



CalPolyPomona

College of Letters, Arts,
and Social Sciences

Dean's Welcome, Fall 2024

A year ago, I stood before you before as the new dean, the day after a hurricane.

I laid out three goals for my first year –

One, to learn about you,

Two, to build connections across campus and with external partners that strengthened CLASS as the hub for collaboration at Cal Poly Pomona, and

Three, to help the college create a shared vision through a strategic plan.

I stand before you, now, full of gratitude for this first year.

Yes, there were metaphorical and literal storms. A lot happened. A lot. But through it all, CLASS faculty and staff were welcoming and kind. You gave grace to each other when we failed to be our best selves. You were generous and honest in sharing with me your frustrations and aspirations. You reached out and said “yes” when opportunities arose. And you collectively engaged in the strategic planning process, through surveys and in-person feedback. If I can count myself as having accomplished my goals, it is because of your partnership.

Yes, there are more challenges on the horizon, and I will talk about those as clearly as I can later on today, but I am absolutely certain that we, together, will continue to fulfill our mission of providing students with engaging, exciting, and active learning experiences that prepare them to flourish in constantly changing world.

Our mission, as the College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences, is too important.

What I said last year remains true, “Only through our disciplines do students gain the essential skills that will allow them to improve the human condition, participate fully in the defense and vigor of our democracy, and better the world.”

The humanities, arts, and social sciences give us the language to explain the human experience, to explain our own experiences and connect with others. They give us the tools for finding and testing collaborative and creative solutions.

I was recently telling a friend about how a single paper on cultural psychology changed my life. The paper didn't tell me how to make more money, it didn't tell me what career to pursue, it didn't give me 10 tips to be more efficient. The article changed my life because when I read it, something in my understanding of the world shifted into place. I learned about cultural differences in independence and interdependence and suddenly I had language to explain why my first-generation immigrant mother and I didn't agree. I had a model to understand her perspective and mine.

More importantly, I realized that my experience wasn't unique and that I wasn't alone. A single reading assignment changed my life.

That is what we offer in our college: Ideas, models, and language to explain and change lives and empower communities.

Students want knowledge, they are curious. We may lament that Gen Z has a short attention span from watching too many Tik-Toks or that they don't read, but that they are seeking information in a different way does not mean that they lack curiosity and wonder.

The top TikTok video, with 2.3 billion views? It's by a guy named Zach King and it's about the Harry Potter illusion of riding a broom. It's a video where a magician draws upon characters from a book that has captivated readers for 20 years and he explains how something works. Other popular videos feature singing and lip syncing and dancing.

It turns out that those TikTok videos that Gen Z is watching are directly related to what we offer in CLASS. It turns out that they are watching those videos out of curiosity about different human experiences and about how and why things happen. Our students, all CCP students, are drawn to our disciplines because they are essential and foundational to the full human experience.

And the University knows this. The CSU knows this.

As announced yesterday, out of 12 LaBounty applications, only one major collaborative project was funded by the University – ours, the Digital Humanities Consortium led by Alex Madva and Rachel Van from philosophy and history. True to our collaborative nature, the Consortium includes faculty from History, Philosophy, Communication, Geography/Anthropology, Ethnic and Women’s Studies, Political Science, Sociology, as well as CEIS, the Library, Engineering.

As announced last spring, a collaboration of faculty under the leadership of Aishwary Kumar, were the recipients of a \$325,000 Teagle Grant to support student engagement with democracy through the American Institutions requirement. Again, showing our centrality, the College of Engineering provided a letter of support for that grant.

And, as announced this summer, in collaboration with the College of Environmental Design, CLASS and CPP are the new hosts for the CSU-Wide Summer Arts program.

These accomplishments show how our work is valued by the University and the CSU.

And we will continue to show that CLASS is not separate from the polytechnic mission of Cal Poly Pomona – we are an essential part of it.

Last spring, led by Communications Department Lecturer, Jen Mahlke, a team of CLASS faculty, staff, Dean’s Circle member, and a student, worked collaboratively to craft 5 strategic goals. Starting with responses to an initial CLASS Community survey and

integrating the CPP Principles of Community Survey, they first drafted 10 goals. They met with individual departments and units to get feedback on those goals. Then, they met to reduce those goals to 5. At each stage, the Strategic Planning team was diligent in keeping true to the feelings and aspirations expressed by the CLASS community. Through fall of 2024, departments are invited to interpret the goals within their departments as we create an implementation plan.


