



All University Convocation Remarks by President Adela de la Torre - 08/23/18

Buenos Dias and Welcome to 2018's All-University Convocation!

I am humbled and honored to be here with you—our SDSU faculty and staff—to share with you what has been happening since I officially assumed my role as the 9th President of the university.

But first, I want to emphasize that this is just the beginning of what I hope will be an ongoing dialogue.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to start the conversation.

Last January when Chancellor White announced that I would become SDSU's president and the first female to serve in that role, I was overwhelmed with emotion.

I was in the car with my husband Steve when I got the news.

I SCREAMED! I was so ecstatic.

The idea that I would have the opportunity to lead this flagship institution with a history of path-breaking innovative work in teaching, research, and community engagement was beyond what I could have imagined.

Looking back at my 35 years in Higher Education, being here with you is more than a dream come true. It is an opportunity for us to re-imagine and create a collective vision that will prepare our students in this global economy—whether they are first generation, adult learners, undergraduates, or graduate students.

Most of you have been at SDSU much longer than I have, so indulge my exuberance as I revel with fresh eyes in this great privilege, to lead an institution with such unique regional presence that provides a platform for unprecedented national and binational influence.

Both the geographical and distinctive attributes of the university place SDSU at the crossroads of a profound national narrative that is capturing the hearts and minds of people across this hemisphere and the world.

All of you are part of that profound narrative.

I still remember the first time I crossed the US Mexico border as a child with my mother, sister, and cousins.

I was crossing from San Diego to Tijuana, eyes wide open, realizing for the first time that I belonged to two distinct yet intricately connected worlds.

As I listened to the syncopated rhythm of my home language, the Spanish of my roots, every syllable hit me from every direction to remind me that I was part of a narrative much richer than I had imagined.

Tightening my grip on my cousins' hands, I wondered for the first time where I truly belonged in this newly discovered world with tangible and metaphorical lines that divided me from my extended kin.

The wonderment is still with me today as I see the relevance of those memories to this time in history for San Diego State University.

When I think about the issues that we face today, I realize that too often the tendency is to see the barriers... the problems... the differences that divide us.

But the real opportunity—

**if we listen closely,
if we think deeply,
and if we pay attention**

—is to see the bonds that bind us, both as a community and as a campus.

Today more than ever SDSU sits at a crossroad where we can build on our legacy, strengths, and capacity to serve the uniqueness of each student, staff, and faculty member.

In the process, **TOGETHER** we can develop a collective vision for the future, and we can capitalize on our regional position.

During the last two months, I have been on a listening tour.

I have heard from faculty, staff, and students. I have heard their unique but always heartfelt expressions of love for this campus.

In different ways...

I have heard faculty and staff say that they want to see a real expression of shared governance, marked by transparency and trust.

I—HEAR—YOU.

When you say that it's important to honor the knowledge and capacity of our staff...

I—HEAR—YOU

When you say that recognizing the accomplishments of our faculty is also important—but not enough...

I—HEAR—YOU

I—HEAR—YOU when you tell me that SDSU **cares** about serving this wonderful community and wants to tackle our greatest societal problems like...

- global warming,
- homelessness, and
- educational and health disparities.

And I HEAR YOU when you say—even without tangible words—that you don't want me to forget about the **extraordinary legacy** that has already made San Diego State University a crown jewel among university systems.

I could speak all day about all I've heard you say... the insights you have shared over hundreds of hours of one-on-one or group meetings.

If you remember one thing from what I say today, remember this:

I - LEAD - THROUGH - LISTENING.

That's why, I emphasize again that today is just the beginning of a longer conversation.

As we move forward this year, I will be asking **YOU**—our staff and faculty—to approach this new chapter of the university with a blank slate.

I don't mean that you are to forget all the wonderful accomplishments that have gotten us to this day.

What I mean is that I hope you also show up to the conversation **willing to listen**—without preconceived ideas...

