

A Place of People and Ideas
Opening Convocation Address
August 19, 2004
Paul J. Zingg

Good afternoon. And welcome all of you to the start of the new academic year. We have a budget that's a little better than what we had when the spring term ended; we have an enrollment picture that's a little stronger than our initial planning estimates; and we have new colleagues – and the energy and enthusiasm they bring – in our midst. We have good reasons to be positive and confident. But lest I lead you in chanting “help is on the way” or “we’ve turned the corner,” let me stick to a non-partisan message and emphasize, first of all, how very pleased I am to have this opportunity to address this University community – in many respects, my first opportunity – since joining you about six months ago.

We are assembled this afternoon as a community of colleagues and partners and friends and I want to acknowledge right at the outset some of the folks who are here, some new and some not so new but who are in new positions. First, our new faculty and staff. New members of administration – please welcome our new dean of the College of Communications and Education, Phyllis Fernlund; Steve Adams as interim dean in Business for another year, and becoming something like sixth in seniority among business deans in the CSU as a result; Byron Jackson as interim dean of Behavioral and Social Sciences; Susan Place as dean of Graduate, International and Interdisciplinary Studies; Katie Milo who has accepted the dual challenge of being both the chair of Journalism and the interim vice provost for research; upon consulting with the Executive Council of the Senate and the Executive Management Evaluation and Development

Committee, to remove “interim” from his title and to appoint with gratitude for two more years Jim Moon as our vice-president for student affairs (we will launch a national search for Jim’s successor next year); Bob Alber as interim associate vice-president for Advancement; and I’d like to acknowledge Ann Schwab of Staff Council, Marc Siegall of the Academic Senate and campus CFA president Susan Green for leadership in the Save the CSU Coalition and its impact on restoring funds – some \$40 million to the overall CSU budget – to support student access.

Throughout the audience are several members of the University’s various advisory boards and councils, including the University Advisory Board, the Research Foundation, the University Foundation, the advisory boards of the Colleges of Agriculture, Business, and Engineering, and our alumni organization. These folks volunteer for such service because they believe in what we’re about. They bring their passion and perspective to bear in enabling us to connect to the constituencies we serve beyond the campus and in helping us to tell the Chico story. They are good friends and true and I’d like to ask all of them to stand to be recognized.

Several folks requested the opportunity to address you as well this afternoon, and that may be the case in future opening convocations. But, with one important exception, I explained that I wanted to have this time with you to share my impressions and to lay-out some thoughts and challenges for the year ahead and beyond. The one important exception is not an exception at all, that is, not a departure from that which these occasions should always be mindful and focused. To bring you greetings on behalf of about 15,000 of his closest friends and classmates, I am pleased to introduce the president of the Associated Students, Adam Dondro.

Thank you, Adam.

As you entered the auditorium this afternoon, you were greeted with a set of images which Kathy Fernandes, Chris Ficken and, especially, Tony Dunn of the Instructional Media Center, with the invaluable assistance of Deb Besnard in Library Special Collections, have put together. Many of these images, especially the portraits and campus shots, are the work of Jeff Teeter. Many of you have found assistance in the Instructional Media Center and my first visit to the center, the week **after** Commencement, found the place abuzz with activity as faculty pursued their own research and worked on their course materials for the **next** academic year. Every available work station was occupied. I was as pleased to note that as I was to see the hundreds of our faculty participating in the May Commencement ceremonies.

This kind of dedication to what binds us together – teaching and learning – and what commands our attention – our students – is the Chico way. It is not necessarily this way elsewhere – where faculty flee the campus as quickly as they can turn in their final grades, where they give nary a thought to how honored their students would be by their presence at their Commencement. Yes, I was pleased to see this because I had not seen it before in the Ivy League or at a highly regarded private institution in California or at another CSU campus. But I saw it here. And six months into my presidency with you, I have a clearer idea of why I saw what I did and how these revelations define the people, the place, and, yes, the idea of our University.

