

# President's Convocation Address

August 17, 2023

Good morning and thank you for being here. I'm so glad to see all of you today as we begin the 23-24 academic year. This will be my 28<sup>th</sup> year in higher education now, and to this day, I still get the same butterflies, nervous energy, and excitement that accompany the start of a new academic year. I hope that everyone here is equally as excited, which to me, stems from the honor and privilege of serving our students – and the opportunity to be an integral part of their academic, professional, and psychosocial development while continually striving to serve them at an exceptionally high level.

I want to offer a warm welcome to the faculty, staff, and administrators who have joined our campus since Fall 22. I'd also like to welcome our special guests in the audience – please hold your applause until everyone is recognized: President Emeritus Dick Rush; Moorpark College President Julius Sokenu (SO-kahnu) and Oxnard College President Oscar Cobian; members of our Foundation Board; our Alumni and Friends Board; our Site Authority Board; our University Auxiliary Services Board; our President's Scholars; and members of our newly formed Retiree Association. It's amazing to see this level of campus and community engagement here today.

I welcome and thank the faculty, staff, and administrators who are *returning* today, for continuing to choose CI and investing your energies, intellects, time, and care – for our students, for our region and beyond in the families, communities, and workplaces of our graduates, but ultimately for our society and its future. There are no small stakes here. Our work is vital – and our need to excel in it, individually and collectively, is great.

## 2022-23 Highlights

Before turning our attention to the coming year, I want to start out by recognizing one of the central responsibilities that I hold as President – which is awarding tenure and promotion to our tenure-track faculty.

Thank you to our program personnel committees, program chairs, deans, the University Retention, Tenure, and Promotion Committee, and the Provost, for your work on the rewarding but incredibly weighty and time-intensive process of evaluating RTP files and making your recommendations to inform my decisions. I also want to thank the Faculty Affairs Success & Equity team responsible for overseeing and organizing all of this work. The responsibility of participating in the RTP evaluation process is always challenging and sometimes incredibly difficult – as it should be. Congratulations to those who earned tenure and promotion to Associate Professor this year.

With your years of Assistant Professorship now behind you, I look forward to seeing what each of you will accomplish with our formal, long-term commitment now backing you and your academic career at CI. Join me in recognizing the accomplishments of Drs. Reza Abdoolee, Theresa Avila, Lydia Dixon, Talya Drescher, Gareth Harris, Jaime (HY-MEH)

Matera, Daniel Reineman, Jacqueline Reynoso, Cynthia Sherman, Rachel Soper, Vida (VEEDA) (VUH-KIL-EE-IN) Vakilian, Kimberly Vose (VOZE), and Taylan (TAYLIN) (YAL-CHIN) Yalcin.

And now, my congratulations to those who earned promotion to Full Professor this year. You've achieved the pinnacle of tenure track progression and have spent more than a decade since your first year as an assistant professor, working continuously toward this promotion. Please join me in congratulating Drs. LaSonya Davis, Jamie Hannans, Jacob Jenkins, Ekin Pehlivan, and Brian Thoms. Well done on this remarkable achievement.

I want to also recognize my elected partners and campus leaders in shared governance:

- Academic Senate Chair Dr. Jason Miller, Second Officer and Vice Chair Dr. Eric Kaltman, and Third Officer Dr. Marie Francois
- Staff Council Chair Honey Krueger, Vice Chair Sean Kramer, Treasurer Colleen Haws, Secretary Shannon Fitzpatrick, and Custodian of Records Rebecca Slocum
- ASI Student Government leaders, President Daisy Navarrete, and Vice President Jazmin Guajardo (GWAH-HAR-DOE).

I will need your advice, your collegiality and criticality, your steadiness, and your support as we navigate challenges and opportunities ahead of us this year. Thank you in advance for stepping up for our campus to lead it with me.

