Good afternoon! And welcome to the start of the new academic year. I am very pleased to be with all of you today. No, I mean really pleased. It’s been a while and an adventure to get back.

So, let me say at the outset, how grateful I have been for all of your good wishes and support while I was away from the campus in the spring. They sustained and encouraged me more than I can ever fully say. And Yasuko and our girls and I will always be mindful of the caring and kindness that so deeply marks our community.

Today’s occasion – brought to you again by Chris Ficken -- marks the 126th time we have gathered to welcome both new and continuing students and colleagues to the beginning of fall classes. Only one other CSU campus has been at this a little longer than us. But none embraces new students, fosters their learning, enables their success, and prepares them for life, work, civic engagement, and service better than us.

But don’t just believe me when I tell you this. Consider a few highlights from the most recent National Survey of Student Engagement that reveals what our students say about their Chico experience. More than 1,500 colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada use the NSSE surveys as a credible source to measure student participation in activities and programs that promote their learning and personal development.

By impressive margins, our students report that they are more likely than their counterparts in the CSU and nationally to find here, in our company, a supportive learning community, an orientation to service and community-based engagements, and an environment focused on their overall well-being. Just as important, they recognize how this occurs. And they tell us what they appreciate:

- **Meaningful interactions** with faculty, academic advisors, student services staff, and other students.
- A high degree of **purposeful, active and collaborative learning** both within and outside the classroom.
- **Applied learning opportunities** through research with faculty and internships and work/study assignments with staff and administration.
- A campus culture oriented to **student success**.
- And a very high level of **satisfaction** with their overall experience.
In other words, they get it. They get what we say we aim to do. They get what we state in our Strategic Plan to be the heart of the matter, namely, “to create a vital and collaborative living and learning experience for our students.”

I have no doubt that our new students will discover this experience for themselves very quickly. And, in the process, contribute to our ever strengthening graduation rates because these students will be more successful academically and more motivated to learn and persist. Our graduation rates, by the way, for both first-time freshmen and transfer students, already exceed the targets set for us in the CSU’s original Graduation Initiative. These rates put us among the top three in the CSU and are among many reasons (including accessibility, the starting and mid-career salaries of our graduates, and low tuition) why Money magazine just rated us among the top 50 “best value” colleges and universities in the nation.

And here’s something really cool. The Sierra Club has just released its 2015 rankings of “Cool Schools” in the United States. This ranking looks at evidence of an institution’s commitment to environmental concerns and sustainability. About 2,300 four-year colleges and universities in the country are eligible to be considered. We ranked 39th, the highest among all the CSUs and better than a few places you may have heard of: Harvard #41, UCLA #42, Carnegie-Mellon #58 and MIT #75, for example.

Our ranking begs the question: would you rather have Harvard’s endowment – about $35 billion compared to our $60 million – or would you rather be considered a “cooler” place than them? What would the Fonz say? Of course! He’d choose cool over cash. Or, at least cool and cash.

Our new students come from the largest applicant pool in our history. 29,835 total applicants chasing about 4,500 combined freshman and transfer spots to be with us this fall. That’s well more than six applicants for every enrollment space available.

Over the last ten years, first-time freshman student applications have increased 96% and transfer applications 117%.

And we will once again enroll the most diverse class in our history. 57.9% of our first-time freshman enrollees are students of color. A decade ago that percentage was 21.8%.

Not surprisingly, the largest growth in this representation of student diversity is Hispanic/Latino at 42.1%. Twelve years ago this population constituted just 11.7% of our entering class. Now, for the first time in our history, our Hispanic/Latino first-time freshman enrollments exceed that of our new White/Non-Hispanic students. Indeed, the future has arrived. This is further underscored with our much anticipated status as a Hispanic Serving Institution. And another first, as the most recent California census reveals, the Hispanic/Latino
population of the state now exceeds that of the White population, 14.9 million to 14.2 million. Yes, the future is now and we are embracing it.