With an open mind and with an open heart.

Chris Thomas, our wonderful Associated Students President, gave me a copy of ***The Heart Led Leader***, the book he and his cabinet have been reading as they prepare to lead not just with skill but also with heart.

As I read the book and thought about the time we would spend together today... one principle stood out:

“Whatever the question, LOVE IS THE ANSWER.”

What that idea says to me is that although we all bring diverse perspectives to the work we do, we share one thing in common:

The love we bring to this place..

- Love for our students
- Love for our work
- Love for our research
- Love for this institution

I share that love with you.

It propels me to listen. To listen intently... to you—our wonderful staff and faculty.

MY COMMITMENT IS TO CONTINUE LISTENING.

In a couple of minutes, I will give you a personal challenge that—**if you choose to accept**—will help us move San Diego State University to the next chapter of impact and distinction.

But first, I want to share the mantra—the presidential vision that has emerged from my listening tour.

My vision is that San Diego State University will be recognized for graduating

The Global Citizens, Ethical Innovators, and Compassionate Leaders—who will impact the future of the San Diego region and the world.

How will we do this together, you ask?

Gleaning from what I've heard you say, I have identified a few ways:

By Collaborating as faculty and leaders in order to identify and amplify our areas of distinction...

By Creating synergies for shared commitment among our stakeholders...

By Developing exemplary relationships—nationally, bi-nationally, and internationally ...

By Committing to a process of transparent and timely communication...

By Improving shared benefits through the Mission Valley project...

By Growing the capacity of SDSU Imperial Valley...

By Ensuring our infrastructure can sustain the demands and challenges of today and tomorrow's educational landscape...

By Nurturing a culture where we listen and engage in productive dialogue

And by Measuring progress with a variety of metrics

It's important for me that you understand that I did not show up to this campus with these ideas in hand.

This vision is the result of what I've heard from staff and faculty members on this campus...

From what many of you have said to me in personal and group conversations.

However, I also realize that not everyone has spoken.

My challenge to you is this: I want to ask that you join me on a listening tour of your own in the form of a guided self-assessment.

We all have an idea of where we want to go as a division, as a college, or as a university.

Knowing who we are is crucially important before we get there.

As we move forward this year in this exercise of self-assessment and visioning, we will cross borders together.

In the immediate future we have important challenges to address:

- **First**, we must recognize that the only acceptable opportunity to grow is through the Mission Valley Plan.
- **Second**, we must address our growing campus infrastructure needs--both in terms of physical space and technology.

We can no longer afford to ignore our most basic needs **today**, even as we plan for the future.

- **Third**, we must continue to diversify our revenue sources.
- **Fourth**, we must create real community partnerships that go beyond our institutional borders.
- **Finally**, we must recognize our regional position as the gateway to Mexico and the Americas.

The “why” may be obvious, but the “how” is where the work really begins.

I recognize that a new presidency can create anxiety and fears.

We need to talk about it.

For now, let me close with this.

That first time I was crossing the border as a child, my mom must have read the fear in my eyes.

She put her arm around my shoulder and whispered in my ear:

“Adelita, the border is nothing to fear but to embrace. All we have to do is hold hands—and together we can walk across without fear.”

Her words have impacted every border I have ever crossed—real or imagined.

Borders of prejudice.

Borders of fear.

Borders between the past and the future.

We as tenants of this sacred Kumeyaay land must embrace that all of us can stand **together** as transborder people.

My hope is that **together** we will foster a culture of discourse and dialogue.

That **together** we will build a campus culture **without silos**.

My hope is that this place—**this university**—will be a space where **NO ONE** will hesitate to bring up a topic because they fear being labeled a troublemaker.

I want you to know that **I hear you**...

I want you to know that **I see you**...

I want **YOU** to know the dreams you have for San Diego State University are critically important to this conversation.

Muchisimas Gracias. Sigamos adelante.

Let's move forward while enjoying this important journey. Thank you!