## **2023-24 and Beyond**

As you know, we're in a tight spot as we enter our 21<sup>st</sup> year as a university, perhaps the toughest we've ever faced. Most of you know the numbers – that we are down roughly 27% in enrollment compared to our peak back in Fall 2019, and the Chancellor's Office is adjusting our funded target by a 5% reduction in our state appropriation in 2024, 25, and 26.

CI's Enrollment Report to the Chancellor's Office in February 2023 provided the breadth and depth of information associated with those challenges, and in the final section entitled [Our Way Forward](#), strategies for addressing them were described in great detail – all of which are already well underway and continuing into this year. These strategies took time to develop and implement, and it will take time to realize their impact in the form of enrollment growth.

As such, we're addressing enrollment recovery through a multi-year lens. We anticipate hitting our budgeted enrollment projections this fall, which is a very good first sign. Our projections indicate enrollment stabilization in 24-25, and an upward trajectory beginning in the 25-26 academic year. While there are many external factors that have contributed to our enrollment challenges, our internal data, which I've shared with the campus community throughout the last academic year, suggests that there is much within our control that will improve our situation. That's why I am confident in our work – because we've identified the crucial data points – both quantitatively and qualitatively – to inform our plan moving

forward. I've been very much in the weeds on these efforts, and I've seen our enrollment management team and the entire campus community step up and engage in the work that is necessary to move us forward.

So we have solid enrollment management strategies in place and underway, but a set of strategies is not a strategic plan. However, as I said here one year ago, this doesn't mean that we haven't been planning strategically from the very beginning of my administration. We've been doing exactly that, in a number of areas vital to the long-term health and success of our University. An early synthesis of these efforts this past spring ultimately led to a three-year "bridge plan" which describes and develops four strategic directions for our campus.

### **Strategic Directions Framework 2023-26: A Three-Year Bridge Plan**

I am pleased to share with you today a complete draft of our [Strategic Direction Framework](#).

As [shared with the campus throughout last Spring](#), Cabinet members and I created the bones of this Framework by first conducting an comprehensive inventory of the various initiatives and programs underway across divisions. We found that there was a great deal of essential and extraordinary work being done, but often in pockets, and we lacked a cohesive and centrally organized conceptual framework to unify our work and maximize resources.

We discussed this draft Framework with the campus community throughout the spring through presentations to the Academic Senate, Staff Council, Student Government, and campus administrators; through our Strategic Resource Planning Committee; through interactive WASC Accreditation Gallery Tours that engaged students, staff, faculty, and administrators; and through our Critical Learning Collectives whose recommendations for improving campus climate were presented to Cabinet members and me in a series of late-Spring meetings.

In all of these conversations, what came through consistently was that we needed to avoid initiative fatigue. Instead, we focused on continuing and enhancing work already underway that was moving the needle on student success and closing equity gaps. We also focused on programmatic outcomes that could be achievable or significantly progressed by the end of the 25-26 academic year.

Through our methodology, four main topics emerged: 1) leveraging an evolving, distinctive campus and academic identity to effectively serve the people, communities and workforce needs of the region; 2) strengthening the holistic student experience to enhance their sense of belonging and affinity to CI; 3) reinforcing and enacting the values of diversity, equity, inclusivity, and accessibility, and creating a vibrant and engaging campus culture where all students and employees thrive; and 4) advancing campus growth, managing and enhancing campus resources effectively and sustainably to fulfill our mission of being a transformational force.

This framework will serve as a bridge connecting: 1) our 2018 Strategic Initiatives that expired at the end of last semester, 2) our WASC accreditation visit in April of next year, and 3) the creation of our next five-year strategic plan that will address findings from that visit. Through this bridge plan, we'll be able to make significant progress on immediately impactful strategies. Further, it will inform resource allocation decisions for the coming years and set us up to utilize accreditation feedback in our next plan.

All that being said, as I reflected on CI's future over the summer, I found myself wanting more – especially in terms of our academic and institutional identity. To me, this is the most important aspect of our long-term strategic success – especially at this particular time in our organizational development and continued evolution. This feeling was exacerbated when I thought about my many discussions with faculty, staff and students during the Charting Our Course and Academic Master Planning processes, our ADV brand foundations work and research which began back in Fall 21, and our efforts to improve our Admissions and Recruitment initiatives and community brand awareness.

