

Investiture Presidential Speech

By Adela de la Torre

TRANSCRIPT



Delivered at Viejas Arena

April 11, 2019

Bienvenidos/Welcome!

“Solamente una vez hay en la vida”—*Only Once in a Lifetime*—is the song my grandmother taught me as a little girl.

I have carried it within me all my life as a reminder of my grandmother, but now as a reminder that there’s only one time in our life ...

to do something truly remarkable.

to do something that has never been done before.

to be part of something so meaningful that it can transform the world.

I’m deeply moved by this beautiful rendition by our talented students, not just because of the personal meaning it carries for me—but because it symbolizes a bridge that connects the values of my youth which prepared ME for this moment and the values of this great institution, which brought US to this moment.

And so, I stand before you humbled by our legacies that now connect.

First, let me acknowledge the 122-year legacy of this magnificent institution and the confidence you bestow on me to lead our next chapter of distinction.

I am mindful that I inherit a landscape that has been cultivated not just by eight presidents before me but also by thousands of faithful hands: Chancellors. Trustees. Faculty. Staff. Alumni. Donors. Visionary partners. And Students.

I am also moved by the care and respect that the Kumeyaay Nation took in their stewardship of their lands, lands where we stand today.

To all of you who represent these critical roles and foundational values I thank you and I applaud you!

I know I stand here as the first woman to serve as permanent president to lead this university. But I recognize that I stand on the shoulders of Women who shaped the identity of SDSU from the very beginning.

In its earliest days, as the San Diego Normal School women formed the majority of the student population. Through the years, women stepped forward to create new areas of study, including the nation's first Women's Studies Program.

From day one, women have led colleges, produced groundbreaking research, and developed the minds of the future.

To all the women who paved the way and continue to do so, I tip my hat to you and I applaud you.

Today we have a reason to be proud: Our 122-year harvest is a class of more than 400,000 diverse alums impacting San Diego and the world.

Look around!

Our graduates are the powerhouse artists, entrepreneurs, teachers, scientists, inventors, and elected officials making a difference today in unique ways.

But because they understand our geography and that we stand at the crossroads of a profound national narrative—they have become the visionaries who are pushing the boundaries of innovation.

They are the trailblazers who are breaking barriers, building bridges, and crossing borders every day!

Yes, proud Aztecs we are—but we must not be complacent—for we have more barriers to break, more bridges to build and more borders to cross.

We must remember that complacency does not propel curious and hungry minds.

Complacency does not break barriers.

Complacency will not get us where we need to go.

We have critical work to do.

We need to prepare the global citizens, compassionate leaders, and ethical innovators of the future. But to succeed, we must cultivate a culture of curiosity, courage, and compassion where they can strive.

Together we will do this important work!

First, we must remember that curiosity and courage, have always been the energy that propelled us forward—to challenge ideas, to move past failure, and to explore new frontiers.

Curiosity is the art of asking, “What if?”

Think about it.

As people on the border, we are positioned to be curious. We straddle two nations yet in some dimensions can blend into one. Our curiosity transcends boundaries to advance knowledge and expand human potential.

It was the curiosity of our faculty that uncovered the molecular basis for how Black Widow spiders produce their intricate webs, a substance tougher than the material in bulletproof vests. This knowledge has unlimited practical applications!

It was the curiosity of our faculty that gave birth to Arts Alive, to expand discovery and meaning for every member of our campus—whether in the whimsical surprise of the brightly colored benches on campus, or the collaboration of over 200 students performing a staged version of Les Mis, or rigorous courses that blend dance and physics... or design & biology—our entire campus is a living laboratory for creative innovation that transcend borders and silos.

Fostering and celebrating curiosity and courage is part of our DNA and we must continue to do so!

But as we move into the future we must be vigilant because curiosity and courage alone are not enough to create the leadership of the future.

That's why we need to cultivate compassion too.

We can draw inspiration from our visionary alumni and donors who have invested in our students for decades.

Driven by a deep spirit of curiosity, courage, and compassion, they've donated hundreds of millions towards programs, state of the art facilities, and scholarships that have yielded unprecedented success for our diverse students.

Together we will soar to new heights, creating the university community that this region so richly deserves.

And we have proof we can do this.

Across our colleges, faculty are fueling greater student curiosity and learning by using virtual and augmented reality to give them more nuanced insights into complex science.

Faculty are also creating living laboratories in our transborder region to engage our students in community-based service learning and research projects.

But here's what really excites me:

Our students do not wait until graduation to make an impact on society. As part of their SDSU experience, they are solving tangible issues—Like hunger, homelessness, and global warming.

Our faculty, staff and students are uncovering ways to address health disparities; they are devising solutions to combat multidrug resistant tuberculosis; they are establishing new standards of human decency and government accountability in the treatment of refugees.

Just to name a few.

SDSU—driven by curiosity, courage, and compassion—is also demonstrating that we can amplify our impact around the world!

Last September, I traveled to SDSU's campus in the country of Georgia. Since 2014, SDSU has played a pivotal role in helping introduce STEM Education and Standards that are transforming higher education in Georgia. By 2024, SDSU will have transformed the Georgian workforce that will propel the economic growth of the region.

SDSU is poised to continue promoting educational diplomacy, reduce social inequities, and fuel economic growth through existing and new transnational partnerships. And that makes this economist-educator very, very excited.