Our African-American numbers are also rising and this year we will see among our first-time freshman enrollees the highest percentage and perhaps largest number of such students, 3.3% and 90-plus, respectively, compared to only 1.7% and 37 a decade ago.

And, just as impressive, the academic profile of this year’s applicant pool as measured by GPAs and testing ranks among the strongest ever in our history. The GPA average of our first-time freshman applicants, for example, is 3.20; for our admits 3.44 the highest ever. Similarly, with SAT scores, the differential between the SATs of admits versus applicants is 47 points. This is the greatest differential in at least fifteen years.

We have more students than ever seeking admission here. We are more selective than ever. We are more diverse than ever. The academic profile of our new students is stronger than ever. And our graduation rates are higher than ever. Not too shabby.

So, the first shout-out this afternoon goes to Barbara Fortin and her great team in Admissions and Enrollment Management. These colleagues set the table for the rest of us. For the students who come our way do not just show up unannounced, uninformed, and unintended. They come here because they have heard a compelling story ... and because they believe it.

And if the promise of Chico State, the CSU, and American higher education stands for anything, it is the commitment to students and the dedication to a mission of teaching and service that rise above all else. These are the measures of our performance. And we welcome them because this is what we do here. Including rising above the already high expectations that we want our students to have in us.

But more than what kind of work we do, it is how we go about our work that makes a difference. And this is a vital part of our distinction and appeal. Not just the goals we share in common, but the spirit of their engagement. And there is nothing more important to that spirit than a sense of community to bind us and the respect that all of us must have for each of us, whether individuals or divisions or units, as we accomplish the purposes that surely are our privilege to serve.

I will return to this theme of purpose and performance when I return to the body of my remarks in a few minutes.

But, first, as is the case at these convocations, a few acknowledgments and introductions.
New senior leadership:

Ahmad Boura is our new Vice-President for University Advancement. Ahmad is a native of Lebanon, where he was a world-class soccer player. Those skills brought him to the U.S. to play professionally. He has been the Vice-President for University Advancement at two previous institutions where he enjoyed great success. We are thrilled to have Ahmad at Chico State – and Coach Restrepo is feverishly checking to see if he has any NCAA eligibility left.

Ricardo Jacquez joins us as Dean of the College of Engineering, Computer Science and Construction Management. Ricardo comes to us from New Mexico State University, where he had been a faculty member in civil engineering for 31 years, including serving as Dean of the College of Engineering the last five years. Among his many achievements, Ricardo has served as the Director of the National Science Foundation’s Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation and is a recipient of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring from NSF.

Our “old” new dean is Eddie Vela in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences. Eddie came to Chico State in 1989 and has provided University-wide service in a number of areas, such as CELT and Multicultural and Gender Studies, besides his contributions to his home department, Psychology. He has been serving as interim dean of the college since 2013.

Let me also introduce John Feeney, our new chief of the University Police Department. Chief Feeney comes to us from the Bay Area where he was a captain and long-time member of the San Francisco PD. In all, John brings us 29 years of law enforcement skills and experience.

And let me also thank Bruce Hagerty for serving as our interim chief for several months while we conducted the search for our new chief. Hagerty to Feeney – tis a fine place for the Irish. Slainte! And here’s a rare photo of the two of them fresh out of the police academy.

New faculty: Two years ago, I announced a commitment to hire 100 new tenure/tenure-track faculty over a three-year period. Last year, we brought 37 new tenure/tenure-track faculty colleagues to our campus. This year, we have added 46 more. That’s 83 in two years. The searches we launch this year will ensure that we will significantly exceed the original target of 100 by this time next year. The future is now in this critical measurement of institutional quality, as well. So, let’s give a warm welcome to our 46 new faculty colleagues, and most of them are with us this afternoon.

Board members: UAB, UF, RF, Turner, GSM, Alumni, Parents, North State Symphony, et al....
Thank you all so very much.