One of the dominant themes that emerged during these conversations was that our students, primarily first generation, from historically underrepresented and underserved groups, and from families with the greatest financial need, are the heart and soul of our institutional identity - and rightfully so. This is evidenced by the fact that CI was one of only nine Hispanic Serving Institutions in the nation to be awarded Excelencia in Education's inaugural Seal of Excelencia back in 2019, and we were only one of nine to be reaffirmed with that honor in 22.

Relatedly, and hot off the press, CI's Initiative for Mapping Academic Success program, or CIMAS, was just nationally recognized by Excelencia as a "Program to Watch" for 2023. This program is a perfect illustration of our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary theme, "Honoring our Past, Building our Future." It originally started as a collaboration between our Sociology faculty and academic advisors for Sociology students who were struggling in 2017, was paused during the pandemic, and was relaunched university wide in 2022 to address the issues of learning-loss, decreased engagement, and reduced sense of belonging caused by the pandemic. We saw significantly higher rates of retention for participating students – which totaled over 500 during the 22-23 year. Thanks to my colleagues in our Sociology and Academic Advising for creating this impactful intervention, and to our SIGUE unit, our current leaders of this effort.

While the students we serve and our student centeredness will *always* be the foundation of our mission and work, our institutional and academic identity cannot be solely defined by *who* we serve. It must also be defined by *what* we are offering and serving our students. This points to another dominant theme that emerged through those identity conversations, which is that we need to develop greater clarity and messaging as to the distinctive features of a Channel Islands education. Perhaps most importantly, our curricular and co-curricular work needs to be more explicitly tied to addressing the most pressing needs of our region.

With this overarching context in mind, I can see the incredible opportunities ahead to better serve our students, communities, and employers – and the need for a unified, long-term approach as we move in this region towards 2030 and beyond. All of this speaks particularly to our first new Strategic Direction, which is about our academic and campus identity. In what follows, I want to describe my vision for our next decade. I hope it will provide rich food for thought about how we can more substantially lay claim to the truly unique University that we are, and set us up for doing the work of developing that identity, messaging it, and marketing it as a unified and long-term vision. I look forward to talking with you throughout this year about the ideas that follow, critiquing and improving them as we go.

### **One Health for 2030+**

Our approach to achieving CI's historic vision and mission for this decade of our existence will logically be different from what saw us through our first 20 years when “build it, and they will come” was enough, and when a strategic enrollment management and marketing plan was not required for us to grow. Though I'm not fixed on a name or title for this approach, I keep coming back to the fact that for me, everything we do is grounded in our unique sense of place and in our promotion and facilitation of environmental and community wellness. In discussing this idea with a number of colleagues, the notion of “One Health for 2030 and Beyond” emerged.

According to Dr. Jenn Perry, Executive Director of Regional Educational Partnerships, “One Health” is a Western way of talking about an Indigenous worldview. This worldview, as I understand it, decolonizes our conceptualization of health and wellness, and expands it to include the fullness of our lives – from personal health to the wellness of our relationships with families, our communities, and our environment.

Through this concept of One Health, I believe we can be guided to answering the question of what it is that makes us distinctive from other CSU's.

Many of us may believe this question is answered through our University's founding approach to defining who we are and what we provide. And it is, partially. We know the ongoing importance of what we do through our roots in the liberal arts, ensuring that students can think critically about the world around them and providing the type of education needed for freedom to hold. Given the degree of social, political, and environmental upheavals of our time, the quality and strength of these roots have never been more important. But our roots in the liberal arts do not make us distinctive, no matter how essential they've been and will continue to be for us. Other CSUs and many institutions are committed to these principles as well.