My remarks this afternoon will focus on both the initial impressions I have formed about Chico State and some of my own notions of distinction for a university that I look forward to exploring with you. Lest I hold you in suspense, though, let me say at

the outset that what I have found is that which I have sought and expected: an institution rich in spirit – spirit of inquiry, community, service and place; and an institution joined in purpose – to be a community of learning and excellence worthy of the trust that our students and the people of California have placed in us. If leadership is anything, it is recognizing strengths in the institution, indeed, in the culture of the institution; asserting the wisdom and validity of that culture; and assembling the friends and the resources to support it. This is a challenge that I welcome taking on with you.

The visuals that greeted you as you arrived here for this convocation – and which will be shown in entirety again at the conclusion of my remarks – depict the essence of a university – a place of people and ideas. And, as two of Chico State’s best known historians, W. H. “Old Hutch” Hutchinson and Clarence McIntosh, described in their fine history of the University’s early years, we are defined and blessed by “a precious sense of place.”

About half of these images are about the physical place of our campus and its larger setting in northern California – the spaces of spectacular beauty and intimacy and meaning that are our heritage, our responsibility to protect, and our promise to keep to those who have preceded and those who will succeed us. The other half are about the people of our campus. Again, some folks who have come before us, but, mostly, people who are our colleagues and companions now and who have particularly distinguished themselves and our University over the last year.

People like:

The foursome of Paul Spear, Laird Easton, Sara Trechter and Sue Ward, who, respectively, were the recipients of our awards in 2004 for Outstanding Faculty Service, Outstanding Professor, Outstanding Teacher, and Outstanding Staff Employee.

Matthew Brown, recipient of the 2004 Young Botanist Award.

Dominique Ralph, recipient of the 2004 Phi Eta Sigma Freshmen Honor Society Award.

The Civil Engineering students who comprise our Steel Bridge Team, which earned a bid to the national competition for a record eighth consecutive year.

Victoria Bernhardt, a member of the faculty of Professional Studies in Education, who received a Distinguished Achievement recognition, the highest award for alumni, from her alma mater, Iowa State University.

Rich Rosecrance of the College of Agriculture who is off to South Africa on a Fulbright, and who joins Political Science professor Donna Kemp, who is off this week to Latvia, as well as Tony Graybosch, Barney Hope, Lee Altier and Tony Walters as other recent Fulbright recipients.

Jan O'Donnell, professor of Social Work, who received a grant of \$910,000 from the University of California to support her research and our curriculum in child welfare.

Richard Narad of the Department of Health and Community Services, not only the campus Outstanding Advisor for 2004 but the recipient of the national Outstanding Advising Award, given by the National Academic Advising Association.

Our Students in Free Enterprise team, advised by professor of accounting and management information systems, Curt DeBerg, which finished sixth nationally among 144 institutions in the national competition in Kansas City.

J.J. Jacovak, twice the individual champion in Division-II golf and among twenty-two Chico State All-Americans in 2003-2004. The performances of these student-athletes and their teammates led Chico State to a 5th place ranking among all 282 Division-II schools nationally for the overall success of our teams. This is the highest we've ever attained and it's all the more remarkable because most of the other D-II institutions have several more intercollegiate sports teams than us.

Byron Wolfe of our Communication Design faculty who won the 2004 Santa Fe Center Prize for Photography, a highly prestigious award that recognizes both the work and promise of a gifted photographer.

Lindsay Meggs, the coach of our College World Series participating Wildcats and the Western Regional coach of the year. Six other Chico State head coaches received 2004 West Region Coach of the Year honors, including Mike O'Malley, national coach of the year for men's soccer.

Elizabeth Coudright, a sociology major and a recipient of the 2004 Hearst/CSU Trustees' Award for Outstanding Achievement

Don and Carolyn Heinz, who spent five months eating blueberries and saving souls as 17th century Puritans for the PBS-TV program "Colonial House."

MESA Program Director Paul Villegas presenting Cyndi Ting with one of the scholarships that have come from the over \$1 million in National Science Foundation grants which Paul and his colleagues have won for the University.

