



All University Convocation Final Remarks by President Adela de la Torre - 08/22/19

Good morning. I am thrilled to be here with you— our SDSU faculty and staff.

This time last year, I met many of you for the first time...

Twelve months later,
I continue to be impressed and inspired by your love for SDSU, your love for your work,
and your love for our students...

In the last twelve months, I have been listening intently... I also invited each of you to
have a listening tour of your own... and also to cross new borders with a
spirit of curiosity, courage, and compassion...

As I reflect on the last twelve months, I'm proud of what we have accomplished.

Together, we weathered storms we navigated conflict,
and we arrived here stronger than ever.

As we move to a new year working together...
as we face new challenges and seize new opportunities...
I am reminded of my marathon running days.

I remember one race in particular...
I reached the dreaded wall at the 20 mile marker.

My feet were dragging and my body was aching...

At that point I looked up and saw this older woman running next to me with a lilt in her step...

Somehow, her energy inspired and motivated me to continue. Just like that... she freed my spirit to soar and imagine my success all the way to the end.

Preparation, determination, and endurance are key to finishing the race.

But imagining success is equally significant when we want to get to the finish line... and when we want to succeed. And this imagination often is fueled by those around us.

These lessons are relevant to all of us as we move forward this year together...

Think about it—we are embarking on a number of ambitious goals.

This year, we will need to work together to outline a strategic plan that represents the voices and priorities of our students, faculty, and staff...

It's going to take everyone to participate, to set the strategic goals for this campus...

Not just for the next year or the next five years—but for the long term future of SDSU.

With the acquisition and development of the Mission Valley site, we are embarking on one of the most ambitious projects this university will see for generations to come.

Together, we are laying the foundation for our future, realizing new educational and research opportunities and expanding access to the region—all while the community ensures we do it well, with integrity, and by including everyone in that process.

Last year, in 2018, we set out to show the community the value our institution brings to the region.

They gave us their trust by supporting our desire to acquire the Mission Valley site.

Now we will have the opportunity to bring even more value to the region as we move forward every step of the way.

This project will test our ability to work together...

It will take unwavering patience..

It will take everyone in the community to reach this goal successfully.

This is why we've spent many months engaging the campus community in dialogue....

Building a foundation of trust.

Imperial Valley itself, with 150 acres of undeveloped land, is also entering a period of transition and exciting changes.

Fall 2019 marks the beginning of SDSU Imperial Valley to accept high school graduates as full-time undergraduates on their campus.

Let us take a moment to applaud our Imperial Valley colleagues for this important achievement...

Together, we will expand our Imperial Valley program offerings to transform the face of higher education in Imperial County, marking a key leg of this important race...

So how do we ensure that we have the endurance to finish the race well?

It will take both preparation and laser focus.

That preparation and focus translates into two key imperatives:

First—we must commit ourselves to organizational health.

Second—we must commit to nurturing trust at every level.

If we can agree that these two priorities are important, we can come together and work on the “how”...

Recently, I invited the university’s senior leaders to come together for a leadership retreat.

To kick off the day, we took turns sharing a fun fact about ourselves...

I was impressed by everyone's willingness to show a bit of vulnerability.

And I was reminded how important it is to show our own vulnerabilities as individuals...

Why? Because it is only when we are vulnerable that we are able to trust each other... and humble ourselves to ask for the help we need.

And it starts with me and our senior leaders.

For example, anyone who knows me well will tell you that I'm an ENSP in the Myers Briggs assessment. And they can quickly figure out why I'm better at global visioning...

But when you ask me to get into the fine details of day to day activities, I always need to make sure that my team includes individuals who can shore up those detail skills in the office...

Now, why is it important that we have self awareness about our strengths and weaknesses? Because we need to understand that every member of our team also has unique gifts but also a unique set of vulnerabilities.

Only when we have a full picture of what we bring to the table, can we have both empathy but also a strategic mindset to ensure we fill the gaps.

Our role as leaders is to ensure that those who report to us and those who work with us use their talents...

So that they can become key players in the collective success of SDSU...

Together, we must consider how working as a collective can realize greater organizational health...

This means we must learn to build our teams and support strong teamwork...

This means we must remove silos that limit our collaboration and imagination....