We also know the importance of what we do and the role we play in encouraging and supporting career aspirations and contributing to the social mobility of our students and their families. While we can do better at communicating it to our students, we know that at CI, students are not just going to class; they are preparing for their careers, developing

content-specific and specialized expertise, working towards long-term security and meaningful livelihoods for themselves and their families through high-impact practices like experiential learning, internships, and undergraduate research opportunities – but again, students have these opportunities at other CSUs, too. High-impact practices are neither unique to our campus nor uniformly accessible to all of our students.

So, how *is* CI distinct from other CSUs and every other university option that prospective students of every age have available to them?

I am certain that what distinguishes us is our incredibly unique sense of place – and fully embracing our location in one of the most resource and culturally rich environments in the nation. This reality provides distinctive place-based learning opportunities and experiences for our students that we have not leveraged anywhere near to the fullest extent possible – either through curricular and co-curricular programming or through our marketing and recruitment efforts.

In sum, I see One Health as an aspirational and strategic approach to CI's third decade of being. It amplifies and builds on our truly unique sense of place as a Central Coast university that is committed to the environmental and community wellness of our region. It combines our strengths in providing both liberal arts education and experiential, career preparation while focusing both in very intentional ways on distinctive aspects of our region.

These include: (1) our location in the heart of the nation's 11<sup>th</sup> largest county in crop value; (2) our interdisciplinary engagement in coastal health and ocean affairs; (3) our proximity to one of the biggest independent biotech firms in the world and at the heart of the nation's entertainment industry; (4) our status as one of only 11 universities in the country with a research station on National Park Service land, with opportunities for extensive, interdisciplinary engagement by faculty and staff with the Santa Rosa Island Research Station and the Channel Islands Marine Sanctuary; (5) our serving as the future home for the Santa Barbara Zoo Conservation Center, which will be the first zoo-owned and managed facility accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums on a university campus; (6) and our identity as the ancestral land of the Barbareño Ventureño Band of Chumash Indians and home to sat'wiwa, a Chumash mountain shrine on the CI campus; and (7) our sometimes struggling but always continuing and evolving commitments to interdisciplinarity, multicultural and international perspectives, community engagement and service learning – with each of these pillars given meanings and opportunities unique to our region, in the diverse and closely-woven communities of Ventura and Santa Barbara.. If I omitted from this extraordinary listing any other place-based treasures we enjoy, please let me know.

Think about all of this in the context of the question about what distinguishes us from other CSU's. At CI, students don't just have experiential learning opportunities. Regardless of a student's major, they can have powerful placed-based learning experiences on the Oxnard Plain; on the beach; at our Santa Rosa Island Research Station; at our Boating Center; on sacred Chumash land; and throughout a region that is teeming with activity of so many different kinds – agricultural, biotechnical, for-profit, nonprofit, educational, environmental,

social services, health-related, and more – given the unique combination of rural, suburban, and urban areas that are ours to serve.

Through this One Health lens, embracing the uniqueness of our region, we will no longer have the very dubious distinction of being the “hidden gem” of the CSU. It’s such an obvious leap forward, because environmental and community wellness is already firmly embedded in virtually everything we do with our academic programs – from ESRM’s focus on coastal sustainability, to preparing teachers and other leaders for early childhood through high school education, to providing communities with nurses and other health care workers, to our role in providing essential employees and industry leaders in the biotech and biopharmaceutical industries, computer programming and mechatronics engineering, and of course, to healing our community through the arts, performing arts, ethnic studies, and more – as well as with our broad array of high-quality co-curricular programs and student services.

I want to ask every member of the campus community – student, staff, faculty, and administrator – to be able to articulate their connection to this approach. How does your work contribute to environmental and community wellness of our region?

