

# Dr. Cynthia Teniente-Matson's Inaugural Message

This morning is an opportunity for us to celebrate some bright spots that characterize our great, emerging university. As we recognize that change creates both momentum and sometimes challenges – this growth, this change is also a time for us to reflect.

It seems fitting to pause and begin with a modified version of the Serenity Prayer:

*Chancellor Sharp and the A&M Board of Regents:  
Grant me the Serenity to accept  
the leadership challenges that we cannot change;  
The Courage to change  
our student's lives where we can;  
and the Wisdom to know the difference.*

To our energetic and motivated students; our staff members who create a positive, dynamic and professional atmosphere every day; our dedicated and exceptional faculty; our accomplished academic, business, community, and elected officials; our loyal and proud alumni; and our foundation board members: Thank you for all that you do to make this a great university, and a special thank you to all who have planned and organized each and every inaugural event this week, culminating with today's ceremony. The week was truly spectacular. I was moved to tears several times as I participated at various events. These activities speak to the quality and creativity of the Texas A&M University-San Antonio community.

Today, I am briefly at the forefront. However, you represent the University and the many voices of the community of students, faculty, staff, and friends each and every day.

Chancellor Sharp and Regents Mendoza and Schwartz: Thank you for



*Chancellor Sharp welcomes Dr. Matson on stage for her Inaugural Message.*

selecting me to lead this institution and offering me the opportunity to serve and contribute. The trust you place in me is significant, and I offer my absolute commitment to A&M-San Antonio's success.

I am pleased that Texas Secretary of State Carlos Cascos could join us today. We are honored to have him on our campus, and we appreciate his generosity in sharing a bit of time with our students and campus community.

I'd also like to welcome my family and friends who have traveled from throughout the country to be here.

A special thanks to John Welty, President Emeritus of California State University at Fresno for 22 years. You are an incredible mentor and friend and have provided me opportunities to flourish and prepared me to grow – leading to this role at the podium today. And I'm honored to have Maria Hernandez Ferrier here on the platform.

She led A&M-San Antonio through its early beginnings and formed the foundation for our beautiful campus, including the distinct architecture of our facilities, which will have a long-lasting impact on the campus culture and exceptional learning environment for decades to come.

Maria, I am honored by your presence. You symbolize a strong commitment that I have to the stewardship and growth of this incredible campus. Thank you for joining us today.

My parents, Carlos and Gloria Teniente, are here with us today.

Their commitment to a solid work ethic, along with their many sacrifices, provided a life of opportunity for my sister and me. They shaped the person I've become that has provided me the privilege of being with you today. My sister, Rebecca, is here; and my pseudo-sister, Victoria, is here with her husband, David, who trekked from Alaska; and to Mariah, who moved to Texas with us, and the rest of our California and Texas family, welcome.

My sons Phillip and Wyatt: You are both an enormous source of pride, joy, and inspiration. Thank you for your support during this transition.

I thank and welcome Madame Chair of the



*Phillip and Wyatt Matson proudly praise their dedicated and hard-working mother at her inauguration.*

Table Mountain Rancheria Leanne Walker Grant and Bob Pennell for joining us today. Sharon Brown Welty was my dissertation chair. Without her, I wouldn't be here today! And many of my favorite and endearing friends from California State University are here, and my special lifelong friends from Alaska are here: Jan, Cyndi, Dennis, Paula, and my childhood BFF, who I met when I was 12, Debbie. Thank you all so very much for being here today.

This journey we call "life" brings together so many people and my journey would not have been complete without my husband, Mike, whose patience, love, and willingness to tackle everything I volunteer us for never goes unnoticed. Words cannot express my gratitude and appreciation to have you as my husband and partner for the past 22

years. Through our short time here, Mike has become a terrific ambassador for A&M-San Antonio.

I am humbled by this moment. I send my sincere appreciation to the A&M community and to all of my colleagues and fellow presidents from around the great State of Texas for your warm welcome and acceptance of Mike and me. Thank you especially for your unwavering pledge to the vision of our great future. I am thankful for your dedication and commitment to advancing the A&M excellence here in San Antonio.

I am hard-pressed to describe the profound and intense feelings of elation, honor, humility and privilege as I stand before you today as the second president of this great university. No person achieves excel-



lence alone, and I've been truly blessed to learn from so many gifted colleagues throughout my career. They have influenced me with their integrity, their passion for their academic discipline and enduring aspiration to spread the public good of higher education. I am fortunate to have an ecosystem of support within the higher education community and throughout the A&M System family.