My heartfelt desire for this year is that all of us move forward recognizing that our job is

to build organizational health that yields trust—the kind of trust that allows for both vulnerability and conflict.

Conflict? Did you hear this right? You may be asking.

Yes, conflict. Conflict is not only inevitable but also a necessary part of organizational health.

Conflict is not productive in and of itself.

It is important because it is key to achieving *active* commitment—as distinct from passive agreement.

As Patrick Lencioni says in his book, *The Advantage*¹:

“Most leaders have learned the art of passive agreement: going to a meeting... nodding their heads when a decision is made that they don’t agree with. They then go back to their offices and do as little as possible to support that idea. They don’t promote it.... they sit back and watch problems develop.”

This is the price of passivity.

Embracing conflict—ensuring that all voices are heard will allow us to move forward successfully with our strategic plan.

During the Strategic Planning process there will be ample meetings, forums, and opportunities for everyone to share their input, suggestions, and perspectives...

But when all the input is in— not every idea will surface to the top... there is a difference between important and *strategic* ideas...

Many ideas are important. Many ideas are valuable. But strategic goals are more than ideas.

Throughout this process, leaning into our core values will be key to guide us...

¹ Lencioni, Patrick. *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*. Jossey-Bass, 2012.

This is more important because we are not only developing a strategic plan this year, but also, we are re-imagining the mission and vision for the university...

So I want to make sure that as leaders within your divisions, colleges, and departments...

That you will allow for opportunities to have robust discussions...

That you will allow for vulnerability to be part of that discussion, and that you will allow for conflict to emerge...

So that when we come together, we will make decisions fully aware of the issues and concerns...

Here's what I found last year— 90% of the problems that I saw coming through my desk were because of lack of clarity and lack of communication, lack of clarity and lack of communication, and lack of clarity and lack of communication.

So we already know that a core element of organizational Health is clear communication...

That means that we need to listen and repeat ourselves... Redundant communication is perfectly okay.

Lack of clarity is not okay.

I can promise you that my leadership team and I will be working very, very hard to ensure that we listen and communicate clearly.

And I'll expect all our campus leaders to pass on that expectation to their directors, their managers, and their teams.

Finally, what I'd like to emphasize is how important it is for each of you to actively engage in discussion, as this year unfolds...

Clearly this is important for our strategic plan...

However, we also need this to remind ourselves of our core purpose as a campus.

Remember that SDSU's identity is deeply rooted in how we evolved as an institution....

We came out of a normal school, we came out of the need for this region to educate a workforce.

And we were able to successfully transform student lives such that our alums are in every corner of this county and many have made their impact across the world....

They are elected officials, business leaders, Artists, Teachers, professional athletes—just to name a few...

The heart of SDSU's success has always been about transforming student lives.

That's why my mantra has been to educate and graduate global citizens, compassionate leaders and ethical innovators.

It doesn't mean that we minimize the fact that we are a great research institution...

It doesn't mean that we only focus on undergraduate students...

It means that we focus on all students...

Whether they are undergraduates in a traditional sense, or whether they are non traditional students... adult learners, masters students...or doctoral students...

It means that we also understand that our focus on building a diverse and inclusive campus—with equity for all—is crucial to developing a workforce of globally minded leaders of the future...

We are the hope of the region and are poised to become the model university for the future.

There is no better time than today for SDSU to break out of the pack..

At a time that vitriol and visceral emotion is dividing the globe and destroying human life, we can show the world that our diverse opinions and voices make us stronger...

So, too, do our diverse communities...

We should aspire to continue being the transformative engine that started more than 120 years ago...

So it's important today to embrace this opportunity to set a new strategic direction... rooted in our core values...

I want you to know that regardless of your title or your position in this organization, each and every one of you are critically important to the marathon we are running together....

Your leadership is crucial every single day...

Your willingness to be vulnerable and to share the challenges that are getting in the way matters to our success...

Your endurance and perseverance to be a team player in the midst of conflict matters to our success...

And your voice and participation to ensure we build a robust strategic plan we can all be proud of... is imperative to our success...

And those will become the mantras by which we will move forward. Today we celebrate all we have accomplished together and also turn a new page....

Let's IMAGINE what success will look like, not just in the next twelve months but in the next few years.

Together, let's commit to building mutual trust, respect for one another... and the organizational health—so we can win this marathon.

Mil Gracias!