Yes, a university is a place of people and ideas. But place is not just the space we occupy, that is, the 119 acres of our campus core and the 800 more of the campus farm. It is the position we hold, the functions we perform, not just in our region, but in the

larger landscape of higher education in this State and in this nation. And this is a place, or station, that, too, is deep in history and rich in responsibility. It is well to reflect on it a bit.

Since the founding of the colonial colleges – Harvard College was the first in 1636 – American institutions of higher education have been committed as much to the development of individual character and the quality of the mind as to the building of community. Those early colleges were envisioned as a social investment, focused largely on preparing new generations for democratic leadership and participation. As such, they were instruments of direct service to an emerging new nation.

The establishment of land-grant colleges after 1862 sharpened this sense of service. What emerged was the vision of a marriage between the intellectual and the utilitarian. For late nineteenth-century America, this meant applying knowledge to solve the daunting problems confronting the country in an era of rapid social, technological and economic change. Across the spectrum of American higher education – public and private, rural and urban, land-grant and liberal arts – a proud service mission matched the mood and needs of the nation. A strong consensus of public policy and institutional engagement formed to underscore the critical role of higher education in serving the needs of a democratic national community. For faculty, in particular, public service increasingly became regarded not just as legitimate work, but privileged.

We at Chico State and throughout the California State University are the inheritors of this tradition. Building upon the common mission of the CSU – to provide high quality, affordable higher education to meet the ever-changing workforce needs of the people of California – Chico State has articulated service as a fundamental tenet of its

identity and strategic plan. Moreover, we emphasize not only the obligations of service, but also the value of service to others in defining our institutional character. We recognize, in other words, that the congruence of individual and institutional goals and values is a hallmark of a high quality and high morale educational community.

Meeting the workforce needs of the people of California is a specific obligation of the CSU, but it is only one expression of Chico State's service record. Through CAVE and CLIC and other voluntary service organizations and efforts, for example, our students provide tens of thousands of hours of service each year to local and regional beneficiaries. Our fine and performing arts programs, our several lecture series and symposia, so enrich the cultural and intellectual climate of our campus and community with over five hundred events a year that it is difficult to imagine what a vastly different place the University and surrounding area would be without them. Through the effective use of technology and innovative partnerships, such as the Northern California K-16 Partnership, and the broad range of programs in the Center for Regional and Continuing Education, we deliver instruction throughout the North State and collaborate with other higher education providers and promoters to encourage greater college participation among the region's residents. Our Center for Economic Development is getting close to marking twenty years of promoting economic prosperity among Northern California communities. The newly formed North State Renewable Energy group led by Provost McNall and City Councilor Dan Nguyen-Tan brings together public and private sector leaders to promote the application of renewable energy and conservation best practices and technology in our region. The priority project list for 2004-2005 for the Butte County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy includes a dozen or more items

that depend heavily upon the expertise among our faculty, especially in Agriculture, Business and Engineering. The promise of a Northern California Natural History Museum is an exemplary public/private partnership that will enhance mutual trust, serve the mission of the University, and support the vision of our friends and neighbors in Chico. And the largest portion of the nearly \$30 million of grant and contract activity our faculty manage each year is focused on improving the quality of life for North State residents.

Obviously, this is not the sum total or the full list of our University's service record and activity. But these are representative engagements that underscore two key, interrelated elements of effective service.

First, service flows not only from the inclination to serve, but also the capacity to do so. Our institutional capacity is predicated on the expertise of our faculty and staff and their ability to bring that expertise to bear not only in teaching and supporting our students, but also in addressing the needs of the University's local and regional communities. For faculty, especially, their effectiveness in helping the University fulfill its mission of teaching and service builds on the broad associational ties of their disciplines and the opportunities for discourse in them. The bottom line is clear: the University must invest in the currency of its faculty as a means to strengthen the capacity and credibility of its service through them.