Let me return now to the themes of purpose, performance and promise that truly form the core of our story. These themes are imbedded in several campus documents and expressions. Most noteworthy among these is our Strategic Plan.

The basis of our identity and the most fundamental way we assert our nature as a place of people and learning are in the plan’s first two priorities.

First, Strategic Priority #1: Believing in the primacy of learning, we will continue to develop high-quality learning environments both inside and outside the classroom.

Among the key ways we enact this priority are to:

- Recruit, enroll, support and graduate a diverse and high-quality student population.
- Dedicate ourselves to student success by re-examining the total education experience of our students.
- Provide on-going faculty/staff training and student learning experiences in the areas of multicultural respect, awareness, and competency.
- Protect and enhance the physical beauty of the campus and provide new facilities to support our mission of teaching and learning.
- Foster and highlight the special and unique sense of place for the University in the design and appearance of the campus.

Second, Strategic Priority #2: Believing in the importance of faculty and staff, and their role in student success, we will continue to invest in faculty and staff development.

Among the key ways we support this priority are to:

- Recruit and retain a diverse and highly qualified faculty and staff.
- Emphasize student learning in our processes for recruiting, hiring, orienting, deploying, evaluating, and rewarding faculty and staff.
- Encourage community-based learning and research as a means to reinvigorate the public purposes and civic mission of higher education.
- Encourage student involvement in the scholarly and creative activities of faculty and staff.

So, just within these two priorities are powerful and defining themes:
• The primacy of student learning.
• The recognition that learning occurs both inside and outside the classroom.
• The role of both faculty and staff in enabling student learning and fostering student success.
• The need to support both faculty and staff.
• The importance of diversity.
• The value of a sense of place.

Among many other actions, our campus-based equity plans directly and specifically address these themes. These plans have accommodated several factors and considerations and focused on a number of key goals, as this fairly simple equation indicates. But, very seriously, these plans should signal to faculty and staff, present and future, institutional willingness and resolve to provide support where it matters greatly – compensation and career advancement – and to prioritize the allocation of campus resources to this effect.

I promised that our campus-based equity plans would be second to none in the CSU, both in scale and scope. From what we know from other campuses, the systemwide CFA and CSUEU officers and the Chancellor’s Office, this appears to be the case. We have seized the tools available to us in the collective bargaining agreements and fashioned plans that are comprehensive, progressive, and responsive. Plans that will be multi-year in their implementation, far-reaching in their refinement, unfolding in their stages, and long-term in their commitment. Plans that reach a higher percentage of our entire work force, with more campus-based funding than any other campus in the system.

As we talk about and address these matters, it is important to note that there is no hierarchy of status in our Strategic Plan among faculty, staff and administration in addressing the most fundamental and primary reason for our being – enabling student learning, promoting student success, and fostering their personal development. We are not a village of first, second, and third-class citizens. Or a place where any one division or unit commands deference from all others.

Like any social organization worthy of the name “community,” we are bound together with a set of values that provide a framework for common goals and a common outlook.

But we are a particular kind of community – a learning community. And what we do in such a community is absolutely distinctive, profoundly noble, and indisputably vital for our state, for our nation, for our world.

Just consider what we do here:

• We discover knowledge and we foster this love of discovery in our students.
• We pursue the application of knowledge through active engagement with our society and its many segments in order to solve problems and address needs.

• We provide high quality learning environments, programs, and opportunities, both in and beyond our classrooms, lecture halls, studios and laboratories. In fact, the reach of this commitment goes well beyond the campus as our thriving international study abroad program attests. We rank, by the way, second in the nation among all Master’s level institutions for the number of our students who undertake year-long study abroad experiences.

• We focus on student wellness and well-being, student safety and support as critical elements of an environment that enables learning and personal development.

• We work tirelessly to enlighten our students to the fruits of knowledge and the hard work it requires for them to possess such knowledge as their own.

