

## **Pasadena City College Convocation Speech August 28, 2015**

Esteemed members of the Pasadena City College Lancer family, it is an honor and a privilege to stand here before you as the 15<sup>th</sup> president of this noble institution. As I look around this auditorium, I'm grateful to see some faces that I recognize despite my short time here, as well as many new ones. Again, I trust all of you had an eventful summer and had the opportunity to rest, reflect, and spend time with family and friends.

As I look forward to the coming of a new semester, I cannot help but think about the history that this institution exudes. This is a college steeped in a tradition of excellence. For more than 90 years, Pasadena City College has served the community and contributed to the country as a whole. It has educated students who have gone on to shape and change the world we see today.

On my daily walks around campus – as many of you know, I love to walk and I have my trusty Fitbit monitor here to prove it – I have to stop on occasion to take it all in. These are the same hallowed grounds that our distinguished alumni traversed in the past: Jackie Robinson, a baseball pioneer and Major League Hall of Famer; Robert Bruce Merrifield, a Nobel Prize-winning chemist; Joyce Kennard, a former State Supreme Court Justice; and Eddie Van Halen, a Rock 'n' Roll legend.

These are just some of our alumni who arrived here – not unlike many of our students – with the same goal. And that is the goal of bettering themselves.

Just recently, I opened the pages of some of our old yearbooks and was overcome with a sense of optimism and pride. In those faded, delicate pages, I saw the black and white images of our students from the 1940s and 50s. And as I looked closer, I saw in their eyes the hope that I see in our students today. And that is the hope for a better education, a better life, and a better future.

Those students, of course, have changed over the decades. Our Lancers today don't look the same, don't sound the same, and certainly don't dress the same. Yet they still carry the same, heavy desire of their predecessors – the desire to succeed.

And to that end, that desire should be our shared desire. We want our students to succeed, and that should be the driving force behind everything we do at this college. As Lancers, we all value the importance of higher education and how it can transform people's lives.

It is with this mutual understanding – coupled with your steadfast dedication and commitment – that has propelled our talented students to excel in multiple areas.

Student groups across various disciplines continue to win top academic awards both regionally and nationally.

In May, more than 1,800 students received associate degrees and certificates at our 90<sup>th</sup> commencement exercises. Of the 1,800, 24 were recognized as summa cum laude graduates – one of the largest groups of its kind in recent school history.

Outside the classroom, we also had our share of winners. Just this last May alone, we saw history being made both on the track and in the gym:

- Freshman Alexander McElwee won the state title in the 400-meter dash. He also owns the second fastest 400-meter time in the nation among community college athletes.
- And the freshman dynamic duo of Rebecca Tzou and Zin Win Maw captured the state badminton championship in doubles, the first ever at Pasadena City College.

In the classroom, our students continue to excel:

- Freshman Ryan Liu, a first-generation college student who delivered the valedictory address at our 90<sup>th</sup> commencement exercises, won the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship. The national award will cover Ryan's educational expenses for the final two to three years necessary to achieve his bachelor's degree. He will be attending Yale University this fall.
- And Comus Hardman, a student-veteran and Navy reservist, won a full-ride scholarship worth about \$244,000 to Vassar College, one of the premiere liberal arts colleges in the nation. He will be attending Vassar this fall.

This is just a small sample of our many student success stories, further validating the college's reputation of being a world-class institution.

I am also proud to say that last year served as a benchmark for the college's transfer efforts. For the 2013-2014 year, more students at Pasadena City College graduated with an Associate Degree for Transfer than at any other community college in the entire state. Of the 113 California community colleges, PCC ranked number one in conferring ADTs, reaffirming our reputation as one of the premiere pipelines to the California State University system.

Pasadena City College continues to be a "Military-Friendly" institution. This year, the *Military Times* ranked PCC number two in the nation in its "Best for Vets" two-year colleges list. *U.S. Veterans Magazine* also distinguished PCC as one of its

“Top Veteran-Friendly Schools.” Yes, the college stands by the PCC Veterans Resource Center motto of “Serving Those Who Served.”

Pasadena City College also continues to celebrate its long and storied history while looking toward the future.

In March, the college honored one of its most distinguished alumni, famed educator Jaime Escalante, with an on-campus exhibit dedicated to his extraordinary life and commitment to education. Hundreds of people gathered from around the country and as far as Bolivia to celebrate a man who came from very humble beginnings, and went on to become one of the most famous teachers in the United States.