Later this afternoon at the Welcome Back session for Academic Affairs, Provost Avila will be taking a deeper dive into what this approach can mean on the academic side of our house. He’ll be detailing four areas of emphasis for focused development in the coming decade toward a One Health kind of approach to delivering our University vision and mission: (1) Embracing place and leading with strengths – blending a focus on place-based experiential learning and career readiness with a foundation in the liberal arts; (2) Providing our students with state-of-the-art digital learning experiences; (3) Affirming a long-term commitment to nurturing and elevating the P-20 educational ecosystem in our region; and (4) Advancing academic excellence by supporting faculty as scholars and teachers – providing professional development in active learning, interdisciplinary- and DEIA-focused classroom and field experiences, community engagement, undergraduate research, and other high-impact practices that place students at the center of the educational experience.

We’ll be sending invitations for conversation and feedback opportunities in the form of divisional meetings, Qualtrics surveys, Gallery Tours, and Town Halls to be announced soon. I’ll welcome your critical thinking and partnership in reviewing, critiquing, finalizing, and enacting this approach to realizing our campus vision and mission.

In the identity work we’ve done, we are positioning CI as the transformative destination institution for higher learning that we are and can ever deeper be.

### **Operational Effectiveness**

I’d also like to give you a preview today of an initiative that has not yet begun but that builds on work already underway through our organizational effectiveness efforts.

Healthy enrollment is intimately tied to student success, and each student's success requires that they *know* and *feel* that they are seen, valued, and capable of achieving their goals. This makes each one of us essential partners in supporting student retention efforts and growing enrollment capacity through our everyday work. Much of this can be done in the simplest and most human of ways -- by being approachable and welcoming, by ensuring that no student has the isolating experience of spending weeks on end without ever hearing the sound of their own name, by being both proactive and responsive as communicators, and by helping students when we become aware of problems they are navigating in campus systems that can be foreign, confusing, and frustrating to them.

In the context of talking about enrollment and retention, it's impossible for me to over-emphasize the importance of our excelling in each of our individual ways to be *attentive* to our students and to be *accountable* for our responsibilities. I'll share an experience from this summer to illustrate responsibilities for which each one of us is accountable, myself first and foremost.

I spoke in June with one of our campus's most ardent and generous supporters, who is also the grandfather of one of our students. He was extremely complimentary of CI at what he called the "macro level" – for the programs and services we offer, for our expansion plans through the new Academic Master Plan, our capital construction projects, new community partnerships, and for the unprecedented levels of philanthropic support. But I won't soon forget him exhorting me with a line that, frankly, landed pretty hard. He said, "*Don't forget the micro,*" describing CI and his granddaughter's experience here as wonderful at the macro level, but as an ongoing struggle with what he called "micro experiences." These included things like inconsistent and highly varied levels of responsiveness in communication from faculty and staff, and being required to follow confusing, multi-step approval processes, often requiring signatures from a number of people who weren't always readily available or who were unresponsive. This supporter described his granddaughter's experience as one of routinely having to navigate "sand in the gears," very often with his help. He wondered aloud how our first-generation students are faring in their efforts to navigate our systems, asking me, "I wonder if they just give up?" I don't think I'm alone here in thinking that's a good question.

This anecdote might seem to contradict my earlier remarks describing CI as the unique and special place to be that it is. You may wonder how I can take pride in the student-centered work of so very many of our faculty, staff, and administrative colleagues *and* take to heart this individual's account of his granddaughter's experience – but I see no contradiction.

I'm thoroughly confident in the vast majority of our employees' fidelity to our mission of putting students at the center of the educational experience, at the same time that I recognize that helping students directly, effectively, and efficiently with their problems requires us to make significant cross-divisional improvements in operational effectiveness to facilitate accountability for our individual responsibilities. Our inefficiencies – which certainly do exist – are due to no one's mal-intent. CI's 20-year-old story is one of "inventing the plane while flying it," and while a very fine plane was created, some of its systems require updating –

with new people, perspectives, strategies, technologies, and the benefit of 21 years of hindsight now available for that work. We stand on the shoulders of those who came before in doing it, with many of those same shoulders still here, thankfully, and still lifting.