Along these lines, I am very pleased to announce a gift of over \$2 million from the estate of emeritus faculty David Lantis and his wife, Helen. David was a member of our geography faculty, retiring in 1983, and Helen a librarian in the Chico Unified School District. Throughout his nearly three decades at Chico State, David made many

monetary gifts to the University. But he saved his best for last. The purpose of their gift, the largest gift for an endowed position in the history of the University, is to endow a chair at the University and they have left open for our determination in what area that endowed position will be and other details of its establishment. It is the best kind of gift – lots of vision and lots of discretion. The gift also provides funds to support the Presidential Scholars program, thus enabling us to strengthen our ability to attract highly qualified students who will designate Chico State as their higher education institution of first choice. I have asked Provost McNall to work with the deans and me to develop the guidelines for the Lantis endowment and I expect we will announce its first recipients this academic year.

Second, a regional service emphasis is far from implying a provincial academic outlook, identity or reputation. Even though the twelve counties of the North State, an area as large as the state of Indiana with about 2% of the total population of California in it, constitute the largest service region for any campus in the CSU, the basis of our ability to serve this region well extends even further. It is built upon the strength and breadth of the faculty's professional engagements, a certain cosmopolitan orientation that enables their participation in the cutting edge conversations of their national and international disciplinary communities. Although faculty research and scholarship at an institution like our's is not principally oriented to establishing the frontiers in one's field, faculty should know, nonetheless, what is happening at the borders of their disciplines. Moreover, in seeking to connect and apply that knowledge to the communities we serve, faculty should be confident that such work matters in the overall scheme of their careers and the academy's reward structure.

Connecting faculty work to the needs and quality of a democratic society effects a powerful affirmation: we are an **American** university and we are **the** university of the North State. Our future is tied to the traditions of the former and focused on the obligations of the latter. Our future is rooted in the very idea of the American academy and its most distinctive element – the promise of service. And our future is in this mission and in this community.

Our future, too, is not only in the ideas we encounter and debate – including those of my own – but also in the spirit of that engagement. For the best places, the finest academies, are defined not just by what is said, but the manner of the saying. The best places, the finest academies, define discourse as much more than a rhetorical exercise or a series of drive-by debates and they embrace a certain morality of learning, certain right rules of conduct, to ensure that this is the case. These rules fundamentally focus on reason and respect, civility and community.

No values of the academy are higher for me. And I look constantly for ways, both concrete and symbolic, to celebrate and to live them. Among the features of our campus that afford such an opportunity are our several bridges, which span Chico Creek. The “Building Bridges” program, for example, although it does not incorporate the actual bridges of the campus into its framework, clearly appreciates the metaphorical power of bridges and how one’s space and views are enlarged through connections and crossings.

Recognizing the symbolism in bridges, several students, staff and faculty among the “Building Bridges” group and others have proposed the designation of one of our campus bridges as “the bridge of respect.” The group imagined the construction of a

superstructure over the bridge that would evoke a message of different peoples sharing a common dream of hope and tolerance.

I appreciate very much the good intentions of this idea, but I am also mindful of the lovely harmony on this campus – indeed, the respect – between the natural environment and the built environment and I would not want to jeopardize that harmony in any way that contradicted the purposes of an initiative focused on respect. Instead, I've suggested that we look at our bridges in a more integrated and holistic fashion, so that instead of building a structure above one of them, we celebrate our values through all of them. One way to do this is to develop more fully a creek walk which focuses on the bridges of Chico State and the water way that runs through our campus. Through signage, interpretive panels, benches and other ways to enhance the setting of the creek for contemplation and conversation, we could both protect a precious asset and find new ways to discover enjoyment and meaning in it. Accordingly, this summer I convened a group to explore this idea and I expect that we will soon see a proposal for campus consideration that emphasizes our system of bridges as something to be highly regarded, not simply taken for granted.