College-Level Initiatives

It is not an accident that the first goal in our strategic plan focuses on College culture, how we are with one another.

Connecting as a college and as colleagues is essential to elevating CLASS and educating our students effectively.

A recent study reviewed in [Inside Higher Education](#) compared faculty feelings of belonging and inclusion in 2018 versus 2022. It found that faculty felt less connected to their departments and less satisfied with both social and professional interactions in 2022. Faculty were also less likely to communicate their

CLASS Strategic Plan 2025-2030



Goal #1: CLASS will be a community that welcomes, includes, and inspires trust.
CLASS will be a working and living environment that centers belonging, transparency, access, and inclusion through clear and equitable processes, respectful communication, and recognition of contributions to our CLASS community.
Goal #2: CLASS will offer learning experiences that prepare all Cal Poly Pomona students for success in a changing world.
Through curricular and co-curricular programs, CLASS will provide a polytechnic learning experience that fosters critical thinking, creativity, perspective-taking, information literacy, and problem-solving skills.
Goal #3: CLASS will be recognized as essential to Cal Poly Pomona’s success.
CLASS will promote the performing arts, humanities, and social sciences as essential partners for opportunity and innovation within the university and indispensable resource for our community.
Goal #4: CLASS will recognize and support staff and faculty aspirations and excellence.
CLASS will foster holistic personal and professional growth through life-long learning, researching, and civic engagement for faculty and staff.
Goal #5: CLASS will strategically allocate, advocate for, and generate resources.
CLASS will optimize the allocation of existing resources while generating new and diversified sources of revenue to support the college’s academic programs, research initiatives, and community engagement.

concerns to their department chair or feel that their chair and their colleagues valued their opinions.

We are not immune to this experience at CPP.

Last spring, I met individually with the nearly 60 faculty who were going through the RTP process. I asked each of the junior faculty if they felt like they had any connections outside of their departments. If they had any friends outside of their departments. By and large, they said no.

Chairs were great. Departmental colleagues were great.

But, unless they had been placed in an intentional peer group, they did not feel connected to anyone outside of their department. They did not feel connected to CLASS or CPP.

Beyond what people told me, I saw for myself the disconnection. I attended many department events over the year, and even at award ceremonies, I rarely saw anyone from other departments or other CLASS faculty make a showing. Even at award ceremonies, department colleagues were not present.

Let's think about that for a moment.

I think back to graduate school and going to conferences. If your friend had an 8:00AM session on Saturday morning, you showed up so they didn't have to give their talk to an empty room. If they had a poster session, you went by so they wouldn't have to stand there alone.

You showed up for them.

The simple truth is that because we can do some of our tasks from home, we've drifted apart.

We are not showing up for one another. We don't have hallway conversations or meet-up for coffee or learn about each other's lives like we used to. We aren't forging the trust that allows us to see past disagreements and

create collaborations. Our office doors are closed. Our hallways are empty.

We haven't been showing up for one another.

Our students see this. Our newest colleagues feel this.

This won't fix itself. And we can't rely upon someone else to fix it for us. So, I am calling upon all of us to act with intention to Connect.

And, I am dedicating philanthropic dollars to invest in our community and support these opportunities for connection.

I'm calling it the Four Fridays Initiative.

Very simply, we are creating four Fridays over the Academic Year to CONNECT, ELEVATE, and EDUCATE.

We are inviting everyone to come together, in person, on four Fridays over the next 10 months to gather for a day of food, learning, and community. I've asked chairs to have department meetings on these days and we've stacked opportunities for socializing and professional development - And there will be food - to ensure that your travel to campus will be worth it. While the first Friday has been programmed, the CLASS Professional Development Committee to help us design the other 3 Fridays of programming.

These Fridays are an investment in you and an investment in Us. I can provide the food, I can't provide the friendship and collegiality - that can only come from you.

Please join your colleagues to fill the hallways with people and bring the college to life.

Our community is worth your investment.

Make a commitment now to each other, and join me on Friday, September 20.

Thank you.