Paying attention to the sands in our gears will be a major emphasis for me this year, and I will need your help – not only to improve our students’ experiences in navigating our campus systems and their academic programs, but to also ensure that our approach to operational pain points begins with studying and understanding their root causes by examining them through multiple lenses.

I understand that as many of 40 of our staff have become qualified in a process improvement program called Lean Six Sigma, offered through our Organizational Effectiveness department. If any of you are here today, please know that I see you as a strong asset already in place for an initiative that I’m calling my Operational Effectiveness Challenge.

The Challenge, most simply put, is for us to get back to the basics – just as every athlete and artist must do to excel in their sport or medium. *Our* basics will be in identifying, studying, and understanding our systems and structures that contribute to operational pain points. Only then can we recommend solutions for relieving inefficiencies and other problems that contribute to feelings of frustration and overwhelm. Each of these can adversely affect our individual and collective capacity to do the hard work that matters most, of attracting, enrolling, retaining, and graduating students.

We’ll be launching The Challenge in September, with thanks to Brian Lindgren, Organizational Effectiveness Specialist, Dr. Tiina Itkonen, Professor of Education and Political Science, and Dr. Kaia Tollefson, Chief of Staff, for leading this effort. Please start thinking now about what real life situation in your unit you might be interested in studying and helping to address. We’ll be sending out the call for proposals very soon.

### **Academic Master Plan**

Due to the good work of faculty and the leadership team in Academic Affairs, with a special shout-out to Dr. Lina Neto, AVP for Academic Programs and Continuous Improvement, we begin this year with a new Academic Master Plan, approved by the CSU Board of Trustees in Spring 23. With \$10M of the Mackenzie Scott gift earmarked for program development and enhancing our distinctive features, we can begin immediately on the work of bringing our newly approved academic programs into being over the course of the coming years.

Partly as an unintended consequence of “building the plane while flying it,” our campus has never had the benefit of a realistic or rigorous model for assessing program opportunities *and costs* when making decisions about which to prioritize.

With thanks to Provost Avila and AVP Kirk England, our Chief Academic Budget Officer, we are beginning our 21<sup>st</sup> year with a cost model for new academic programs in hand. In the implementation of our Academic Master Plan, this represents Phase II, which outlines the methodology by which new programs will be prioritized and existing programs will be identified for growth. While cost is relevant for the immediate future and always a significant factor in this kind of prioritizing and decision-making process, it is by no means the only lens incorporated in this methodology. Other factors include projections for enrollment growth, faculty and staff capacity, the degree of alignment with regional needs, and alignment with the organizing concepts of our One Health lens.

Going forward, Academic Affairs will utilize this cost model to evaluate all of our academic programs. As President, I will be asking all other divisions to go through a similar exercise in evaluating their program costs relative to realized contributions. All of this will allow us to create the long-term budget planning model needed for seeing us through the next few years and then beyond, when we are on the other side of this watershed moment in our institutional history and enrollment is again rising. Keep in mind, it is the cumulative picture in data that we need so that we can pursue new program development strategically and maximize growth as early as possible.

### **Accreditation**

Another vitally important category that I ask you to learn about and be engaged with this academic year is our WSCUC accreditation reaffirmation process, which is well underway.

### **Thematic Pathway for Review**

You'll be hearing frequently throughout this semester and in early Spring from Vice Provost Lavariega Monforti and other members of the [Reaffirmation Steering Committee](#), the faculty, staff, students, and administrators who have been preparing since at least September of 22 for our WSCUC accreditation visit scheduled for April 2024. They need our help now; and again, the stakes are high. The results of our accreditation visit will communicate to us and to our students, region, and world the level of confidence that our accrediting body has in the overall quality of our academic programs and our institutional effectiveness. If that confidence is low, what would be at risk are things like our ability to offer federal financial aid to our students, to compete for federal grants, and to communicate to current and prospective students the value of a CI degree.

