

Fall Conference 2024
“The Time is Now: Building Upon Our Strength”
President Soraya M. Coley | August 19, 2024 | Kellogg Arena

MOMENT OF SILENCE:

Good Morning. Before I begin my formal remarks, I want to call for a moment of silence. Some of you have shared with me the struggles associated with losing a loved one this past year, some of you have shared your health challenges... and some are challenged by the unfolding events in your personal lives or the events occurring in our community and across the world.

But may you, in your moment of silence, know that you have the strength to persevere, to have confidence in your ability to meet all these challenges and more, and may you find fulfillment and the wherewithal to support our students and contribute to the continued advancement of our mission and vision.

Thank you.

OPENING:

Hello, and welcome to Cal Poly Pomona’s 2024 Fall Conference! I want to thank Professor Preeti Wadhwa for carrying our mace and, of course, Billy — along with everyone who helped him on his quest to create happy memories on our campus — and demonstrating the spirit, enthusiasm and love of Cal Poly Pomona.

Billy, let’s take one last summer selfie.

[BILLY comes on stage and SMC and BILLY take a photo.]

As I begin the formal program, I want to take a moment to express my sincerest thanks to all of you, but there are some special people I want to recognize. First, I would like to thank my cabinet for their leadership, knowledge, strength of character, and commitment. I am going to ask the members of the president's cabinet to please stand and be recognized.

I also want to thank the people and teams that made this event, and every event we will host this week possible, please hold your applause until the end; First, Esther Chou Tanaka, who led the planning committee. Helen Yniguez, and our facilities team for their tremendous work in preparing this venue, and the entire campus for the week ahead. And thanks for our creative MediaVision team, for their work on all the videos you will see this morning.

And speaking of the MediaVision team, I also am pleased to acknowledge their work on our now, Award winning “Dreams of Success” video series. Last year, Trevor Henderson and his team partnered with Amon Rappaport and his team in Strat Comm to write, film and produce four vignettes highlighting our students. Their extraordinary work earned our university multiple Telly Awards. I would like the Media Vision and Strat Comm teams to please stand and be recognized.

And if you haven't seen last year's videos, I encourage you to watch them later today via our university YouTube channel to reacquaint yourselves with why we are here, and just how special our students are.

And now, to our new faculty, administrators, and staff members, I hope that you have already begun to explore the tremendous community that defines Cal Poly Pomona. We are truly pleased that you have joined us. Your expertise and commitment are essential to our continued success and that of our students

Finally, I want to thank my husband Ron for being here today and for his unending love and support always. Yesterday, we celebrated our 45th wedding anniversary!

Every summer, I reflect on the past year, as well as the year ahead. Last week, we kicked off our year with a Leadership Retreat that brought the Academic Senate, the Deans and Department Chairs, along with President's Cabinet together to reflect on our current state, the challenges ahead, along with projections for the future.

And with student move-in yesterday, under the leadership of Vice President Gonzalez and her extraordinary team, I saw the excitement and wonderment

of our new students, as well as the pride of their families. And now we have our Fall Conference, which brings us together in person, re-connecting face-to-face, and experiencing the power of our campus; a campus that is ***united in community***.

I take this opportunity to share how grateful I am for you, and how important you are to our campus community, and how much I think about your individual and collective well-being. And of course, to thank you for your essential work that contributes to our institutional success and advancement.

Over the next decade, Cal Poly Pomona, the entire CSU system, and higher education within California and across this country will be making significant changes in how we operate. Moreover, we are going to need to focus on providing people of all ages, avenues for educational attainment, as well as career advancement and success.

I also want to take a moment to thank our honorary Doctor, Clark Rucker, who has been working now with the college of business and promoting and connecting with students as they explore opportunities beyond Cal Poly Pomona. Please, join me in acknowledging him.

And while that work is underway here at CPP, we must rapidly extend our efforts, and embrace these new opportunities through our collective knowledge and experience, as we continue navigating the changing landscape of higher education.

SETTING THE STAGE:

I, much like some of you, spent my summer reading. I poured through issues of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, articles that were shared with me by you, and fellow colleagues. And everything I read made clear the enormity of the challenges we face going forward.

Our world is evolving at an unprecedented pace, driven by technological advancements, globalization and shifting societal norms. And within this dynamic landscape, the role of universities has never been more crucial.

We are not just repositories of knowledge, but we are crucibles of innovation and hubs of critical thinking. We are caretakers of generational wisdom. We are safe places for challenging conversations, centrifuges for inspirational new ideas and incubators for intellectual progress.

And now we must be all that... and more, while overcoming numerous unprecedented challenges.

Underserved students continue to encounter barriers that impede their access to, and success within higher education.