• And we teach. Really well and very effectively. And the very best among us [photos of faculty who have won distinguished teaching awards] share much in common. For our new faculty, especially, if you want to know what teaching excellence looks like, and why it matters here, please seek out these folks. They are likely to be found in all of your departments.

Yes, they teach the facts, lots of them. But so much more.

They teach about connections and inter-connections.

They teach that learning is fun.

They teach that no student will achieve mastery of any subject matter or endeavor, no matter how original and penetrating a mind he or she possesses, without hard work and hard thinking, without commitment and self-discipline, without patience and perseverance.

They teach that no student will reach great understanding without intellectual curiosity, without passionate devotion and dedication, without the ability to think critically and creatively.

They teach that no student will succeed in changing the world for the better – as, thankfully, so many of our students aim to do – without stubborn idealism, without compassion.

And the nature of a learning community – in fact, the joy of a learning community – is that all of us have a role in what we are here to accomplish.
Most basically, we all have an opportunity to teach. We all have the opportunity to
discover that the difference between teacher and student is not so much a matter of age or
experience, but a state of mind. For such a perspective affirms that each of us is both teacher
and student, giver and receiver. This is what makes teaching, in whatever form or forum, such
a profoundly human experience. The chance we are offered as teachers to give something of
ourselves to our students, to our community, to each other. How good is that?!

To be sure, there are particular roles, essential and unique roles, that each segment of
our workforce, each member of our community of learning and service, has. And these roles
relate to the way we achieve distinction as an institution which is true to its mission, values,
and purposes.

First, the heart of an institution’s academic reputation and worth is its academic quality.
And that finds expression in two key ways. First, the high quality of its faculty; and second, the
high quality of its academic programs (that is, the formal curriculum of majors, minors, and
General Education and where they are located: colleges, schools, departments, programs,
centers and institutes).

Second, an institution’s general reputation – academic and otherwise, that is, the kind of
perceived reputation that draws the attention of the governor, the legislature, the press, high
school counselors, donors, U.S. News & World Report, and WASC, for example – also depends
mightily on the success of its graduates. That is, the consequences of their time with us, both
inside and outside the classroom. We look for evidence to this effect in so many ways:
graduation rates; alumni satisfaction in the quality of their experience with us; employer
satisfaction with our graduates whom they hire; alumni achievements; alumni support through
annual giving… And that evidence is strong and compelling. Among the most impressive and
gratifying examples of this evidence are the folks whom we have been honoring annually since
1994 as our Distinguished Alumni. {Shout outs to those present...Farshad Azad, Tom Di
Giovanni, Judy Sitton, Missy McArthur...]

Third, an institution’s performance reputation rests largely on its ability to marshal
effectively and clearly its operations and activities to support the teaching and learning process.
In fact, all facets of an institution must be justified and measured in terms of their ability to do
just that.

So, yes, we teach through what we know, through pedagogical skill and through
currency in, and dedication to, our disciplines and duties. But also through the powerful force
of personal and institutional example.

Consider these few examples from the four divisions of the University as to how our
enacted values reflect our professed values, how student learning is fostered as a community
commitment, and how that learning both transcends and connects classroom instruction, out-of-class experiences, and service:

**Academic Affairs:**

- With two administrative directors, eighteen program directors, and over 80 student interns, the **Community Legal Information Center (CLIC)** has been providing valuable legal information to students, faculty, staff and community members for over 45 years. It is a prime example of how students in the Legal Studies program gain unprecedented experience in applying their learning to real world situations. Last academic year, CLIC logged over 15,000 client contacts, served thousands of community members, many of whom are low income and homeless, and generated over 30,000 hours of service.  [Ed Bronson]
- Entrepreneurship professor Colleen Robb and Engineering professor David Alexander combined their undergraduate classes to pilot projects that successfully qualified for the 2016 U.S. Department of Energy **Collegiate Wind Competition**. This competition challenges the qualifying teams from only sixteen colleges and universities across the nation to find new uses and solutions to solve remote power needs through harnessing wind energy resources. In our first appearance in this prestigious event, our students will be competing against teams from such places as Penn State, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. We won’t know the results until next May, but I have no doubt we’ll be reporting on a pretty impressive showing in this competition then. So, good luck, Colleen, David and your team!