Our bridges, as one element of a rich and unique campus visual vocabulary, afford practical connections – between the University and downtown Chico, between the University and residential neighborhoods, between campus disciplinary communities, between the natural environment and the built, and, yes, between those who dwell in the light of academic activity on one side of the creek and those who harbor the dark secrets of the administration on the other. These bridges mark different boundaries, but they also afford seamless relationships. They are a powerful metaphor for distinction, because the

best places, the finest academies, balance the particular and the general, that is, they acknowledge the certain pull of disciplinary identity and loyalty, but they place them within the context of a common commitment to approach learning as an integrative endeavor, not a detached one. This is the essence of a learning community – common commitment, connected purpose, and the realization that we teach with joy so that our students can learn with hope. How we respect, imagine and develop the physical space of our campus is a reflection of how we respect, imagine and develop our work here together.

In order to ensure a tighter relationship between the physical development of the campus and its reflection of our institutional culture and values, and to communicate information about the facilities master plan to the campus, the city of Chico, the Chancellor's Office and others, I will now have the Campus Planning Committee report directly to me and engage the Cabinet in facilities master planning as a standing agenda item. Both of these steps will underscore the importance of campus planning, especially as we anticipate such new facilities as the student services center, a successor to Taylor Hall (with the next bond measure), a natural history museum, other academic buildings, additional student housing, and a recreation/activities center. And as we prepare our master plan for trustee review next spring. The student services center and the Taylor Hall replacement are particularly important because of their location along the First Street promenade. How we develop this area of the campus will say a lot about our identity and both the distinctive and seamless ways with which we interact with the city of Chico.

Our work together is enriched not only by the beauty of the space we share, but by several important understandings.

We share expectations of high standards.

We ensure openness of expression.

We teach not only with the command of our disciplines, but with the force of personal example, bringing such qualities as kindness, decency, civility, personal integrity and intellectual honesty to our interactions with each other and our students and enabling us to transmit knowledge with effectiveness and enthusiasm.

We pursue diversity as a fundamental value because what is at stake is not only the preparation of our students for a pluralistic society, but also the elevation and strengthening of that society itself. Moreover, we pursue diversity not just as an idea to embrace, but as a community to form. Diversity is not merely an intellectual exercise: it is a commitment to enrich the social, cultural and intellectual fabric of our campus by increasing the numbers in our own faculty, staff and student diversity communities. Remember, we are a place of **people** and ideas.

We promote active learning, that fine balance between the abstract and the applied, between the learning that occurs in our classrooms and studios and laboratories and that which occurs through clubs and service and other expressions of a healthy student life environment.

We celebrate a distinctive institutional culture through a strong sense of place and respect of our natural environment.

But just as action without understanding has no meaning; understanding without action has no consequence. Our challenge is to make this vision of distinction practicable and compelling.

We will do so in several ways.

We will build our resource base on a four-pillared platform of State support, fair student fees, effective and wise stewardship of all our resources, and private support.

Regarding the latter, in particular, whether we call it advancement, development, or just fundraising, we face the harsh reality, as revealed in the Governor's compact for higher education, that the State will no longer provide the funds that are necessary even to meet our basic needs. Private support is no longer largely about the wherewithal to provide a margin of excellence, it is about the resources to enable basic operations.

As I mentioned in an *Inside Chico State* column in February, advancement is much more than fundraising and institutional promotion. It is, in fact, a means "to do good" and "to make better." It is to enable us to prosper in our mission.

These are notions of advancement that emphasize improvement, signal positive momentum, and convey a feeling of noble and connected purpose. The best places, the finest academies, are marked by a sense of institutional momentum that flows from the recognition that we are in this together. And all of us should know and be able to articulate what binds us together. We should appreciate the different roles we have in moving the institutional agenda forward – from grounds keeping to record keeping, from conducting laboratories to cleaning them, from recruiting students to feeding them – and feel both pride and confidence in the goodness and nobility of our connected work. As we all contribute to the spirit of this place, we are all capable of shaping and telling its story. And make no mistake about it, our story is about teachers and scholars who achieve distinction both in the classroom and beyond, about staff who serve our students and campus faithfully and effectively, about students who learn, and alumni who succeed. Our story is about promise and passion and an ongoing, unfinished agenda to

fulfill the former and to live the latter. “Life is action and passion,” said Oliver Wendell Holmes, and our story – our connected story – is about a place which sings with life and hope.

