid this year.

Although we are a young university, we've awarded a total of 7,290 degrees as an independent institution, and when we add those awarded when we were part of Kingsville, we can add another 1,653 degrees, for a grand total of 8,943. And we are on track to hit 10,000 next year.

As we sit here today—it is truly a game changing moment. At last year's convocation, we were in early conversations about what this year would look like—and we could not have arrived here without you embracing your role as a university citizen and participating in shared governance. I ask you to take this moment to reflect on—these two questions: Why did I come here and what keeps me here? I'd like to share with you some thoughts from our community about this question. (Video)

As we close out this morning, I will share a final reflection. This last week I spent numerous hours with new transfer and first year students and their loved ones. We invited JagX students to share in a common read as a component of their JagX experience. The book is a simple read

with a powerful message that is relevant for us all—and I quote from the Andy Andrew book *The Butterfly Effect* “How Significant is my life? Do I make a difference? When I move, when I act, when I do something, does the universe notice? Do I Really Matter? The point of the story is—every move you make, every action you take matters. Every single thing you do matters.

The author relates the interconnectedness we have with each other and the mere existence of our encounters in life and momentous events in the world. As I’ve met students, I have gazed straight in their eyes—and in those interactions I can foresee the greatness that will come from within them—as they eagerly engage with each of you. Together we are writing the A&M-San Antonio story. Do not discount the impact that your contributions are making –every single thing you do matters today and for the unforeseeable future. We are making an impact. We are game changers.

Thank you all.