Our vision for global impact will start in our own backyard.

You've heard that we will soon break ground in Mission Valley.

Together—as partners, as leaders, as students—we will build a state of the art campus and innovation district that will expand our capacity to serve thousands of more students and advance groundbreaking creative research. This neighborhood will provide accessible housing with a River Park and a stadium complex all within an environmentally sustainable community. A place for all San Diegans.

We are not stopping there.

SDSU Imperial Valley will continue to capitalize on its untapped potential. The campus sits in a rich agricultural region and is an

epicenter of renewable energy sources and a focal point on border issues and binational university partnerships.

Here at SDSU we will continue to address current challenges, seize creative solutions, and uncover new opportunities to generate more revenue. Together, we must push innovation boundaries like never before.

How will we do that?

I recently had a fascinating chat with SDSU Alum Jordan Evans. Jordan led the NASA team that landed the rover on Mars in 2012—after dozens of failed attempts. Jordan said: “You have to set the bar really high and expect that you're going to fail along the way, and also recognize that in those failures, that's when the deep learning occurs.”

We must remember this lesson as we move forward because as every leader knows, “What got us here won't get us where we want to go.”

We will face criticism.

We will disagree.

We will fail along the way.

But...

If we value the diverse curiosity everyone brings to the table;
If we communicate with empathy and compassion;
And if we have the courage to lift each other up when we fall—we will
succeed!

And that brings me to a final but vital topic as we start a new chapter
together.

I want to talk about YOU—but not just you, the student,
or the faculty or the staff member, or the community member.

I want to talk to YOU—the son, the daughter, the father, the mother,
the sibling, the friend. The dreamer with personal dreams yet to
achieve and obstacles yet to overcome. I want you to know that when
we talk about our lofty vision for the future, I see YOU.

Over the last ten months, I've talked to hundreds of people during my
listening tour. The number one question I get is "Can you share your
path to the presidency?"

I've sensed that behind the question is a desire to know how to break
barriers and to shatter glass ceilings.

Somewhat apprehensive at first, I've come to realize that apart from
being an economist, a professor, and now a president—I have also
become a role model— not just for those who look like me but also

those who have not always received the benefits of a culture imbued with the curiosity, courage, and compassion we aspire to foster here.

To them and to you:

Te doy mis consejos de corazón—I give you my heartfelt advice—the essential puzzle pieces to achieve and maintain personal and professional success.

First: be proud of who you are and the roots that make you strong.

I am the product of the rhythms of my daily life, gifted to me by the values I inherited from my mother and my grandmother.

As a child, I saw my single mother Herminia start her day at the crack of dawn in order to take two buses, to climb her hill, and to change the lives of students as a teacher. From her I learned to value education, hard work and the deep love of family.

I saw my Abuela Adela with her molcajete, grinding fresh ingredients for salsa and always ready with her comal to make the most perfect tortillas. I saw her pray to the Virgencita caressing each rosary bead with her arthritic hands. She showed me that with faith we can always do more. And I saw her stretch a meal to feed neighbors, cousins, aunts, uncles, comadres, and compadres—anyone who needed help.

From her, I learned the power of faith, the power of love, and the power of compassion through the simple act of breaking bread with family and friends— during good times and during difficult times.

Because everyone knows that “Con panza llena corazón contento”—*Full stomach, happy heart.*

Where we come from matters. Where YOU come from matters.

I learned who I was and how to value curiosity, courage, and compassion decades before I earned a PhD, before I earned tenure, and before I became president.

It would be a disservice to this university if I did not bring ALL of who I am to my daily work. I hope that you feel the same way about the tremendous value you bring to our vision.

Finally: Honor the people who got you here, thank the people who help you succeed, and surround yourself with the people who keep you grounded.

We all know that no one succeeds alone. It takes mentors and the sacrifice of many to achieve great heights.

But if history and recent headlines can teach us anything, it is this: the fastest way down is when we forget to be humble, to be grateful, and to be true to the person we always wanted to become.

My hope is that you will always honor, thank, and cherish these important people in your life.

As for me...

To the mentors and advocates who helped me get here—Chancellor Tim White, Chair Adam Day, Honorable Trustees, and my mentors, friends and family members joining me today—I thank you and honor you for the confidence you’ve placed in me.

To each of you who daily ensure this presidency succeeds—alumni, advisors, donors, faculty, staff, students, and members of my team—I thank you, for I could not do this job without you.

And to each of you who keep me grounded—my husband Steve, the love of my life, who never lets me forget that there’s a life beyond being president;

My daughters Adela and Gabriela, who provide the purest source of meaning in my life,

My grandson Javier who reminds “Buela” that the center of the universe is not SDSU but the Model Railroad Museum at Balboa Park.

And to my future granddaughter, who brings to me new hope.

I cherish you all today, tomorrow, and always.

And to my mom, who I know at 96 is watching her daughter on the iPad, "Te amo con todo mi corazón mami."

Friends, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you for standing with me, with us, with SDSU today.

This is just the beginning of a great future. Let's gift the world the global citizens, ethical innovators, and compassionate leaders who will transform our future.

But as my abuela Adela taught me—Solamente una vez hay en la vida—*There is only one time in our life...*

Solamente una vez to do something like what we will do at SDSU.

This is my time.

This is your time.

This is our time.

Mil Gracias !