**Advancement:**

- For nearly twenty years, a group of student volunteers has been dialing for dollars in the Chico State **Calling Center**. They work seven shifts, six days a week, taking off only for Thanksgiving, the December holidays, and spring break. Yes, they will be working in the Center today. [phone call] In the 2014-2015 fiscal year, the Center generated over $1 million in pledges, the first time it reached that mark. It will not be the last. For the students who power the Calling Center are an incredibly motivated group who welcome both the challenge of raising money and the opportunity to serve their University and fellow students. A few of these students are with us this afternoon. Please join me in thanking them for the work they do for us.
- The **University Box Office** and Chico Performances employ about fifty students each semester in several pre-professional roles: as part of their ticketing and patron services team, as stagehands in Laxson Auditorium, as student aides in the marketing and business offices of **University Public Events**. In these capacities, students have the opportunity to provide customer-oriented service, gain hands-on experience in their
chosen fields of study (such as, business, marketing, and the performing arts), and undertake assignments that develop leadership skills and creativity.

Business and Finance:

- The **Campus as a Living Lab** program is an element of our story that helped win Second Nature’s highest award in 2014 for campus-based climate leadership. This program is a joint effort of Residential Living, the Institute for Sustainable Development, and Facilities Management Services and uses the residence halls to promote and reward sustainable behaviors. This and so many other aspects of our sustainability record are highlighted in the *2014 Going Green* report. And, by the way, our residence hall students placed first in the National Campus Conservation Competition for cutting electricity consumption by more than 20% last spring. An achievement that earned them a “best practices” recognition at last month’s 14th Annual California Higher Education Sustainability Conference. And a special shout out to Fletcher Alexander, our campus coordinator of sustainability programs. At this same conference, Fletcher received the “Sustainability Champion Award” for the entire CSU.

- The **CSO (Community Service Officer)** program employs students in the non-hazardous aspects of community services to the campus and support services to the University Police Department. Whether pursuing a career in law enforcement or not, the CSOs have found the program to be a valuable way to expand their skills and strengthen their commitment to community service. A few of them, in uniform, are with us today. And here’s a tip: the louder you applaud may affect their attitude with respect to one of their responsibilities – enforcing our parking policies.

Student Affairs:

- A fundamental goal of the Division of Student Affairs is to promote “*learning, personal growth, self-governance, social responsibility and understanding.*” A primary orientation of the division toward accomplish this goal is through the nexus of student life and leadership. And, as this easy to read chart illustrates, Student Affairs promotes the social, cultural and intellectual development of our students through a great number of **leadership programs and activities**. Some begin even before classes start; all provide opportunities for leadership development throughout a student’s entire career with us. And, I should add, a foundation for academic success. The cumulative GPA for all members of the University’s student organizations is 3.04. The cumulative GPA for all Chico State students is 2.82.

- The motto of Division II athletics is “*Life in the Balance.*” It sends the message that “student-athlete” is a meaningful and credible phrase at least at this level of
intercollegiate athletics. Consider the evidence of such balance here and what are coaches and athletics staff “teach” our students about achieving such balance:

69 student-athletes were awarded All-Conference athletic honors in 2014-2015; 43 of these men and women also achieved All-West regional athletic honors; and 16 were awarded All-American athletic honors. Eight of their teams qualified for postseason championship play; three won conference titles.

But here’s the balance part:

Two student-athletes were named Academic All-American (Zach Sardinia in golf and Luke Barker in baseball). Cassi Scroggins of our women’s soccer team made the Soccer Coaches Association Scholar All-America Team.

The cumulative grade point average for all student-athletes is 2.901. And this, too, exceeds the all campus GPA.

145 student-athletes achieved a GPA of 3.0 or higher in 2014-2015. This number represents 45% of our student-athletes.

