

2021 Fall Welcome Address
President Mary A. Papazian
August 2021

Introduction and setting the stage

Hello, members of the San José State campus community! I am delighted to welcome all of you to the Fall 2021 semester.

And what a semester this promises to be! I, for one, am very much looking forward to the repopulation of our campus and getting back to some semblance of pre-pandemic normalcy.

Having said that, I know that we all are aware that we are still in the midst of a public health crisis. I very much appreciate how flexible and nimble our campus community has been throughout this period, and I know there remains anxiety for some about our return. As we do repopulate our campus, we must remain vigilant and flexible with our policy guidance and adherence to safety precautions.

I know we will continue to navigate the changing environment with kindness, understanding, and a caring attitude that focuses on the health and safety of all members of our community. Though it has become somewhat a cliché over these past months, we truly are in this together.

I remain confident that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, especially as more and more in our communities are vaccinated. As things do progress, I am hopeful that a resumption of re-campus life and operations be a refreshing change from the past year and a half. So I hope everyone can remain patient, look after yourselves and one another, and take the steps necessary to help us all return to the campus life that we know and love

The variety of “welcome back” activities that already are underway for our campus community

they transition into our campus community. We have a mix of approaches this year for how Weeks of Welcome can be accessed, with roughly 60 activities in a virtual format, more than 30 in-person, and the rest of them in a hybrid format. We have the activities arranged by themes, such as Academics, Spartan Spirit, Wellness, Social Justice, and Career, to make it as easy as possible for students to find and participate in them.

And a completely new initiative this Fall has been our Celebration of Faculty and Staff, which acknowledges the more than 15 months that we all have been away and working remotely. This really has been an effort to shower our staff and faculty with appreciation for all they have done to keep our university going during the pandemic, all in a spirit of coming together and demonstrating how much we treasure each other and the work we all continue to do.

Our “Welcome Back” events, by the way, are not limited to the confines of the campus! I can assure you that the San José community, particularly our downtown business community, welcomes us tremendously and is looking forward to our return as we once again become part of this thriving urban community.

I hope you will find time to participate in our “welcome back” activities and enjoy everything they have to offer. This has been such an unprecedented period, one hopefully we will never see again, so this is our opportunity to see our campus come back to life and to show this community what Spartan Spirit is all about. And who wouldn’t want to be a part of that?

Incoming class

Now I would like to turn my attention to our incoming Fall class.

Our enrollment numbers have remained strong, even during this pandemic half. In fact, our total Fall 2020 headcount enrollment exceeded Fall 2019 by 120 students, and California residents in particular continue to find SJSU an attractive landing spot.

Enrollment for Fall 2021 again will be solid, with total enrollment projected at more than 36,000.

We received more than 45,000 undergraduate applications for Fall 2021 and admitted nearly 26,000 first-time freshmen. Our transfer numbers also are impressive, with well over 10,000 upper division transfer applications. All told, 4,400 freshmen and 4,250 transfer students completed the Intent to Enroll process and thus have committed to attending San Jose State University.

Graduate applications took a small dip over last year.

In addition to our enrollment numbers, I wanted to take a moment to talk about how we have been working to support our students during the pandemic.

Our university was the beneficiary of nearly \$29 million in federal funding as a part of the Coronavirus Response & Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act. This provided direct funding to students who may have experienced loss of employment or other financial support due to the COVID-19 emergency. Another portion of the funding was designated for needed institutional support, while just over \$14 million was used to provide direct aid payments to students during the Spring 2021 semester.

In addition to this financial support, our own Financial Aid Office has awarded more than \$98 million in federal, state and institutional financial aid to over 18,000 undergraduate and graduate students to support their Fall 2021 semester studies.

Our students and their families are not immune to the financial struggles that have hit so many throughout the COVID-19 crisis, so we continue in our efforts to assist them as best we can. Our SJSU Cares program remains an excellent clearinghouse of all our student support services, including offerings such as the Spartan Food Pantry, housing assistance, and other resources.

As always—but especially this semester—we have been working very hard to create all of the right support systems for our new and returning students. Our Division of Student Affairs, in particular, has been burning the candle at both ends to make sure our new Spartan students have everything they need in order to settle in comfortably to their new campus environment.

They have done this through various programs, including freshman and first-year orientation that served more than 10,000 new students, as well as a host of college programs.

One new item I would like to call out is a new student success center to support our Asian Pacific Islander Desi/American

On July 1, we welcomed Richard Abeyta as the University Police Department's interim chief. We are in the process of launching a national search for the full time position and will make an announcement when that search process has completed.