What you can do now to ensure that our WSCUC visit in April is a success includes the following

- Participate:
  - in brown bag sessions in September that will provide opportunities to learn and discuss CI's definition of student success

- in Gallery Tours in October to familiarize yourself with the contents of the Institutional Report drafted by the WSCUC Reaffirmation Steering Committee and its working teams; and
- also participate in campus accreditation kickoff events.
- Be able to explain, should a visiting WSCUC team member or anyone else ask:
  - that TPR stands for Thematic Pathway for Reaffirmation, a WSCUC review option that we were offered that allowed us to identify three themes for our own self-study, instead of having this review focus on everything about our University;
  - that our three TPR themes, identified and developed with the campus community in Fall 22, are:
    1. Academic Quality and Student-Centered Infrastructure,
    2. Student Services, Support, and Development, and
    3. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility;
  - and that our overarching approach to accreditation, which we titled “Brechas por Cerrar/Escaleras por Construir,” [bray’-chas por say-rar’ / es-ca-lay-ras por cone-stru-ear] or “Closing Gaps, Building Ladders” isn’t simply about being re-accredited, but about [building a culture of assessment](#) and continuous improvement.

Relatedly, and as I mentioned earlier, the 2018 Strategic Initiatives expired at the end of the Spring 23 semester. Dean Sue Andrzejewski and her WSCUC working group have utilized [divisional reports](#) summarizing work across campus to synthesize the final status of these efforts over the past five years. You’ll be able to review this wrap-up of our 2018 Strategic Initiatives and our draft Institutional Report that the Reaffirmation Steering Committee will make available later this Fall. Thank you for your leadership, Vice Provost, and to all of the staff, faculty, students, and administrators who are doing the heavy lifting here on behalf of our campus.

## Closure and First Things

My gratitude for each of you here today requires my corresponding respect in acknowledging the difficulties of the year ahead for our campus. I want to establish a view of the coming year that acknowledges our challenges but holds them gently, with a fundamental sense of care for each other and a decision to value *how* we engage challenges equally as much as we focus on *what* those difficulties are. I have set that expectation for myself and my leadership team, and if it resonates, I invite you to set it for yourself as well.

In this spirit, I close this address but begin the new year with recognition and appreciation for the Chumash and their ancestral lands which are now nourishing this University and its people. It’s important to me, and I believe for all of us here, to actively work at being good partners with Native American and Indigenous communities in our region. Our accomplishments to date include the establishment of a [Chumash Advisory Council](#) which embodies the coming together of two governing entities – local Chumash leadership and

CSU Channel Islands, the creation of a Cultural Resources Management Team, the securing of federal funding to be used toward developing a Native American and Indigenous Studies curriculum, and the formation of affinity groups for students, staff, and faculty.

My thoughts return often, in this context of trying to do better, to something that the Chair of the Barbareño Ventureño Band of Mission Indians, Matthew Vestuto, shared with members of the Chumash Advisory Council Steering Committee. This group met throughout last year, leading up to the first full-Council meeting this summer, in June, with thanks to that body's Co-Chairs, Drs. Raudel Bañuelos and Jenn Perry, and to its [Chumash and CSUCI members](#).

Chair Vestuto shared that in earlier times when the Chumash People would gather – perhaps very near to where we are gathered here today – a leader would hold a staff that signified great meaning. It moves me deeply to imagine all of us standing beside that Chumash leader, sharing in the knowledge that where the staff is touching the earth, is the point of feeling for xutaš (hoo-tash), or mother earth; and sharing in the understanding that, for that moment, it signifies the center of our "world." Here we are, on this very same land. It's inspiring to consider us joined together, at this point of feeling for xutaš. I'm further inspired by the idea that for the Chumash, this place of feeling has a correlative in our poš (posh), that is, in our individual hearts and minds.

I share this powerful story with Chair Vestuto's permission. Thank you, Matthew. I believe most of us need to feel connected, and that we want good things for each other as well as for ourselves. If you believe that, too, I ask you to hold precious in your mind the staff of xutaš and our individual attachment of hearts and minds to it, connecting us to one another, to this land, and to all the worlds.

