

## CONVOCATION REMARKS

### September 12, 2008

We have an enormously exciting opportunity ahead of us this academic year! As you know we are at the early stages of a campus planning process. This process challenges us to vision, to dream, and to imagine what USD will be, not in 2009 or in 2010, but in 2020. Not just what we will be in terms of our physical facilities, but more importantly what we will be as an academic and learning community. This is not just a challenge but an opportunity for us to think in the most creative way and in the most collective way about who we want to be and how we want to distinguish ourselves.

Our goal in planning is not to come up with an answer that is cast in stone. Rather, we are looking to establish some guideposts for our future. We could never anticipate all of the opportunities, challenges or issues that might be put in front of us over the next decade or more. Neither do we want to become totally reactionary and stumble into our future, without taking collective responsibility for it.

For a campus plan to be useful, it must not only be flexible, but most importantly it must be undergirded by our academic vision and aspirations. These are the foundation. The process for determining the academic vision that undergirds the plan often begins with taking stock of our current strengths and distinctions, so we can determine how we can build on what is unique to USD today. We need to begin by describing the seeds of today from which we will grow tomorrow.

This is also the time for us to think collectively about tomorrow. We welcome two outstanding new deans to USD this year. They complement our strong academic leadership team with their immense talent, energy and passion. We currently sit at a point in time where there is a great sense of optimism for the future of each of our Schools and the College. Each academic unit has recent achievements to build on and exciting aspirations they are working towards.

However, the value of the campus planning process is to stimulate us to focus on the collective academic vision for USD. How does each School and the College contribute to this collective academic vision, so that we come together in a way that creates value that is more than the sum of the parts? The collective academic visioning process does not focus on what any individual School or the College does by itself. It seeks to identify the real opportunities for the future that are defined by our synergies and the springboards that arise from the bottom up to contribute to a collective vision - a vision that allows us to really look differently at the world and to engage differently with the world.

So, what are the seeds of today, the attributes we can build on for the future? This past July each of the deans was asked to complete a survey about their academic program vision and potential initiatives over the next 5 years and 10 years and how the campus does or does not facilitate these. The deans, associate provosts, and I participated in an all-day retreat with our campus planning consultants in mid-August. We discussed the vision for each School and the College, the programmatic opportunities for collaboration across academic units, the

common academic traits and aspirations of the units, and how these define USD's distinguishing characteristics.

So, what were the outcomes? What are some of the elements of this common vision that is emerging?

In discussing an academic vision for the campus today or tomorrow, there was a strong sense that the overarching umbrella for such a vision must be academic excellence. We must give primacy to ensuring the continued high quality and intellectual vibrancy of our teaching and research, scholarship and creative activity. Our teaching is characterized by academic rigor, engaged learning practices (e.g., student/faculty research, service learning, and internships), innovative pedagogy (e.g., experiential learning, problem-based learning, and guided inquiry), care towards our students, and a high level of preparedness of our graduates. Our research, scholarship and creative activity are complements to our teaching and are nurtured by a culture of intellectual inquiry and guided by a desire for impact – impact on our discipline, on practice, on our community, on society, and/or on education and learning.

In addition to the primacy of our academic mission and the outstanding characteristics of our teaching and research, what are the other attributes or elements of strength we can build on? Four were discussed that I would like to share with you. There likely are others, but certainly these four are promising seeds.

1. Interdisciplinary collaboration – There is a unique breadth and depth of cross disciplinary collaboration at USD. There are current or potential (being discussed) fruitful collaborations among every one of our academic units with every other one. This is extraordinary and important! Our world becomes more interconnected every day. The problems of our future are complex and multi-dimensional. They will best be approached through the new lenses that often result from cross disciplinary collaboration – the type of cross disciplinary collaboration that exists and can continue to grow and flourish at USD.
2. Global – We embrace the interconnectedness of the world and view the world as the venue for our research and learning. In large part due to the leadership of our own faculty, our international experiences are rich and multi-faceted. They include elements of learning, research, community service, internships, consulting, and/or spiritual reflection. They occur in all parts of the developed and developing world. We currently offer over 70 programs in 35 countries and 54 cities around the globe. Over 50% of our undergraduate students report that they participated in at least one study abroad experience. Several of our graduate programs have started requiring international experiences for graduation. We are increasingly taking advantage of our unique geographic location on the border of Mexico and the Pacific Rim. In sum, internationalization is in midst and has become a university-wide strength. USD has extensive and rich global engagement which we can creatively build on.
3. Social justice and sustainability – Social justice is a core value at USD. It reflects our Catholic values and mission and our desire to “make a difference” in the world. But the term ‘social justice’ is not conceptualized similarly by all disciplines. It is a very broad concept to some and a much narrower concept to others. Some disciplines

