

January 14, 2011
Opening remarks of the CSUN Faculty Retreat

Faculty Senate President Steven Stepanek:

It's my privilege at this particular time to turn it over to President Jolene Koester who is going to be giving a talk called "The Times They Are A Changin', a President's Perspective.

CSUN President Jolene Koester:

I. Introduction

For those of my age group, the lyrics and music of Bob Dylan's generation-defining song, "The Times They Are A-Changin'," offered a positive feeling of change, a mood of liberation along with a strong statement about the inevitability of change. So, when I learned that the first panel discussion after my speech here at the annual faculty retreat had already been titled after this celebrated Dylan song, I immediately chose to extend this retreat's focus on change by offering a university president's perspective on "the times they are a changin'."

The world within which public higher education functions is changing. This is a statement of fact widely accepted, a reality generally acknowledged. The specific reasons for those changes, the nature of the changes, whether the changes are good or bad, and the timing of the changes are, however, certainly open to debate, differing interpretations, and, yes, disagreement. What is also unclear is how public higher education will respond to, manage, and handle the inevitable changes coming our way. The "how" of managing these changing times is a question for public higher education in general. More specific, and most immediately pertinent for those in this room, are the questions of how we here at Cal State Northridge will manage and respond to these changes.

Today I want to present three major sets of ideas consistent with my belief that it is the "how" of responding to change that is most critical. I will begin with a brief recap for all of you of the major areas in which I see change advancing on public higher education. Second, I will suggest some ways in which Cal State Northridge specifically will *not* change. And, finally, I will address the "how" of change within our University and offer suggestions and hopes for how we as a campus community can work, lead, and manage ourselves into our future.

That some of the "changes" in public higher education have already occurred should also be obvious. Let me remind you of the quote from science fiction writer William Gibson, "The future is already here — it is just unevenly distributed."

II. Ways in which public higher education will change, needs to change, wants to change, and will be pressured to change.

“Times a-changin’” for public higher education have certainly been a consistent theme of my various speeches, conversations and exhortations to this campus community over the past 11 years.[*endnote i*] In fact, if you read all of my major addresses to the campus community during these 11 years, what you will find is a consistent beating of the drum about the forces of change.

Some of you have heard and read some of those speeches. Some of you have heard and read none of those speeches. So, rather than providing an extended explanation and description of each of the major areas of change, I will provide an abbreviated description of the key areas of change I consider to be most powerful. For those of you who want to learn more about them, or perhaps dialogue, debate or discuss them with me, I urge you to go the President’s Office website and read.

A. Financing of public higher education, or the disinvestment of the states in public higher education.

Governor Brown just announced a proposed \$1.4 billion cut to public higher education institutions in California, and specifically a \$500 million reduction in state support for the CSU. This follows a \$625 million two-year cut in 2008-09 and 2009-10, with partial reinstatement of some of that money in 2010-11. Next year’s proposed total state support budget for the CSU — \$2.2 billion — is equivalent in terms of dollars to 1999-2000, even though the CSU now educates 70,000 more students.

More broadly, this continues a long-term trend, which in turn reflects choices in the face of states’ declining resources and growing obligations. At a recent meeting of the National Governors Association, economists predicted that most states’ budgets will not return to their 2007-08 levels until 2014-15, and in California until 2015-16.[*endnote ii*] Anticipating the end of the recession it is predicted that, “Even then states will be hard-pressed to return to the status quo in terms of appropriations.”[*endnote iii*]

Let me reiterate comments from my fall 2010 convocation speech: Our reality is a changed — and changing — financial base for public higher education.

For the past two decades now, higher education has experienced a continuous, albeit modest, decline in state funding. Appropriations are reduced during recessions, partially restored as the economy returns to growth, but never quite to earlier levels. The pattern adds up to an incremental divestment of state funds. Thus we have seen, in California and elsewhere, budget cuts, growing dependency on student fees, and threats to access.[*endnote iv*]

We know from our own budget numbers that the decline in funding of public higher education is *real*. This is the new reality, and reversal is unforeseeable.

As I also noted in that same convocation address, we at Cal State Northridge have always been mindful and intentional in adjusting to new challenges, and we will continue to be relentless in planning for them. I urged then, and I urge again today, that we set aside unrealistic hopes of another gold rush. We need to see the facts as they are, imagine practical alternatives, and accept that we simply must conserve resources. It is of no benefit, and is in fact damaging, to wait for the state to rescue us.