And just three months ago, the Pasadena City College Foundation organized a spectacular fundraising gala that raised nearly \$1.1 million for scholarships to Pasadena City College students – a record. The proceeds from this historic event will underwrite more than 200 additional scholarships every year, ensuring that many of our students will have the necessary funds to continue their academic journeys.

As you know, Pasadena City College is well-known regionally and statewide for its historical buildings. While it remains committed to the stewardship and preservation of these landmarks, it has its eyes squarely set on future growth.

As we speak, the college is continuing work on developing the Centennial Facilities Master Plan, which will lay the foundation for generations to come. Faculty, staff, and the community have already played an important role through the development of the Educational Master Plan and participation in the facilities visioning sessions.

To ensure that we build the finest facilities to support our educational goals and student success, we will continue to engage the campus community and seek the input of faculty and staff in the development of the Facilities Master Plan. Our next step will be to engage the faculty in reviewing the EMP’s growth projections and meeting with faculty to determine what revisions must be made to effectively inform the Facilities Master Plan.

Moving forward, our planning team will also work with the shared governance committees to ensure ongoing transparency and regular feedback from the faculty, staff, and school community. Additional engagement with the faculty, students, and staff are scheduled over the coming year.

Yes – thanks to your dedication, hard work, and commitment to student success – I can truly say that this college has accomplished much over the years, let alone this past year.

But, not unlike many other institutions, Pasadena City College has its share of challenges. These challenges, no doubt, will test our resolve.

As some of you already know, we continue to struggle with our in-district enrollment. The number of students coming from our very own backyard is dwindling. This is a problem that needs a solution.

We've already begun to address it with increased efforts in our existing outreach programs and collaboration with local high schools. In October, I plan to invite all of the principals and superintendents of these high schools and districts to a luncheon here on campus. At this event, I hope we can initiate discussions on ways to increase in-district enrollment to PCC. My goal is to strengthen our relationships and set the foundation for future, ongoing dialogue.

I trust all of you know by now the status of our accreditation. The report on PCC is that we have many campus-wide problems. As a result, we have been placed on probation.

In its report, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges forwarded us nine recommendations. These nine recommendations touch everything we do at this college. Addressing these recommendations will be paramount in the reaffirming of our accreditation.

A task force comprised of members of the Academic Senate, Classified Senate, Management Association, and the accreditation liaison officer has met several times over the summer. This group has created an initial plan for addressing the recommendations and a list of workgroups will be created within the first three weeks of the semester to start work on them.

It is important that the campus as a whole understands the seriousness of the recommendations and the need for members of all constituency groups to come forward to serve on the various workgroups that will be formed within the next few weeks. Additionally, I ask that each of you, personally, do what you can within your own scope of work to ensure that the recommendations are met.

These recommendations are wide-ranging. Here is an abridged version:

**Recommendation #1** – requires us to complete an entire cycle of a new, integrated planning and budget process starting this fall.

An Integrated Task Force – led by Dr. Cornner and consisting of faculty, staff, and administrators from College Council, the Academic Senate, the Classified Senate, and Management Association – has drafted a model for integrated planning. The model will be vetted through all constituent groups early this fall and implemented.

**Recommendation #2** – We need to bring our evaluations up to date by the end of the spring semester.

Human Resources has created a master list of all employees including faculty and when they were last evaluated. Managers are creating plans to complete the evaluations prior to the end of spring and will be responsible for making sure that they are done.

**Recommendation #3** - We need to include responsibility for Student Learning Outcomes assessments in our evaluations this year.

Dr. Miller is working with the Faculty Association to create an MOU whereby adjunct faculty will be paid for SLO assessments. Dr. Miller and Dr. Kiotas will be leading discussions on contract language, per the most recent FA agreement, and will look first to include SLO language into evaluation documents and create another MOU.

We will also begin providing the opportunity for faculty, classified, and management input into administrator evaluations.

**Recommendation #4** – We must comply with and “embrace” our codes of ethics.

Dr. Bell and Professor Kris Pilon will be leading a task force to create a single code of ethics by which all will need to comply. Trustee Brown is serving on this committee.

**Recommendation #5** – The college must fill its administrative interim positions.

Before we can fill our interim positions, we must decide whether the school structure will remain or be modified. Dr. Scott will be working with the appropriate groups within the first two weeks of the semester to gather campus input. A decision that combines input from the campus and administration will be made and interim administrative positions replaced with permanent ones before the end of the spring term. I know this is not going to be an easy task. But we need to come together and make whatever structure we agree upon work.

**Recommendation #6** – The college must develop and implement a comprehensive and coordinated professional development program for this academic year.