describe their mission more as social responsibility. Whichever term is used, within this social justice or social responsibility framework, there is a university-wide focus on sustainability. However, this common focus is not on sustainability in the narrow sense of only environmental sustainability. Rather it is a focus on a three-pronged notion of sustainability – environmental, economic and social sustainability.

Today, there is unprecedented involvement of our young people in our world, young people who are connected to and have experienced the world, young people who care about and have concern for the world, and young people who rightfully believe they can make a difference in our world. This generation has high hopes – hope for energy independence, hope for the eradication of poverty, and hope for social justice. How can USD use its distinction in sustainability and social justice to help our country and our world realize these hopes? What related hopes will our entering students of 2020 have? These students are in kindergarden today. How will our commitment to social justice and sustainability address their hopes and dreams?

4. Leadership and innovation – These terms are somewhat overused and often mean different things in different contexts. In terms of USD, we are using them to mean that in all of our programs, we focus on lifelong skills for success, we focus on team work and team building, and we seek to develop approaches and processes that allow us to see opportunities where others do not. These are the types of skills and approaches that will be necessary to thrive and to identify or create exciting opportunities in an ever changing and dynamic world.

These four attributes are interconnected and linked to one another. Leadership and innovation link to social justice, social justice is global, and global is interdisciplinary.

These are some of the elements we can build on. As I said earlier, there may be others.

So, at this point you may be saying, so what....

These attributes are not unique in and of themselves. Many universities claim the same or similar attributes. They may be necessary, but they are not sufficient for defining USD's distinction.

Okay. I accept that.

What will make them sufficient? What will make them key differentiators for USD?

These attributes can only become sufficient with the engagement of our faculty and others from the USD community in owning the future and making it theirs. These attributes become key differentiators as they are conceptualized and developed by you and within the context of USD. They must be conceptualized and actualized by our own community, by our own faculty, and within and across our own individual schools and the college. Only then will they become distinct to USD.

How will this happen? How can you participate?

There will be several opportunities. First, we will be asking each academic unit to discuss and provide further input to this emerging academic vision. We also will use existing cross-disciplinary committees and task forces and form others to address specific aspects of the emerging vision. Liaisons from the campus planning steering committee will be responsible for feeding this input back into the planning process. The campus planning consultants will be continuously absorbing our input over the next several months and will then present alternative campus plans for the community as a whole to discuss, refine, and ultimately collectively embrace.

So, sit back, close your eyes and let's begin this process. How do you envision the USD campus of 2020?

How does it at same time exude the atmosphere of a "small liberal arts based" undergraduate experience and a university with a comprehensive academic mission, which currently includes 5 strong professional schools and the college?

How does it reflect our academic excellence and our integrated teaching and research mission?

Can you feel the intellectual vibrancy?

How does it foster broad and deep interdisciplinary collaboration?

Can you feel the connectedness – the connectedness within the campus of students to faculty, faculty to faculty, and students to students, as well as the connectedness of the campus to our local and global communities?

Do you see a place where diverse people with diverse perspectives are interacting fully and comfortably with one another?

How does it accommodate the learning styles of its students (remember people who today are in kindergarden)?

How does it integrate academic and student life?

How does it reflect our engagement with the world and our contributions to its environmental, economic, and social sustainability?

How are its faculty and its students having an impact on the world and contributing to the opportunities and challenges of 2020?

In conclusion. We will only become as good as we believe we can be! We have outstanding current strengths to build on. Now we just need to start dreaming about and believing in what the future can be.

We must take up the challenge and the opportunity of engagement and ownership of defining tomorrow.

What a great time to be at USD!