Again, these are just eight examples from a myriad of others equally impressive and representative. But what they underscore is that the whole of our story is so much greater than the sum of its parts.

This is our story. It is compelling. It is purposeful. It is inspiring. It is a community responsibility. And it is true.

And, like the students in the Calling Center, in CAVE and CLIC;

with the annual Blitz Builds and This Way to Sustainability conferences;

as members of the top delegation at the Model UN competition and Curt DeBerg’s internationally-acclaimed SAGE teams [and that’s Ndahba Mandela, the grandson of Nelson Mandela, in the middle with Curt and SAGE alumni];

in Mark Stemen’s Environmental Thought and Action class and Dingxin Cheng’s California Pavement Preservation Center;

as the recipients of a 2015 Emmy Award for a documentary project on an 1850 shipwreck off the Mendocino coast that came out of our Advanced Laboratory for Visual Anthropology and as members of The Orion named for the twelfth time since 1994 as the best four-year college newspaper in the state;

as record-breaking fundraisers for children’s cancer research at St. Jude at home and as ambassadors of our University and nation in twenty-five countries abroad;
Yes, like these students, and so many more, we have the opportunity every day – in fact, something more, we have the privilege every day – to strengthen our story even more so.

Whatever we call it – The Chico Experience, the Chico Spirit, the Wildcat Way, Wildcat Pride, or simply excellence – it is a story larger than any one of us, but made extraordinary by all of us.

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Now I began my remarks today by telling you how happy I am to be here this afternoon with you. Yes, on one hand, there is a transcendental dimension to this feeling. Happy to be vertical with a healthy heart and a replenished spirit.

On the other hand, the feeling is very elemental, very grounded. It rests on the enormous respect and gratitude I have for the members of our campus and extended community and the great pride I have for what we have been accomplishing together – for our students, for our society, for the advancement of knowledge, for the sake of understanding, for the future of our region and state and nation.

I have held senior leadership positions in higher education for forty years. For well more than half of my life. And I’m only 52... (just seeing if you’re still paying attention). Well, actually, my doctors tell me that I now have the heart of a 39-year-old. I just hope it’s not Jack Benny’s. And you probably have to be at least 52 to get that reference.

That experience encompasses an Ivy League University, a first tier private liberal arts college, and twenty-four combined years at the two finest institutions in the public firmament of the California State University: Cal Poly–San Luis Obispo and Chico State.

Yet, I have never been happier or felt that I was making a stronger contribution anywhere than here. In your company and as your colleague in the pursuit of our noble mission and its most compelling values.

Recently, though, I have been considering an important decision. And this has been informed by my health, my love for my family, my deep commitment to the best interests of this University, and the words of the American poet Robert Frost that “I have promises to keep; and miles to go before I sleep.”

So I have let Chancellor White know that I will be retiring at the end of this academic year. My thirteenth as Chico State’s president.

I wanted to give him, the trustees, and the campus ample time to prepare for a successful presidential transition. To develop the kind of high quality candidate pool that our
University deserves and then to succeed in attracting the top choice to come here. I have no doubt that that will be the case. And I will work tirelessly to that end.

I have three key responsibilities in these regards. First, to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible. Second, to keep pushing our institutional agenda forward. And, third, to ensure, again, as much as possible, that stability, certainty, continuity and strength characterize the senior leadership team who will help keep this campus moving forward and who will greet and support Chico State’s next president. And I will provide the campus with greater specificity on the steps that I will be taking to this effect with the full support and concurrence of the chancellor within the next few days.

There will be opportunities and occasions in the months ahead for you – and me – to reflect on our time together. And, especially, for me to say “thank you” to all of you.

But there are promises to keep this year and a few more miles yet to travel on this journey with you.

So, for now, and as always for your kind attention to my remarks at these convocations and your great support for Yasuko and me personally, from the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Please join us at the reception over in the BMU. And let’s have a great year together.

August 20, 2015