



From the President's Desk

The Heart of the Matter

California State University, Chico is, above all else, a center for learning. Our first priority is the promotion, creation, and support of an environment that fosters learning and the joys of its lifelong pursuit. Both our Strategic Plan and our recently approved Master Plan reinforce this priority. Although the most obvious expressions of our learning community are our degree programs, we know that learning occurs beyond classrooms and studios, lecture halls and laboratories. It occurs everywhere and any time. This learning culture without boundaries or borders guides and challenges us.

While we share with many other institutions of higher education a focus on student learning and success, what distinguishes us is the manner and the commitment of our faculty and staff to our students and their education. In this special issue of *Chico Statements*, we examine how the University approaches student learning through some of the exemplary programs and people that translate a good intention into a distinctive reality. I hope it conveys a sense of the University's long-standing commitment to the success of our students and our record of achievement in this regard.

We chose six areas to highlight in this issue. The Honors Program opens new vistas for students with small classes and creative approaches to general education. Service learning offers thousands of students meaningful experiences away from campus. Leadership programs cultivate outstanding student leaders on campus and in the community. The First-Year Experience program creates new connections for freshmen adjusting to college. The Commission on Campus Life leads an effort to establish new standards for student behavior. Co-curricular programs provide healthy activities that enrich the lives of half of all students enrolled at Chico State.

Learning is not something that just happens to a student. It is not a spectator sport. It requires energy, time on task, a willingness to explore one's intellect and values, and an environment that makes all of this possible. The keys, of course, to that environment are faculty and staff who recognize that learning is an integrative and collaborative venture and who seek to develop in students a capacity for such learning throughout their entire life.

In the words of author and civil rights activist Marion Wright Edelman, we "educate students not just to make a living, but to make a life." We emphasize that the capacity to learn finds its fullest expression in the use of knowledge to improve self and society. We believe that the goals of self-discovery and service are connected and complementary.

Since colonial times, American colleges have been envisioned as a social investment, focused largely on preparing new generations for democratic leadership and participation. As such, they are instruments of direct service to their communities. Chico State is mindful of this heritage and obligation. Whether it is supporting small businesses, improving irrigation systems, protecting wildlife, forecasting economic developments, fostering community arts programs, teaching writing in the rural North State, assisting tribal communities in cultural preservation, or addressing hundreds of other needs, our faculty and staff engage students not only in their work but also in the habits of citizenship through service.

Every day I see our students bringing what they are learning to bear in improving our campus and community. The Associated Students testified before the Chico City Council in support of a measure that would fine property owners for violations of noise and safety ordinances. Our Greek community raised nearly \$30,000 in a fun-filled day for the Boys and Girls Club. I joined our students for both of these events and was amazed and gratified by their passion and generosity. This kind of engagement involves learning that is informed by understanding. For what occurs is more than applied learning; it is engaged living.

At Chico State, we believe that civic engagement starts with the relationship that students have with the University, which must communicate its expectations clearly and consistently. The dedication of faculty and staff are critical to the integrity of the message. So, too, are the opportunities that the University provides both within and beyond the formal academic curriculum. When we are successful, we develop the skills and form the attitudes that foster democratic engagement and promote respect, civility, and altruism.

Over the course of the past academic year, the University has had many chances to re-examine the message of engagement and to assess how well we are doing, or not, in developing in our students an appreciation for how their behaviors and choices affect their own learning and those around them. We are constantly impressed with the goodness and giving that characterize our students. Whether assuming

statewide leadership in sustainability issues, celebrating the 40th anniversary of CAVE (Community Action Volunteers in Education), documenting the peace process in Ireland, managing a successful referendum to build a student recreation center, providing alcohol-free entertainment alternatives, working with University police to make our campus safer, and raising funds and awareness for Habitat for Humanity, St. Jude Children's Hospital, and countless other community causes and services, our students give back, and pay forward, joyfully and genuinely. They inspire us.

But, occasionally, some disappoint us.

Over the past academic year, we witnessed some very regrettable student behaviors. As reported in the spring 2005 *Chico Statements*, a student died in February as a result of hazing activities at a fraternity not recognized by the University. Several students, including one with a blood alcohol content six times over the legal limit, were transported to Enloe Hospital for the emergency treatment of alcohol poisoning. Another fraternity, this one recognized nationally and by the University, participated in the production of a pornographic video at its house during an alcohol-fueled party.

All of these behaviors brought scorn upon the University and skepticism about our resolve and effectiveness in dealing with alcohol-related problems. And all of these behaviors spurred us to assure our campus community, city neighbors, alumni, parents, and friends that they do not define who we are or what we stand for.

Some of you are familiar with these incidents and the actions that the University has taken, including the development of a comprehensive reform plan for the Greek system at Chico State and the establishment of a commission on campus life. What guides all of our actions is the goal of aligning individual behaviors with institutional values. The charters of the Greek organizations, for example, are complete with noble qualities: friendship, unity, respect, dignity, service, leadership, citizenship, integrity. Our challenge to them is simple: You are either who you say you are, or you are frauds. You are either true to your claims, thus earning a place in our community, or you are not, and there is no place here for those who do not live up to their own promises.

Civic engagement is a key to our efforts. We aim to engage students in the responsibilities of University citizenship, to enlist their good hearts and good intentions in creating a safe, supportive, civil, and respectful living and learning environment that fosters student success.

As John Wooden, the great basketball coach at UCLA, once said: "The crime is not to fail; it is to aim too low." Our aim regarding the kind of community we are building and the kind of students we are educating is very high, because high performance occurs within a framework of high expectations. Our faculty and staff, as the stories in this issue illustrate, are committed to our students meeting and exceeding these expectations. I know you will find in the pages to follow evidence of these efforts, which help to make Chico State a truly distinctive place, a truly remarkable learning community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. J. ...', written in a cursive style.

—President