In the meantime, we are very fortunate to have someone with Chief Abeyta's professional experience and skill. Perhaps most notably, Chief Abeyta knows our community very well, having previously served as SJSU University Police Chief from June 1988 until July 2004. So welcome back, Chief Abeyta!

We also were pleased earlier this year to welcome Junelyn Pangan Peepleas our inaugural Vice Provost for Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Analytics!

Among the diverse set of skills and experience Junelyn brings to SJSU are helping institutions like ours demonstrate their value and effectiveness. She also is an expert facilitator and organizer of accreditation and institutional site visits, while at the same time she cultivates teaching and learning pedagogies, fosters student success, and makes use of data and evidence to improve practices, programs, and policies. Welcome aboard, Junelyn!

Our Athletics team is also evolving, with a pair of terrific new additions that I know have our alumni and sports fans excited.

Jeff Konya was announced in June as our new Director of Athletics. I know our campus community will very much appreciate Jeff's commitment to the success of our student athletes, his integrity, and the innovation he has displayed throughout his career as an award-winning collegiate athletics administrator. Welcome, Jeff!

And Jeff will have a great team around him. Earlier this spring, we brought on board new men's basketball coach Tim Miles and I am confident Tim will elevate that program in similar fashion to what he did at Colorado State and the University of Nebraska. Great to have you with us, Tim!

Institutional Reports (WASC, Economic/Social Impact)

Before I delve into research, grad studies, international programs, the arts and other campus topics, I would like to mention a key, upcoming report that we can anticipate being made available soon.

This actually will be the second important report that we will have seen these past few months, the first being the inaugural Economic and Social Impact Study that was released in June. That report, which remains available via our website, offers a detailed look at the tangible influence SJSU throughout the City of San José, the greater Bay Area and the State of California.

Soon, we will unveil the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Institutional Report, developed as part of the WASC university assessment. The report really picks up right where the

We also continue to work on ways to support quality RSCA experiences for our students. As part of this commitment, the Office of Research has now launched the new Student RSCA Grant Initiative for undergraduate and graduate students. This increases the level of support amount from roughly \$1,000 to \$3,500 for each student project, and it also creates a new mentoring program that more effectively connects students and their faculty mentors that will help our students succeed in the RSCA experience.

As our campus community makes its way through the Fall Semester, I would encourage all of you to follow the progress of our Research and Innovation team and learn about the amazing work of our SJSU Scholars and their wonderful research and creative activity.

Whether you bookmark their website or follow them on their social media channels, keeping abreast of this important work is a great way for our students to learn about State's research and researchers in order to help them identify and expand on their own interests. For our faculty members, activities such as our Faculty Short Talks can help you to connect with your peers and colleagues in ways that might support your academic work and foster interdisciplinary collaboration. So please check out those and other events that will be coming up throughout the semester.

And lest I forget the Innovation side of "Research and Innovation," the newly formed Office of Innovation already is showing progress and will be launching great new programs this academic year.

The industry-sponsored Student Research Program for example, will help our students engage with industry with opportunities to license their developments.

A new startup incubator is in the works to launch this year in support of our student and faculty entrepreneurs from across campus. In the meantime, the Office of Innovation is active in protecting the intellectual property developed by our faculty and students. For many of you to whom this may apply, I encourage you to connect with the Office of Innovation to help protect your technology and explore opportunities to build and benefit from your intellectual property portfolio.

Graduate studies

Graduate education at SJSU is flourishing as we continue our quest to become known as Silicon Valley's Public Graduate School!

On the doctoral front, the first cohort of students in our independent Doctor of Nursing Practice program graduated in May, and we celebrated the one anniversary of our new audiology doctoral program with the very first cohort of students as they now embark on their clinical work.

Our doctoral program in occupational therapy is on track to accept its first group of students in the 2022-23 academic year, and we now are in active discussions with our colleagues in the University of California system about several possible new joint PhD programs.

Our master's students continue to excel. For example, we are proud of our own Lupe Franco, a student in our environmental studies master's program, for winning first place in the SJSU Grad Slam, and for winning the People's Choice award at the first CSUwide Grad Slam, which we hosted virtually in May.

I equally was delighted to see that Grace Sheffield, a recent graduate of our PhD program, was selected as the first recipient of the SJSU Graduate Student Award for Leadership.