As Bob Dylan warns us, “he that gets hurt will be he who has stalled.” Indeed, the times they are a-changin’.

B. A second major area of change for public higher education is one I have spoken of on many occasions, most recently again in my 2010 convocation address. I am referring to the public's expectations about higher education — what we generally refer to as “accountability.”

As I said in that speech, we *must* pay attention. For example, when the U.S. Secretary of Education speaks repeatedly of the low graduation rates of public universities, we must pay attention. When the U.S. Undersecretary of Education argues for the need to marry college and work, and a major analysis of jobs data concludes the U.S. is headed toward a serious mismatch between the skills needed for new jobs and the education of potential workers, we must pay attention. When the chair of the National Governors Association says he will make higher education productivity the focus of his term, calling for common performance measurements and concrete steps to increase completion rates within available resources, we must pay attention.

Further, when the governors attending the recent National Governors Association meeting repeatedly express the belief that higher education is inefficient and unproductive, we must pay attention.

One specific and critical area of the accountability domain is the increasing preoccupation with, and insistent call for changes in, the lackluster graduation rates from colleges and universities. David Brooks, the *New York Times* columnist, has repeatedly observed that U.S. colleges and universities have done a good job of getting people into college, but largely have not done a good job of graduating them. And at the recent National Governors Association meeting, a great deal of conversation focused on changing the funding model for higher education to provide incentives for graduating students rather than just enrolling students.

C. There is so much that can and should be said about the impact of changes in technology on our universities, but let me summarize it by recapping again from my 2010 convocation address.

We in higher education have a major planning challenge in the face of ever-escalating advances in technology. Higher education was traditionally about the transmission of knowledge through instruction. But today, technology enables student discovery as part of the learning equation. Technology previously was instantiated through its ownership; but today it is instantiated by access. Technology was once primarily something that existed “on” the campus, but it is now increasingly “above” (or away from) the campus, in “the cloud.” And where technology was once likened to a utility, like electricity or running water, something to be reliably provide so that work could be accomplished, it is now a potential strategic advantage.[*endnote v*]

D. A topic that is unique to California is the viability of the Master Plan for Higher Education. I spoke of forces of change and their effect on the California Master Plan in, for example, my 2009 convocation speech.

I pointed out then that California's ability to fulfill the vision of the Master Plan for Higher Education has been severely compromised. The Master Plan envisioned low fees and high state financial support for public higher education. But that proportional relationship has been set askew. Low fees depend on healthy tax returns and a public commitment to fund higher education proportionally. Neither factor is seen to be a political driver today.

In last year's convocation address, I urged that the people of California rethink the relationship between state revenues, student fees or tuition, access, and affordability. Despite increases in student fees in the CSU, our base budget has been severely reduced. The current fiscal situation in California and the new Governor's 2011-12 budget proposal makes it amply clear these financial challenges, and the attendant challenges to access and affordability, will prevail.

E. Finally, we see changes in our students and their expectations for their learning.

I want to discuss here several related changes pertaining to working with and educating our current and future students. I have discussed these before, and some are made more explicit in a recent report from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled, *The College of 2020: Students*.^[endnote vi]

In past convocation speeches I have noted that scholars today know more about how people learn, and know that how people learn is changing. We know, for example, that the digital age shapes brain circuitry and affects learning in ways that challenge traditional curricula and pedagogy. We are admitting today a cohort of "digital students" who, unless universities change, will struggle to find engagement in "analog schools." Already students are demanding an education that more embraces knowledge as something continuously created, not something to be acquired then forever possessed.

We can predict that our increased knowledge of the science of learning, coupled with advances in technology, will reshape curriculum and pedagogy. We must, and will, readjust the ways we teach to the ways students learn, building on new understandings of learning that scholars have identified. I continue to predict that our University in the future will find obsolete or completely redefine the concepts of class size and student faculty ratio.

There are also significant changes in peoples' expectations for how we should provide learning. Again, in my 2010 convocation address I talked about the fact that alternative models of higher education have emerged, and students are increasingly choosing them. Students' expectations are changing as for-profit universities offer, and extensively advertise, flexibility and convenience to match the realities of students' lives. Convenience of location and timing is achieved through technology and by stripping back to physical basics without co-curricular activities, athletics, extensive libraries, residence halls, and other features of the traditional campus. In many ways, this new model of higher education threatens the very definition of what we think of as a college or university, and yet many students are choosing it!"

And there is more to this development than just convenience factors. Degree options more immediately relevant to work and career resonate with students.

