To: Campus Community  
From: Paul J. Zingg, President  
Subject: Commencement changes

As many of you who have attended Commencement know, our spring graduation exercises and other celebrations are very popular and do an outstanding job showcasing our successful graduates.

Unfortunately, the undergraduate Commencement, held on the Saturday and Sunday after finals week, has become so popular that it has created problems for our venue, the University Stadium. Upwards of 10,000 people attend Commencement on both Saturday and Sunday, when in recent years we typically have had 1,500 or more graduates participating either day. Attendees fill the 8,000 stadium seats while those who can’t find seats stand or sit on the track surrounding the area where the graduates and platform party are located.

Naturally, as our enrollment has grown over the years, so, too, has the number of graduates and those who wish to attend Commencement. Simply put, there are now too many people at these events for the size and dimensions of the stadium. Because we are unable to safely accommodate everyone who wants to attend Commencement in the stadium, we must make changes starting this spring.

I want to be very clear that this is a serious safety consideration. Our Public Safety Advisory Committee, comprised of faculty, staff and administrators, has concluded that emergency evacuations are threatened by the number of people in the stadium at Commencement. Police, fire and other first responders could not respond quickly and effectively enough if there was a medical emergency or immediate need to evacuate the stadium. The committee’s finding was carefully reviewed by the Council of Academic Deans, the Commencement Committee and Cabinet and all agreed we could not continue with the Saturday and Sunday undergraduate Commencement with no limit on the number of people attending.

As a result, for the Commencement exercises May 17 and May 18, 2014, we will be using a ticketing system to keep the stadium audience at a safe size. There is no charge for Commencement tickets. Each graduating student can obtain up to five tickets for their family and friends for attending Commencement in the stadium, and additional tickets on a first-come basis for viewing Commencement broadcast live at either Laxson Auditorium or Harlen Adams Theatre. We will also be setting up a big screen at an outdoor site on campus for all other people who want to watch Commencement. No tickets are necessary to view the Commencement ceremony at the outdoor site. Whether in the stadium or at one of the other venues, we should be able to accommodate everyone who wants to view the event. We also plan to stream the Commencement exercises live on the Web, as we did last year.
Given our safety concerns, we want as many friends and family members of graduates to attend Commencement as possible. For that reason we have asked one of the colleges to move its Commencement exercises from the stadium to reduce the overall number of graduates, and thus the attendees, in the stadium. The College of Agriculture will have its own Commencement ceremony Saturday morning, May 17, 2014, in Laxson Auditorium, prior to the Commencement in the stadium. Agriculture was chosen because the expected number of graduates and attendees best fit the capacity of Laxson. By moving the Agriculture Commencement, and estimating the number of other graduates, it resulted in up to five stadium tickets per graduate, the maximum number we could allocate and achieve our goal of a safe number of stadium attendees.

Graduating students will be able to request stadium and other venue tickets starting on April 1. More information about our new ticketing process will be shared with you and the students as soon as it is available. Here is a link to a series of FAQs about ticketing and other arrangements for the May 17 and May 18, 2014 Commencement: http://www.csuchico.edu/commencement/Tickets.shtml. For additional questions, please contact commencement@csuchico.edu.

I know that these new arrangements may disappoint some graduating students, families and friends. I have met many graduates who have had up to 12 family members and friends come to the stadium to watch them walk across the stage. Please know we will make every effort to work with graduates to utilize every stadium ticket available and get any extras to those who want them. We will also do everything we can technically and artistically to make the live broadcast a showcase for our graduates.

While it was an extremely difficult decision to limit the number of attendees in the stadium for Commencement, it had to be done. Safety comes first, and we cannot risk anyone’s well-being nor assume that some critical emergency will never occur. Thank you for your understanding and consideration as we make these necessary changes.