Since arriving on campus in mid-January, I have spent much time listening to students, faculty, and staff and learning about all that we have to offer through our great programs and from our alumni, who are finding their way in the world, inspiring the next generation of students.

A prime example is Cresencio Davila.

Cresencio served as the first SGA president of A&M-San Antonio as an undergraduate student and was later named the first Student Regent from A&M-San Antonio by former Texas Governor Rick Perry. He is a dual graduate who also earned his MBA with us and today serves as the Client Service Director for Robert Half Management Resources. He continues to serve his community. In fact, he chaired the sub-committee for the Inauguration Week Alumni Networking Mixer. Our Communications Department continues to develop our outstanding students – many of whom have been part of our one-of-a-kind in the nation program with Univision, which shares its actual production studio as a classroom. In fact, we have two recent graduates: Nicole West, who is now attending graduate school at UC Berkeley, and Jon Salas at Boston University. They are shining stars and highly sought after, like our graduates in the teacher education program. They are recipients of “Teacher of the Year” awards, like Jennifer Vasquez, who teaches Social Studies at Rawlinson Middle School in NISD. In 2014, Jennifer won the NISD’s Educator of the Year Award and was also honored with the ExCel award, presented by KENS-TV and SACU, which named her one of the best educators in San Antonio!

These graduates represent countless others who are the power of A&M-San Antonio.

## THE POWER OF THE A&M SYSTEM IN S.A.

Inaugurations are beacons that signal a transition for universities. Throughout the week, we celebrated with diverse faces and voices that all point to our positive future. And while I sometimes say our best days are ahead of us, I want to pause for a moment and also remind us that today is also a “best day.” For today is what prepares us for tomorrow. Preparation leads to agility.

At numerous times, I've used the word “agile” to describe our ability to respond quickly, to be nimble, and to effectively respond to the needs of our students and our community. Agile is not typically a word used to describe life in a public university, but that's not the case here. We leverage the talents and resources we have to continue to elevate the A&M System of excellence and deliver results at what's often an accelerating speed.

I've also used the word “audacious” just about everywhere I go. It provokes the challenge to unleash creativity, let go of habits that unintentionally inhibit new perspectives and to pursue big ideas – not just any idea – but those that guarantee quality opportunities for our students, our colleagues, and our community. At this moment in our history, we are fortunate to

**LEFT** *Dr. Matson walks in a procession, past the University Seal, as faculty follow to the inauguration ceremony.*

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be untethered by past traditions; we seize this unique circumstance – for us to be architects of tomorrow and to create the A&M-San Antonio University of the future – a future that is intentional, deliberate and student-ready.

I have asked my campus colleagues to embrace the power of the A&M System and leverage the significant investments that have been made for this great university and this tremendous city.

Here at A&M-San Antonio, it is truly different. Let me explain a couple of these differences. First, we celebrate our great place – located here in the underserved region of San Antonio – the historic South Side. This region is reawakening and will experience a rebirth, launched largely in part by the presence of our great university alongside the World Heritage-designated San Antonio Missions. Together, we represent the crown jewels of the South Side.

Father David, whom you heard from earlier, speaks with great vigor and passion about the World Heritage designation and the future of interactive learning within the missions. And he calls this process of discovery “experiential tourism.” His spiritual connections to a higher order and the

connectedness of the region’s authenticity are cornerstones for learning, founded on centuries of experience and hands-on exchanges between theory and “doing.”

We too speak about the importance of interactive learning and the impact of applied classroom theory and moving it to real life action through experiential learning. Across the campus, our faculty is developing this process of discovery and they are embedding it into every corner of the curriculum. All new students will have at least two experiential learning encounters in every program in every college and four years in a learning community to progressively navigate the higher education expectations.

Also, we are one of the few universities that will provide an experiential learning transcript. As a part of our National Role Model for Student and Academic Success, we are creating intentional practices which document the experiential journey of our students during their academic career— to date, these types of transcripts are in development at only seven universities nationwide. A&M-San Antonio will launch the experiential transcript in fall 2016.

## THE POWER OF THE A&M SYSTEM IS HERE

I commit to steward this great place – and by virtue of our geography, our presence will continue to catapult purposeful economic development that contributes to South San Antonio and beyond. We have an enviable future in this community.