Finally, as we consider that students are a-changin', we must consider why students pursue college. Our current and potential students know that most of the higher-paying career-oriented jobs today and in the future will require a college degree as a means of entry or advancement. This means, as noted in the report, *The College of 2020: Students*, "the product colleges are offering is in greater demand than ever."^[endnote vii] But as this same report articulates, the defining questions for colleges for the next decade will be: What is college? And why should a student go?

One thing we must bear in mind: our future students, say the freshmen class four years from now, eight years from now, twelve years from now, will be the same kids who grew up with iPhone, iPad, Xbox,

Wii, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, and more. They take for granted technologies like touch screens. In their world, gestures “make things happen.” Web 2.0 is just the web. One doesn’t need to be in the same place as friends to see friends or know exactly what they are doing. They have grown up in a new technological world, and we must be prepared for them. I am reminded of Bob Dylan’s words, “the present now will later be the past.” At no time is this made more real for me than when I consider our current and future students.

Still, while students’ demands for convenience, online technologies as learning tools, and relevance will be ours to deal with, it will continue to be incumbent upon us to demonstrate the traditional values of education. This I have also discussed in the past. Repeating from my 2008 convocation speech, I do continue to believe, “...the value of education lies in the quality of thinking of individual citizens, the level of passion brought to a profession, and the collective efforts of educated people to improve the human condition.” This remains unchanged. And this is a natural segue into my next major point.

III. What will be enduring?

Through much change, some things will stay the same.

A. My predictions for the future Cal State Northridge begin with the declaration that, first and foremost, we will continue to educate the students of this region and ensure this region an educated workforce and citizenry.

As I’ve said in the past, the excellence of our academic programs will be the bulwark, allowing Cal State Northridge to remain indispensable to the region we serve. The vision for the University’s future represents no change in our fundamental mission. Think of words such as “applied,” “practical,” and “relevant.”

B. Along these same lines, we will remain committed to and focused on learning and teaching. We are and will continue to be a learning-centered university. Faculty members’ motivations in being here will continue to be their excitement about their discipline and the satisfaction that they receive from engaging students in the teaching and learning process.

From a review of Don Gerth’s book, *The People’s University: A History of the California State University*, in *Times Higher Education*, the reviewer provides a succinct summary of the CSU mission, faculty, motivation and intent, and notes: “The [CSU] campuses I have visited are lively, the staff are unoppressed, and the students are getting an excellent undergraduate and master’s level education. Nor are they ‘teaching-only’ institutions; they are just not research-led or prestige-obsessed.”[*endnote viii*]

IV. So, how do we manage the change, here at Cal State Northridge? This is what is most critical, and it involves a set of decisions within our control.

A. First, we must manage change by being responsive to it.

It simply doesn't work to fight change, or at least the type of change I have spoken of today. It is happening, not just here but everywhere.

As Bob Dylan exhorts, "you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone, for the times they are a-changin'."

As the old adage goes, nothing is so constant as change itself. Change is ever present and has been a constant of this University for its 50-plus years. We have a legacy of resiliency — of dealing productively and collaboratively with change.

Still, it is important, as we remain responsive to inevitable change in higher education to also remain true to and honor our core values. At Cal State Northridge, that includes, as I've summarized above, our regional mission, our commitment to learning and teaching, and our dedication to our academic disciplines and students.

Very shortly after I became president here at Cal State Northridge, I heard a colleague talk about managing change at his university. He described the process as dialectic, a balancing between the "covenant of change" and the "covenant of tradition." That description had a profound impact on me. While we in higher education will be pushed by change, and sometimes also must pull our colleagues along, it is important to honor the current environment. It is important and necessary to balance initiatives and efforts in response to the forces of change with periods of rest and consolidation.

B. Second, we will manage change with civility and dialogue. We will be challenged in the accomplishing of this.

This was the topic of my talk at last year's faculty retreat. I advanced a number of concrete suggestions for us at Cal State Northridge around managing change with civility and dialogue, and I laid out a number of things to avoid.

1. First, I urged that all of us accept that we as individuals can and must become agents of change within ourselves, within our University, and within its parts.
2. Second, I suggested we accept the reality that change is almost always incremental, not instantaneous.
3. Third, I advised that we as individuals nurture our own internal dialogue, feed our academic souls by reading, presenting, listening to and discussing others' presentations, and taking the time to ponder the types of questions that attracted us to the academic community in the first place and that arise because of our continued academic development.
4. Very important for managing change through civility and dialogue, we can each practice listening to others rather than jumping to conclusions before we have asked, sought out information, listened, and clarified.
5. In the spirit of civility, we must avoid monopolizing the conversation, instead making sure everyone has a chance to be heard. It is imperative to take

responsibility for getting our facts right, say what's true for us without making others wrong, and avoid personal attacks.

