

**WELCOMING REMARKS FOR THE  
"EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION" CONFERENCE**

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University of California**

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**[TEXT AS PREPARED]**

I was very pleased to receive the invitation to this conference, and I am honored to have the opportunity to welcome you here this afternoon.

This is a tremendously important conversation to be having in America today, and in California specifically. You are a very impressive group of people to lead the discussion of these issues, and I am looking forward to hearing what you have to say. I hope and expect to learn a lot from you, and to walk away with a lot of new ideas.

Let me thank the Harvard Civil Rights Project for bringing this event to California, and let me thank the many people at UC who have contributed to making it a successful event. I particularly want to thank Professor Patricia Gándara, who not only has played a key role in organizing this event, but who for years has been a committed and effective advocate at the University of California for equitable access to higher education – both for students and for faculty. Patricia, thank you for all of your work in this area.

I am going to direct many of my comments to the situation at the University of California. That's because it's the institution I know best, because I have thought about these issues largely in the California context, and because I know that UC issues are prominently featured on your agenda.

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN QUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

When I was appointed president back in June, I told a press conference that my highest priority was preserving and enhancing the quality of the University of California. Given some of the responses to those remarks, I think a good place to start today is to dispel any misperceptions and explain the relationship I see between diversity and quality.

I believe that diversity is a legitimate and compelling interest for a public university in America today. And diversity and quality, particularly in a state like California, are inextricably intertwined.

Put simply, diversity adds to the quality of an academic institution. There is no conflict or compromise. On the contrary, a monolithic student body or faculty results in a lower-quality education.

Historically, the responsibility of the University of California has been to educate California's very best students and to draw them from all walks of life. High quality and broad access are our mandate.

The challenges associated with fulfilling that mandate are harder today than ever before. That's because the pace of demographic change is fast, state law prohibits consideration of race in our admissions and financial aid processes, and the state's budget challenge threatens to choke off access to college for large numbers of students.

But I believe we have to find ways of continuing to meet our historical commitments to the people of the state we serve – both now and 10-20-30 years in the future.

I often explain it to audiences this way: What we must do at the University of California is take students from all corners of California, from all walks of life, and prepare them. We must prepare them to maximize their creative powers, and we must prepare them to compete and lead in the global society and economy.

But we also must prepare them to deal with the world. As 18-year-olds, they come in from many different backgrounds and cultures, with many different beliefs and skill sets. At the University, we put them all together, so that they live with each other and learn to deal with each other – and thus are better prepared to live in the incredibly diverse world that awaits them outside. Ideally, they develop an understanding and respect for each other – we may disagree, certainly, but we respect each other as we disagree.

That is a critical function we must perform for California. And I believe the future success of our state – measured by its economy, measured by its quality of life – is highly dependent on our success in performing this function.

When I told that press conference that quality was my top priority, I meant it. I truly did. But to me, the quality of the institution means several things.

It means the caliber of the faculty and the research they conduct, as measured by the most rigorous international standards and by our faculty's service contribution to our society.

It means the characteristics of the students we attract – students who have demonstrated high achievement in their own lives and show the promise to be part of our society's next generation of leaders.

It means the character of the student experience – do they get the classes they need to graduate on time; do they have an intellectually stimulating experience; does it prepare them to continue their education and consider learning a lifelong pursuit.

It means the impact of the institution on the society around it – through its research innovations, its workforce contributions, its delivery of health care, its contribution to the cultural and artistic world.

And quality also is measured by who is participating in all of this – who is touched by the work of the University and whether they are broadly representative of the society that supports the University in the first place.

I don't know that a public university can truly call itself "excellent" or "high quality" if it is not reaching all segments of the society around it – through its teaching, through its research, and through its public service activities. I say that not only with student access in mind, but in the context of staff and faculty diversity as well. That is another topic on your agenda for this conference, and it's a very important set of challenges to focus on.

Now, the obvious question is, how do we preserve this relationship at UC between quality and diversity – and make it even stronger – given the laws in California and the budgetary challenges we're facing? I would break the question into two parts – how we prepare students for college while they are in the K-12 school system, and how we then provide them with access to college.

### **IMPROVING PREPARATION IN BAD BUDGET TIMES**

The last budget in California cut by 50 percent the state's funding for UC outreach – our programs with K-12 schools to improve academic performance and college preparation.

That was a very distressing turn of events. We dramatically increased our involvement in the public schools several years ago, and we did so with the

recognition that it was not an “in and out” proposition – it would take literally years of dedicated, collaborative involvement to make a difference, starting with students in pre-kindergarten and continuing all the way through high school.

We’re looking right now at the best ways to preserve that involvement as best we can. But one thing is clear to me: No institution can do this work alone. Many institutions have much to contribute. And we need to do a better job of linking ourselves together.

I believe the segments of public education in California must collaborate and work constructively and seriously together to address the problem of preparation. The California Education Roundtable already has begun focusing on this, and as a member of that body, I will work to carry the conversation forward.

I believe – and Winston Doby, our vice president for educational outreach, is focusing intently on this – that even in an environment of constrained resources, we can continue making a difference for K-12 students if we work with our partners and we take a regionally based approach.

That means taking the educational players in a given region of California and getting them to work together, using whatever resources they have or can muster together, to have an impact on academic achievement in that region’s public schools.