Among the many indelible characteristics of our institution – simply put – is our name, Texas A&M, one of the most widely recognized and distinguished names in the higher education sector. We are harnessing our identity as a valued member of the A&M System to build a national model for student and academic success. I have every confidence that we will become THE national model. Yes, our best days are ahead.

## BUILDING A PATHWAY TO PROSPERITY

Our campus is graced with a rich diversity of wonderful faces and voices – some that have faced significant adversity, some that have proudly served our country, some that represent the best in their academic class, and for some, first in their generations of

# WE WERE BORN TO FILL A NEED IN A VASTLY UNDERSERVED REGION

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family to earn a college degree. One of our unique assets is the fact that a majority of our students come from homes facing economic hardship or where college was not a readily accepted tradition. Here, we proudly embrace our students – and all their experiences and identities they bring with them. We were born to fill a need in a vastly underserved geographic region. One of our signature initiatives is to be accessible and affordable, and to build evidence-based practices that help all students – most notably those from vastly underserved communities, such as the first-generation college students and historically underrepresented, particularly those that self-identify as Latino or Latina.

We embrace our students to be inclusive of everyone. Our focus is to “meet students where they are in their journey” and stand alongside them as they ascend to a pathway to prosperity that’s a significant outcome of success. We know attaining a degree contributes to the economic, social, cultural and intellectual prosperity of our graduates and this lays the foundation to a more progressive community. This pathway to prosperity resonates to my heritage. You see, I too am a product of this largely underserved Southside neighborhood. “78224,” our campus ZIP code, is in my DNA.

Please know I will always be committed to this region. I’ve traveled the world and lived in various cities. I have an inherent passion for learning, and it all began right here. Here’s the difference – when I was a child here, there were no higher education options in my neighborhood, no Palo Alto, no A&M-San Antonio. Thanks to the commitment and dedicated vision of great legislative leaders like Texas State Senators Frank Madla and Carlos Uresti, we’re vibrant and strong. They too believed, when others did not, in the pathway to prosperity where a better life would begin through this great university, in this region.

I dedicate my wholehearted commitment to make this university a better place because our region needs it. The faculty and staff at A&M-San Antonio are architects of circumstance and they too have harnessed A&M excellence and have escalated their commitment to create a pathway to prosperity – our best days are ahead.

## A CONSPIRACY OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Today, October 10, 2015, we are ten months and 14 days away from welcoming our inaugural freshman class of students. And about six weeks ago, at Fall Convocation,

I challenged our community to join me in creating a conspiracy – yes that’s right – a conspiracy; but not the kind that requires wire-tapping or covert operations. This is much more difficult for it requires innovation and grit – that’s a conspiracy of high expectations. Imagine that, all of us in this room, weaving together our collective spheres of influence, conspiring to create a pathway to prosperity. Here and now, we are embracing the best-known techniques and inventing new practices, while contributing our grit with tenacity to ensure that we truly meet each fabulous student wherever they are in their emotional and intellectual readiness and guaranteeing their success.

And I have challenged our entire community to come together and challenge the norms of higher education. We must “out innovate” to achieve the student excellence we’re aiming for. We cannot imitate greatness. We have to live it through evidenced-based practices adapted for our student population. I pledge to you, on behalf of our students, to embrace this responsibility and not shy away from it. We know what we need to do to produce results for our unique student population. We are the university for everyone. Here at A&M-San Antonio, we’re creating a system with the highest expectations for learning and engagement and an attitude of excellence, irrespective of life circumstances.

# A&M-SA STUDENT SNAPSHOT

FALL 2015 ENROLLMENT

4,564  
STUDENTS

57%  
FIRST  
GENERATION

67%  
HISPANIC

64%  
FEMALE

These achievements include graduating with knowledge and skills that reduce barriers and embed the ability to be civic-minded, thoughtful citizens. We know this strategy will solidly place our alumni on the pathway to prosperity. Each university has its own academic and social culture and many micro-cultures. That's what makes education dynamic and suitable for the vast array of individual student and faculty aspirations.

However, at A&M-San Antonio, we are on the on-ramp – metaphorically – we're on the on-ramp to become a comprehensive four-year university and we know our lane. We will work together to provide the best education to all. However, our lane is a specialty. Here we embrace the underserved and the historically underrepresented. This is our lane and we will continue to be strategic in our focus to best serve and support our diverse populations of students.