Demographic shifts that once were far down the road, are here now. There is a significant downward trend in the number of the typical 18–21-year-old college-going students. Moreover, technology will change the way our students learn, study and complete their assignments.

Artificial Intelligence was once a proverbial bridge to cross when we got there. Well, today we are standing on that bridge, and we must determine how we will use technology and AI to help our students launch their future careers rather than allow it to hinder their development.

In addition, our labor market remains in flux. The careers of the future are not necessarily the careers of the past. We must continue to shepherd, and strengthen every student who seeks out a better future here, and support their achievement of that goal.

I now would like to invite Dr. Wadhwa to the stage to share her thoughts on the future. She is a teacher-scholar and a lifelong learner. She is a full professor of management and leadership at the College of Business Administration and a faculty fellow with the Office of Academic Innovation here at Cal Poly Pomona. She champions and facilitates positive transformations, both in people and organizations.

Welcome Dr. Wadhwa.

[PREETI SPEAKS]

CHALLENGES WE FACE:

Thank you, Dr. Wadhwa.

Your message of hope confirms that together, we can accomplish anything we put our minds to. I am confident that if we each do our part, we will continue to strengthen this university and propel our students towards the future of their dreams.

Since 2007, birth rates have been dwindling. Additionally, young adults are not pursuing a university education at the same rate as before. The percentage of high school graduates considering a four-year degree is down from sixty-six percent to fifty-two percent over the past four years – and that number will continue to decline over the next five years as we continue to reckon with the effects of the pandemic.

Student mindsets are rapidly changing. During this time of economic uncertainty, research shows that students want to major in something that is going to quickly launch their careers; and colleges across the nation are struggling to connect with prospective students.

So far, we have not yet felt the impact of these decreasing numbers. Students continue to seek out and apply to Cal Poly Pomona. But what is quite troubling, is that we are one of only eight universities among the 23 within the CSU system, to not only hit our enrollment targets, but to receive state funding.

And, we must reflect on what contributes to our continual attraction of students to CPP. We must act in students' best interest, and fight to help them see just how important a broad university education is. Together, we will provide them with an understanding of subjects and a foundation for complex problem-solving.

The work we are doing here at Cal Poly Pomona is *essential*, for the future of our students, our university, our state and indeed our country. We must find ways to ensure we continue to help our students find avenues for success, no matter the barriers they face.

To that point, we have made significant progress on our Future Career Path Initiative. To date, we have provided six-hundred-and-fifty-seven paid micro-internships to six-hundred-and-fifteen students, who worked with sixty-one community partners. Once up and running, this program will help thousands of students find meaningful careers beyond this campus and allow us to continue providing paths to greatness. At the same time, this work also includes supporting those students seeking graduate study opportunities.

I am tremendously pleased that our campus continues to explore new opportunities to help our students achieve their dreams of success. And, as we look towards the year ahead, let us look back at some of our other highlights from the past year.

[VIDEO: 2023-24 Highlight video]

When I walk across our campus, when I speak to faculty members, interact with our staff at events and meet with our students, I see the greatness of this community. I see the rewards of your work and am truly grateful for every one of you. The work you do changes lives for the better, and I want to honor you for your tremendous contribution.

And so today, it is my great pleasure to announce our winner of the annual One Team Award.

[VIDEO: One Team Award overview]

We established this award to celebrate cross-divisional collaboration and those teams that truly align with our university values. This award honors some of the best work and achievements that this community has to offer. Thank you for taking the time to recognize these efforts through all your submissions and thank you for the myriad of collaborations you create across our campus. And now, I am proud to present this year's One Team Award to – the Roots House.

This partnership between departments from the College of Engineering, College of Environmental Design, College of Business, College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences, the Lyle Center and University Advancement, developed a sustainable and affordable house for the inaugural Orange County Sustainable Decathlon. Cal Poly Pomona's "Roots" house was a culmination of three semesters of work by approximately one hundred students across eleven majors.

The entire project exemplified our Learn by Doing philosophy.

Will any of the winning team members who are here today, please stand and be recognized. Thanks so much for your impactful collaboration.

THE IMPERATIVE FOR ACTION:

So, let us build off the great example of "Roots" house. Let us find opportunities to support each other as we help our students grow. Let us take decisive action to improve our university through collaboration and remaining committed to our students' success.

We have a collective responsibility to ensure that every student who comes through our doors has the opportunity not only to attend our university, but to thrive and excel. This commitment will require us to adopt proactive and holistic approaches that address both the academic and non-academic barriers faced by underserved students. It will require us to engage with more potential students, share our vision for their lives, and find ways to help them achieve their dreams.

In the coming year we are going to be focusing on enrollment-related terms such as "melt," "yield" and "rate," which I also interpret as *lives*, *futures* and *possibilities* for the students we serve. By helping our students find their way to our university, earning their degrees, and entering the workforce and/or postgraduate academic studies as our college graduates, we will shape a better future for all.