On Monday, the Standing Committee for Professional Development will meet to begin working on the creation of professional development program for the campus. In the meantime, plans are underway for a Flex Day event on October 1 for all constituency groups.

**Recommendation #7** – We must do a better job of gathering and respecting campus input in our decision-making processes. Our decisions and processes must be transparent.

We will evaluate our governance processes in this regard and encourage and support greater involvement by all groups. We must also communicate better, become more collegial, and work together more effectively.

Under the direction of our new executive director for Strategic Communication and Marketing, a plan will be created for improving campus communication, both internally and externally.

The Accreditation Task Force has also agreed that an external consultant should be brought in to facilitate conversations and short- and long-term plans to support improved collegiality and respect.

**Recommendation #8** – We need to evaluate and improve our organizational structures and processes.

An evaluation workgroup led by Crystal Kollross and others will evaluate our governance policies and procedures. Another group will lead governance training. Dr. Cornner and Professor Stephanie Fleming will lead a group to create a new governance handbook. We will need to document our processes and not keep reinventing them.

**Recommendation #9** – Student Affairs, led by Dr. Olivo, will complete assessments and program review annual updates this fall, using the new integrated planning structure.

Additionally, two weeks ago the college was given notice by the ACCJC of enhanced monitoring and the possible need for a special report on Student Learning Outcomes. Only 15 of the 113 community colleges in California have an ongoing course assessment rate of less than 67 percent.

Pasadena City College is at 58 percent. This makes our situation even more serious than it had been when we were put on probation.

We need full participation with SLO assessments starting immediately to address this issue. Dr. Melissa Anderson, our new faculty SLO facilitator, has been working already with Dr. Scott, Dr. Paul Jarrell, Dr. Cornner, and Professor Fleming to establish initial priorities.

Here are some of the results of their work so far:

- The college will be providing stipends to faculty SLO leads to be selected by the faculty of those areas.

- SLO leads will provide training on SLO assessments, where needed.
- SLO leads will work with and support faculty in getting the assessments done.
- We will provide support staff, where needed, to get the results entered into our database.
- The SLO coordinator, SLO leads, and deans will be working with faculty to ensure that the Annual Assessment Reports are completed as quickly as possible.

Updated assessment data must be included into our new program review process so that student-learning needs are being given full consideration in the allocation of resources. That is part of the urgency here. We need campus-wide participation to resolve this very serious issue.

In short, we have a lot of hard work to do in order to lift our probation status and reaffirm accreditation. Yes, the challenges are many, and they will certainly test our resolve. As I've stated before, we cannot overcome them without hard work, dedication, and most importantly, collaboration.

One of my primary goals as superintendent-president is to create a climate where all of us can work in harmony. I want all of us to come together – faculty, staff, administration, Board of Trustees, and students – and work as a team. We cannot put our own self-serving goals ahead of the one singular goal that should be driving us all: student success.

I also stand by my commitment to making sure that we are transparent in our efforts. We should not be secretive in the way we conduct business. We are a world-class institution entrusted by the public to educate anyone who wishes to better themselves. And we will act and conduct ourselves accordingly.

I am open to scrutiny. I always tell it as it is. The truth is sometimes hard to accept. But we have to learn to accept it and deal with it.

I invite all of you to attend my Question-and-Answer forums every third Monday of each month. These sessions will give anyone who attends the opportunity to ask me questions or share your thoughts on anything regarding Pasadena City College.

Yes, I fully understand that it's not realistic to believe we will all agree on everything. And that's OK. That is part of the discourse that flows freely in a well-oiled academic institution. But I will say this: we may not agree on everything, but we will disagree in a civil and collegial manner.

As we move forward with a new semester, it is my hope that we move forward together with renewed trust and optimism. As a recent addition to this Pasadena City College family, I look forward to coming together with all of you to overcome our challenges and put us back to where PCC should be: the premiere community college in the state of California and in the nation.

In closing, I would like to leave you with a quote from one of our very own beloved Lancers, Jaime Escalante:

*“We are all concerned about the future of American education. But as I tell my students, you do not enter the future - you create the future. The future is created through hard work.”*

Again, let us continue this excellent work of creating a nurturing environment that shapes and transforms our students’ lives and futures. Let’s find another Nobel Prize winner, another State Supreme Court Justice, and another Rock ‘n’ Roll star.

Above all, let’s continue this important work, together.

Thank you all for your passion, your resiliency, your talents, your dedication to your students, your teaching, and your love for Pasadena City College. I hope all of you will have a great fall semester, and as always:

**Onward Lancers!**