6. We need to accept that there will invariably be opposing points of view.
7. I recommend we have our conversations face to face, and be wary of extended email exchanges which too easily lead to misunderstanding and distortion.
8. And finally we, administrators and faculty alike, need to communicate with transparency — an overused term, but an important value.

C. Further, as we respond to and manage change, we must do so from the point of view of the common good, not constituencies.

It's all too easy to see the University as divided into different and competing constituencies — faculty, administration, staff, students; central administration, college administration, staff in central administrative functions, staff in collegiate or divisional service offices; full time faculty, part time faculty; union members, non union members; students with differing points of view.

But instead, it is incumbent upon us as we deal with change, to remember that all parts of the University are connected — the parts affect one another. Think of the University as a body, made up of many parts, each with specialized functions but serving as components of systems and all linked. You have all experienced the interconnectedness of the body. Your stomach is upset, which leads to a headache. You twist or sprain an ankle, and while walking with one side impaired, strain a muscle elsewhere. As the old song goes, “The toe bone's connected to the foot bone, the foot bone's connected to the ankle bone,” and so on.

As we consider change, it is critically important to anticipate the effects of a proposed change on other parts of the University, to consider the impact of the change on the common good. It is important to dialogue and coordinate responses to change, thinking of the common good rather than only about what's best for the individual or our own area of the University.

D. And finally, I will close by commenting on a president's perspective and voice in the face of change.

As president of this University, my voice is prominent and public. Though I am aware of this, and strive to speak thoughtfully and with care, I am sometimes taken aback that my words seem to take on a life of their own, subject to interpretations I didn't foresee and attributed import I didn't intend. But then I remember, this is what is expected of a university president. Even in casual conversation, people expect me to speak as president of California State University, Northridge.

As the times are a-changin' in higher education, I am expected to speak. I am expected and often required as president to respond quite directly to the forces of change. It is not possible to represent the varied and sometimes sharply divided viewpoints of the many constituencies of Cal State Northridge, yet I must speak for Cal State Northridge as an institution of higher education. I must sometimes publicly take a sharply defined position, and that position will likely be at odds with someone's point of view on this campus, perhaps with yours. But the position I take so publicly endeavors to be in the best interest of the entire University and its various constituent parts. And I check my position against some key measures of personal integrity — my commitment to fairness and to the long-term welfare of the University as a whole.

So, again, I return to core values — civility and dialogue, transparency, our regional mission, our commitment to learning and teaching and students, our dedication to our academic disciplines, and the common good of Cal State Northridge, because the times they are a-changin’.

Endnotes

- i. This speech contains multiple direct quotations from past speeches by President Koester posted at <http://www.csun.edu/presofc/>
- ii. National Governors Association meeting, December 5-6, 2010, “Raising the Bar for Higher Education in a Time of Fiscal Constraint.”
- iii. Joni E. Finney, “Reset for Higher Education,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 27, 2010, p. 6.
- iv. For a concise summary of these trends, see Dennis Jones and Jane Wellman, “Breaking Bad Habits: Navigating the Financial Crisis,” *Change: The Magazine for Higher Education*. May-June 2010.)
- v. From presentation by Diana G. Oblinger, President and CEO of EDUCAUSE, “Leading the University of Tomorrow – Today,” *Association of State Colleges and Universities Annual Meeting*, November 2009. [Available at <http://www.aascu.org/meetings/annual09/index.htm>]
- vi. Martin Van Der Werf and Grant Sabatier, *The College of 2020: Students*. Chronicle Research Services, 2009.
- vii. *Ibid.* p. 3
- viii. Alan Ryan, “The People’s University: A History of the California State University,” *Times Higher Education*, September 30, 2010.

STEVEN STEPANEK – Faculty Senate President,

What we like to do now is to start the panel discussion on The Times They Are a-Changin’. As it says in the program, and I’ll briefly read it and it’s up there on the screen. The past few years have clearly demonstrated that the teaching and learning environment at CSU Northridge within the CSU system and throughout the state of California has radically changed. Will there be a new master plan for higher education? Who will write it? What would be its purpose? These and many other questions that President Koester actually raised this morning...

[Go to Panel #1 Discussions to continue.]