## **CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO UC ADMISSIONS REFORMS**

The other piece of the puzzle is the enrollment piece. Once students become prepared, will there be a place for them at UC – and at CSU and the community colleges?

A bit of background: At UC, the admission process for entering freshmen consists of two parts. First, students become “eligible” for the system, as defined by grades in specific courses and test scores, which together determine the top 12.5% of the high school graduating class, as our Master Plan requires. All UC-eligible students historically have been guaranteed a place somewhere in the UC system.

Second, individual campuses select students from the eligibility pool based on a thorough review of each applicant’s file, looking at all their academic and personal achievements – what we call “comprehensive review.”

That kind of approach was validated by the recent Supreme Court decision on the University of Michigan, and I think it is the right approach for the University of California.

I remain committed to comprehensive review, as well as to the other admissions initiatives that the UC faculty and my predecessor, Dick Atkinson, launched in recent years – namely Eligibility in the Local Context and Dual Admissions, which focus on high achievement in the local school context as an indicator of promise and likely success at UC.

At UC San Diego, we've been admitting the top 4% of students since 1999 – and it's working very well, based on those students' performance at UCSD.

### **COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS TO PRESERVE THE MASTER PLAN**

Today, with so much uncertainty surrounding the next state budget, I also believe we need to think creatively about how to preserve the college dream for California's students. Again, as with the preparation issue, I come back to the theme of collaborating with the other segments of higher education.

UC, CSU, the community colleges, and the independent colleges and universities need to work together to ensure there are multiple, effective pathways to a bachelor's degree in California. That doesn't mean any segment shirking its responsibilities, but all working collaboratively in the best interests of the students.

We did this at UC San Diego with our "University Link" program providing high school seniors with a direct and guaranteed route to UCSD if they fulfilled specific requirements at a community college first.

I've instructed my staff to think in terms of working together with our educational partners to continue meeting the promise of the Master Plan, and I'm looking forward to some serious conversation with my colleagues in the other segments about this.

### **IMPORTANCE OF CLARITY FOR THE PUBLIC**

Finally, we at UC need to work on the clarity of our admissions procedures from the public's vantage point.

As you may know, several newspaper stories recently have questioned why some high-SAT-scoring students have been denied admission to UC Berkeley while some lower-SAT-scoring applicants have been admitted.

There are several good reasons underpinning that finding, and they have largely to do with those high-SAT students being from out of state, or applying in highly competitive engineering majors, or having low high school grades. But I want to make a couple of broader points on this, because they relate to this nexus of quality and diversity that I've been talking about.

I want to say, first of all, that it is important for the public to be able to question what we do at the University. Public institutions are accountable to the people, and I think we owe it to the public to make our processes as clear and understandable as possible.

I also believe that this current issue taps into some very real feelings among the public that we can't ignore – those held by parents of good students in good schools who have worked hard, done everything they were told, and still been turned away from their first-choice campuses.

We need to be sensitive to that. We need to be receptive to criticism, we need to look seriously at ourselves, and when we identify problems in our processes, we need to fix them.

But we also need to do a better job of helping people understand how these decisions get made in the first place. And if we do that – if we help people understand the process better – some of this furor that has come from comparing students' SAT scores may die down.

And rightfully so: Merit and promise come from much more than an SAT score. Creativity, imagination, motivation, and just plain work ethic have to account for something.

We also need to build understanding in California that UC is not a hierarchy – it's not a tiered system with a lone flagship and several lesser campuses. It is a true system of distinguished universities, six of them members of the Association of American Universities.

In that kind of system, there is no bright line in admissions – we don't just rank students from the top and allocate them out to the campuses. Indeed, every campus draws students from the full range of the eligibility pool, looking at the variety of qualifications they present.

I think that is the right approach if each of our campuses is to continue fulfilling the University of California's historical obligations – and if we are to provide the best possible educational experience for the students attending each one of those campuses.

## **NO ONE CAN DO IT ALONE**

I am going to stop talking in a moment, but I want to close where I began – and that’s with you, and why you’re here.

I believe you’re focused on one of the critical issues that will be facing higher education and our society over the next many years, both in California and across the nation.

We need fresh ideas, we need thoughtful exchange, and we need reasoned dialogue around these issues. I think that is exactly the kind of thing this conference will produce.

At UC San Diego, we did a lot of things to improve diversity. I made it one of my top priorities – I even named myself Chief Diversity Officer for the campus because I wanted to send a clear signal that diversity mattered to the institution.

I convened a lot of conversations about diversity, set up a lot of structures to promote it, and instituted a number of accountability measures to make sure we were pursuing it, fully within the guidelines of Proposition 209.

Some people dismiss what we did by saying there was more rhetoric than results. I disagree. First, the rhetoric actually is important. It’s important that people get the message very clearly, and that they get it straight from the top.

Second, I think we made some very good progress at UCSD in a lot of areas, though I will be the first to admit that we also have a lot of work left to do.

My point is that no one can do this work alone – not a chancellor, not a president, no one. I can do a certain amount – I can raise the issues, I can be a cheerleader for them, I can push and cajole and plead with people.

But I need the help of all those who share the vision of an institution that is both excellent and diverse – an institution that is excellent in part because it is diverse.

That’s why this conference is important, and that’s why I am looking forward to hearing your views and the findings of your research – both today and into the future. I’m sure you won’t be shy about sharing them with me.

Thank you very much.