We will conspire for prominence and the highest possible R.O.P. – return on people. Not R.O.I., but R.O.P. It is the “people” that matter. And those people are our faculty, staff, and leadership that have the greatest passion for our students. This critical investment will have the greatest return on people, our students, who will become alumni and prominent global citizens on their upward trajectory towards prosperity.

In closing, I'll share this final thought as to why A&M-San Antonio is ever so relevant today. Six

weeks ago, I was visiting the Science Mill with Drs. Robert Elde and Bonnie Baskin, both of whom are amazing social entrepreneurs and science scholars. Dr. Elde asked me, “Do you recall that moment?” And he describes it like this: “The moment when there was a person who gave you confidence, ignited the spark in you to pursue a discipline or career.” I ask you, this morning, do you remember? Do you remember that moment?

That defining “moment” has been simmering in my mind for the past eight weeks. Now that's more than an aha “moment.” It's a subliminal intersection that brews in our psyche.

As we navigate on our University's journey to become a comprehensive four-year university, my “moment” has me thinking back to my days as a college freshman.

I was a traditional student attending the University of Alaska – times were much simpler. I enrolled as an eager freshman with the idea to become a petroleum engineer. Well, that lasted partway through the first semester – in my first course in petroleum engineering – when I realized this course of study was a complete disconnect for me. I later found that I connected and relished the study of business management. The interesting phenomena about being a student, and in my case a traditional 17-year-old student, is the process of learning ran parallel with my process of intellectual maturity and the evolution of

**RIGHT** Dr. Matson with A&M-West Texas President Dr. Pat O'Brien



my own human development. As we live through this student phase, we cross paths with people that will influence a direction, or ignite a spark and passion – a “moment.” As an undergraduate student, I recall only three professors. There is only one I can recite the name, course number and period of time and semester when I took the course.

It just so happened that person, who vividly influenced my learning and created a “moment” that simmered for years, was my college economics professor. Economics 350 Money and Banking – summer session, with then UAF Professor Dr. Pat O’Brien and now President O’Brien at A&M-West Texas. I am so honored that he was able to join us today. More importantly, it is a reminder to me, and all of us here today, that it sometimes takes decades for us to realize the impact, influence and spark that we have on others. Now, like most alumnus, I’ve led a busy life and never took the opportunity to reach out or the time to reflect on that “moment” and say “thank you.”

There have been many “moments” along the way. These “moments” take on various forms of what I now refer to as “hallway mentoring,” alongside traditional classroom learning or the conversations that take place during faculty office hours. Most times we cannot foresee the greatness we are unleashing in others, just by offering encouraging words at the right moment, at the right place. As educators and higher education

professionals, we imagine the best for all of our students, and we wait because we know we are nurturing something greater – their talents as these students build their life tools on their way to becoming strategic and thoughtful thinkers and contributors to a better community, a better region, and a better world.

Universities like A&M-San Antonio thrive on the energy of great people who commit to creating the foundation that will move our graduates onto the pathway to prosperity.

Today and now, what we’re doing at A&M-San Antonio includes all forms of pedagogy in multiple formats, digitally and traditionally. Alongside undergraduate research and experiential learning, these proven practices weren’t as readily available when I was a student. But here and now at A&M-San Antonio, our presence alone ignites aspirations.

I’m frequently told by parents, spouses and partners of our current and prospective students, “We are so happy that A&M-San Antonio is an option.” And we celebrate our faculty who have generated countless “moments” for thousands of students. In fact, since 2009, some 5,634 students have received degrees from our emerging university. And that number will begin to grow exponentially in ten months and 14 days. Our faculty, staff, and leadership will focus on creating a powerful A&M-San Antonio “moment” with a new community of student learners.

# WE WILL CONSPIRE FOR PROMINENCE AND THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE R.O.P. RETURN ON PEOPLE

We know here in San Antonio, talent is universal, opportunity is not.

Together with the campus community, I encourage each of us to embrace our good fortune and the presence of this prestigious campus and all its aesthetic beauty. We will soon offer even more options for long overdue opportunities for our region, our state and the A&M System family.

I invite you all to join me in creating moments. Join me as an architect of change, building this ambitious and prestigious university. We have plans for new disciplines and programs, like a School of Engineering, and partnerships with other educational institutions. And new co-curricular activities for students like housing, honors programs, and yes, a competitive athletics program. Join the momentum for audacious thinking as we build the pathway to prosperity for future generations of A&M-San Antonio students and their families. For our best days are ahead.