We have some serious challenges ahead, but this is the CI we can be.

Thank you.

*[Transition to President's Awards]*

Together we've got this. In fact, it's my pleasure to now introduce some of the reasons we've "got this" – the recipients for the 2023 Student Innovation Award, the Faculty Teaching and Innovation Award, the Staff Excellence Award, and words from our President's Faculty Fellows.

### **President's Award for Student Innovation**

Our first award is the President's Award for Student Innovation. This award recognizes a student who has developed a uniquely innovative contribution to student success and engagement at CSUCI or in our broader community. This year's awardee is Trent Ruiz. Trent has led the establishment of the groundbreaking Augmented Reality and Simulation Lab at CI, supported by a prestigious grant from NASA; yes, that NASA.

The ARSL is a cutting-edge Hololens 2 Augmented Reality Lab, equipped with 14 headsets dedicated to simulating corrosion damage in aerospace metals. By embracing this technology-driven innovation, Trent is actively showcasing the value of integrative approaches, a foundational aspect of our campus' mission statement, by providing CI students with opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary research. Well done, Trent.

It is my honor to welcome this year's President's Award for Student Innovation recipient, Trent Ruiz.

(TRENT SPEAKS)

### **President's Teaching and Innovation Award**

Thank you, Trent. Phenomenal work. Next, we will be hearing from this year's recipient of the President's Teaching and Innovation Award, Dr. Tadashi Dozono, Assistant Professor of Education. This award recognizes a faculty member who makes a significant contribution to the teaching mission of the university. In fulfillment of that criterion, Dr. Dozono, in partnership with Teaching and Learning Innovations and Student Academic Success and Equity Initiatives, has led the establishment of the Equity Inquiry Project. The EIP is a community of scholar-educators from across campus who support a vision of equity-minded and data-informed teaching and learning. Participants complete a 7-module facilitated program designed to advance our campus' commitment to closing equity gaps and building community knowledge around student equity data and learning design. Dr. Dozono was sought out specifically to facilitate this project because of his research on the topic and his skills as a teacher.

Please welcome Dr. Tadashi Dozono, recipient of the President's Teaching and Innovation Award.

(TADASHI SPEAKS)

### **President's Staff Award for Excellence**

Thank you, Tadashi. The next award is the President's Staff Award for Excellence which recognizes a staff member who demonstrates unwavering integrity and exceptional service to our university community. It is my honor to announce this year's awardee, Jessica Dalton, the Staff Council's top recommendation to me from a particularly robust field of nominees this year. Jessica is a Senior Biology Technician who has been on campus for 19 years. The individuals who nominated Jessica spoke to her keen abilities to streamline processes, her strong relational skills building connections with faculty and staff colleagues as well as with the students she serves, all while keeping diversity and inclusion top-of-mind. Congratulations Jessica, please welcome her to the stage.

(JESSICA SPEAKS)

### **President's Faculty Fellow**

A round of applause for our three awardees. At this time, I would like to welcome our second President's Faculty Fellow and introduce our new Faculty Fellow for the 2023-24 academic year. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Michelle Dean, Associate Professor of Special Education, who served in the role the past academic year. She will share a brief reflection on her work over the past year. Dr. Dean.

(MICHELLE SPEAKS)

Thank you, Michelle, for your service and for your words today. Now, I would like to introduce the new President's Faculty Fellow for the upcoming 23-24 academic year, Dr. Melissa Soenke (SANK-EE) Associate Professor of Psychology to share some thoughts on the work she'll be undertaking over the course of the coming year. Dr. Soenke.

(MELISSA SPEAKS)

Thank you, Dr. Soenke, I look forward to working with you and witnessing all the contributions you will make to our campus community in this role and beyond.

That brings us to the end of our program today. Thank you all sincerely and appreciatively, for your contributions to CI, old and new. I hope I have given each one of you reason to know that I value your being and building here, very much.

Please head on down to the Central Mall for some food and community. Thank you everyone.