This will require us to enhance our support systems, look for ways to expand access to financial aid and scholarships, and work to find solutions for those concerned about the cost of a Cal Poly Pomona degree. Additionally, we must strengthen our mentorship programs, provide pipelines for students to find their right path post-graduation and support them as they navigate the academic rigors of university life.

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY:

Most imperative is that we continue cultivating a campus culture that celebrates diversity and commitment to community.

To that purpose, our campus has been actively involved in developing our newest strategic initiative, “Principles of Community.” These principles are designed to guide interactions among campus members and are essential for promoting a positive and inclusive environment. I am pleased to announce that, after nine months of gathering input, engaging in dialogue, and refining the content, the Cal Poly Pomona Principles of Community have been finalized. As a community, we commit to practicing mutual respect, fostering growth, cultivating a sense of belonging and acting with integrity in all our interactions.

In the coming year, we will focus on education and engagement around these principles. There will be opportunities to learn more about each one and explore how we can actively embody and practice them, regardless of our position or role on campus. The Principles of Community are meant to be aspirational and reflect our best selves. With that in mind, I ask that we give each other some grace, as we evolve together, striving to become an even better campus where all members are valued and can flourish.

We are strengthening our culture. A culture of care, kindness and commitment to the work ahead. One that champions action and those willing to boldly lead. This campus belongs to all of us, as well as our students, regardless of our backgrounds or circumstances. This is a home for intellectual thought, intercultural development and acceptance. And, by promoting cultural competency, respect for our diversity, and empathy

among faculty, staff and students alike, we can create an environment where every voice is heard, and every perspective is valued.

COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Achieving our goals will necessitate collaboration — both within our university community and beyond. We must continue to forge partnerships with local high schools, community organizations and industry leaders to create pathways to higher education for our talented students. Through our outreach initiatives, pre-college programs and dual enrollment opportunities, we can inspire and empower the next generation of scholars and leaders.

Additionally, we must engage with policymakers and advocates to champion policies that promote access, affordability and equity in higher education. By leveraging our collective voice and expertise, we can drive systemic change at local, state and national levels, ensuring that higher education remains a beacon of opportunity for all.

CELEBRATING SUCCESS AND STAYING COMMITTED:

I want to take a moment to reflect on and thank all the teams and individuals who make our campus so special. Every morning, when I go to my office, I take in the beauty of our campus, meticulously maintained by our dedicated and excellent facilities team. I enjoy the flowers, the gardens, the lawns and the trees that make this campus so special. I know just how hard they work, and I never take their contributions for granted.

I pass by our Cashier's Office and hear their cheerful voices as they help our students and their family members. Their kindness, helpfulness and dedication to problem solving never goes unnoticed.

And then, from my office window I can see our cafeteria and residence halls, and I always take a moment to reflect on the tremendous service those teams provide daily.

Cal Poly Pomona is world-class because our people are first-class.

From our faculty who devote their whole selves to educating our students, to our staff who nurture our robust culture of goal achievement and care, it takes everyone here, and I want you to know how thankful I am for your contributions. Without you, our students wouldn't be able to complete their education here with us.

This past year was challenging and filled with unforeseen hurdles. But none of those challenges deterred us from improving lives and fulfilling our mission. We conquered every obstacle in our way and will continue to do so going forward.

As we embark on the year ahead, let us not lose sight of our successes, our accomplishments and our triumphs. This campus continually overdelivers across the board. So, take some time to celebrate every milestone achieved, every barrier overcome, and every life transformed by your work.

In closing, I am reminded of the words of Nelson Mandela, the South African anti-apartheid activist, politician and statesman who served as the first president of South Africa from 1994 to 1999, who said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Together, as the number one polytechnic university for social and economic mobility, we are the manifestation of Nelson Mandela's statement, and we have the power to continually enact profound change — not just here at Cal Poly Pomona, but across our region and beyond.

The time is now to enact the changes that will shape our future.

The time is now to reaffirm our commitment to excellence, equity and the limitless potential of every student who comes to our campus.

The time is now to ensure that ten years from now, we can look back confidently knowing that we strengthened and enhanced Cal Poly Pomona's commitment to its students, their families, our communities and our state.

I believe in you, the people in this room and those not in attendance. I believe in our mission, and our capacity to work together to enact profound change for the benefit of our students.

I am reminded of a quote that asserts that “we are not a team because we work together, we are a team because we respect, trust, and can depend upon each other to fulfill their individual and collective responsibilities.”

And so, let us reflect on our individual and collective contributions and our individual and collective strengths, regardless of our position, regardless of our role, and as we do, I leave you with two very heartfelt words – Thank You!