Before this new academic year is completed, we will have reexamined our entire Advancement effort and taken sure steps to build an operation that supports advancement activities at the college and divisional levels and strengthens the needs of the central advancement office. For we need to do both. We will revive the search for a chief advancement officer for the University, a search which was put on hold while I assessed our status and needs in these matters, and we will take the initial steps towards developing a major capital campaign that will be geared around the celebration of our 125th year in 2012. That campaign, as for all our advancement efforts, will be guided, first and foremost, by our primary focus on teaching and learning as the previously mentioned Lantis gift underscores.

We will form partnerships with our local and regional diversity communities in order to encourage higher college attendance rates among their members, to strengthen their perception of us as their university and a source of support and assistance to address their needs over the long term, and to advance the values and expressions of the good community, especially those that foster behaviors and attitudes to defeat bigotry and intolerance. We will model these behaviors on our campus, including, especially, the message that we are a safe, supportive and welcoming community for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion or sexual orientation.

Along these lines, and in keeping with a larger North State initiative, I have asked president emeritus Manuel Esteban to assist me in building deeper partnerships with

those in our service region who share these goals, especially the goal of serving regional educational needs and encouraging greater college participation. I am delighted that Manuel eagerly looks forward to doing this and continuing to serve the University.

Guided by our strategic plan, and the processes we have in place for genuine consultation and participatory leadership in setting direction for the University, we will demonstrate a real determination to allocate resources in terms of clearly articulated priorities and how those priorities contribute to making the University more outstanding than it now is in teaching, academic support services, academic reputation and service. We look forward, in particular, to the presentation of our master plan to the trustees in the spring and revealing to them, especially those who really don't know us very well, that being a "hot" campus is not the product of a meteorological condition, it is the consequence of professional dedication.

We have enormous evidence to this effect, as my remarks have noted. This evidence is nicely summed in the latest *US News & World Report* rankings, which will be formally announced tomorrow. We continue to enjoy our highest ranking ever, counted among the top three public comprehensive institutions in the West. Congratulations to all of us!

We will meet more fully the expectations of our students that we mean what we say in our strategic plan about the primacy of their learning and their success as good people and engaged citizens. Since the way in which our students start their university experience is so critical to their emotional well-being, intellectual development and the attainment of their educational goals, we will devote particular attention and resources to the First-Year Experience. As many of you know, and are already involved, a university-

wide effort along these lines has been underway for over a year. We need now to weave the principles and goals of this effort into the very fabric of the university so that our new students start well, stay with us, and graduate from us in timely fashion. This will require a campus-wide commitment that engages faculty, staff and students in its fulfillment. I look forward to the recommendations of the First-Year Experience implementation working group to this effect.

We will continue to build bridges – to our neighbors local and regional, to the world beyond, to our past and to our future, to greater intellectual integration and collaboration, to understanding and to hope. We will continue to build these bridges because we enlarge and enrich our space through connections.

The protagonist in E. M. Forster’s *Howard’s End* said it this way: “Only connect the passion and the prose.”

We aim to be a University where the passion is the prose – where devotion to, and sustenance of, the spirit of inquiry and community, service and place is our story. A story that depends on each of us and whose next chapters will be our best. We should aim for no less because high performance is the reward of high expectations.

I am honored and thrilled, I think more than I can truly say, to have become part of the story of Chico State University. I can’t wait to see how, together, we will develop it further. Thank you and all of our colleagues for what you do for our University. And thank you for your kind reception to my arrival and attention to my remarks this afternoon.

Now, I think we have time for a question or comment or two, but we do have a reception awaiting outside. Also, we'll replay the entire slide show as we finish up in here. So please stay and enjoy it again, if you'd like.

Now, any questions or comments?