This grant will fund 15 Alaska Native, American Indian and Native Hawaiian students to attend our Masters in Library Science program at the iSchool. The award supports our goal of creating access to relevant, high quality educational programs.

Technology

Now onto technology, always an important area at SJSU that underpins so much of what we do. Our technology team has been critical to our ability to pivot to a virtual environment during the pandemic, and I know we all appreciate them very much.

One of the new multi-year initiatives on which our IT is working a game-changer, really is a new Customer Relationship Management platform. When it is rolled out, this new CRM is expected to help us to engage and promote an impactful experience for all campus community members at all university touchpoints. More details will be forthcoming as we continue to plan for a launch of a phased approach to CRM implementation on our campus, most likely beginning in the second half of fiscal year-22. So stay tuned!

Also on the technology front, we are in the process of upgrading the WiFi coverage at the MLK Library with WiFi 6 which I am told will provide consistent high-speed WiFi for students and faculty for the Fall Semester.

This is not merely a “nice to have” upgrade, but actually a vital one for our students and other library patrons.

The updated technology greatly will improve the user experience for students, staff, and faculty members. The enhanced WiFi also will relieve network congestion and reduce dead spots and drops when students move around the library with their laptops or mobile devices.

So that’s indoor at the library, but what about outdoors on campus?

Well, we have put in place an initiative to blanket the majority of campus’s outdoor spaces with WiFi 6 connectivity by sometime this fall. Our students will love these upgrades! They will provide all new areas for students to study and work while staying safely distanced from others. For faculty, it offers a way to work while staying safely distanced from others.

I likely will post a blog piece about our campus's digital transformation in the coming months, but for now I will just say that we continue to drive our campus toward fully online processes while automating manual administrative processes wherever possible.

On the playing field, our 2020 Mountain West champion football team, that same team that generated such incredible excitement last year, has 62 returning letter winners and 23 starters back from last year's national championship team. No pressure, we know you will give it your all as you head into the season!

Our Mountain West champion women's tennis team returns its top seven players from the 2021 title team. They and so many of our Spartan athletic teams are looking forward to a successful year.

Earlier I mentioned that joining the San José State family for his first season is men's basketball head coach Tim Miles. Tim's first Spartan coaching victory this season will be his 400th as a men's basketball head coach, so we look forward to celebrating that milestone with him.

We also look forward to an October dedication of our new baseball facility at South Campus, and the start of construction of the Spartan Athletics Center at CEFCU Stadium this fall. So there are a lot of exciting things on the athletics front!

Arts

One aspect of the university and the community at large that is most eager to resume to pre pandemic life is the arts!

I believe we can expect a season of thoughtful and exciting expression and action through the newly launched H & A in Action initiative that integrates curriculum and programming in the humanities and the arts. This year, faculty and students will be exploring two contemporary and timely themes: Sustainable Futures and Racial Equity and Social Justice. There will be guest lectures, bootcamps, panel discussions and workshops, to name just a few programming features, as well as collaborative music projects, art exhibits, and so much more.

I personally am looking forward to a visit to our campus by Tracy K. Smith, Pulitzer Prize winner and recent Poet Laureate of the United States who will recite and talk about her recent poetry collection, *Life on Mars*.

The Racial Equity and Social Justice initiative will feature a lecture by the writer, activist and Black feminist Tricia Rose, and a variety of theatrical and musical productions are also on tap. Students also will engage in theater and storytelling workshops on how arts provide avenues of resistance against racism aimed at refugees, and will compare prewar and postwar social climates for Japanese immigrants in San Jose. Students in our Humanities and the Arts courses will have a chance to participate in our

It is wonderful to see how fully our arts and humanities programs and activities are coming back to life this semester. And there is so much more that I simply don't have time to mention, so please check out our College of Humanities and the Arts and the Hammer Theatre websites or subscribe to receive their updates to learn about everything that will be offered this semester throughout the year.

Conclusion

As I wrap up my remarks, I would like to remind everyone that it was one year ago this month that San José State University was ranked by Money magazine as the #1 Most Transformative University in the nation.

We are extremely proud of that distinction, of course, and it truly is a reflection of the incredible caliber of faculty, staff, and students that comprise our campus community.

There is no way to tell where we will land this year, or in years to come, in Money's rankings. But you know what? It hardly matters.

Certainly, strong rankings are wonderful, and it is always nice when we are recognized for the value we offer to our students and their families.

But we know who we are. We are Spartans, and we transform ~~live~~ally is that simple.

Welcome back to campus, everyone. I hope you have a rewarding semester! Thank you.

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