

Since our inception, California State University Channel Islands (CI) has embraced a commitment to access, inclusivity, and academic excellence. Our faculty and staff have been dedicated to serving a diverse population of students, including many who are the first in their families to attend college, and thus our university changes not just individual lives, but shapes entire family trees. As a campus community, we are singularly dedicated to these students, and we know that their success strengthens our region, our state and, indeed, our entire country.

At CI, we are building a new and innovative higher education institution that enables students to succeed and thrive, serves as an engine for social and economic vitality, provides the intellectual resources necessary for a thriving democracy, and has the potential to transform our regional community and beyond.

The university we have built, and which we continue to develop in response to changing conditions, is grounded in our fundamental commitment to serve and promote diverse faculty, staff, and – most critically – our students. It is a model that is woven into the very fabric of our surrounding community and that is stronger because of that essential connection. Working with our partners in business and industry, our faculty have designed programs to meet regional workforce needs, while also ensuring our graduates demonstrate the ability to think critically, communicate effectively, apply quantitative understanding thoughtfully, and work effectively with diverse teams. Our model of education moves beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge, and teaches our students to learn, to question, and to lead. It is these skills that transcend a particular discipline that will allow our students to navigate the complexities and contradictions of a rapidly transforming society.

Despite our remarkable success, we face significant challenges. Today, campuses across the country seek to serve a growing number of students least likely to benefit from traditional models of higher education. At the same time, years of state disinvestment in public higher education have shifted the financial burden of earning a baccalaureate degree to students and their families, raising serious questions about affordability and mounting public concern about the long-term value of a college credential. However, by the year 2030, California will experience a shortage of more than 1.2 million employees with bachelor's degrees. The future of our innovation economy requires more college educated citizens than ever before. At the same time, current trends also highlight the need for an increasingly flexible citizenry that is capable of engaging in informed, rigorous debate in a society that has become increasingly partisan, uncivil, and divided. The future of our democratic society requires that higher education prepare leaders who are ready and willing to model open expression, engage in rigorous debate, employ critical thinking skills, and participate in democracy. Now more than ever, there is an urgent need to prepare graduates who adapt quickly, and who respond creatively and imaginatively to solve increasingly complex problems. With these sobering facts in mind, it is time for colleges and universities to reimagine our financial and educational models.

At CI, we are prepared, committed, and perfectly positioned to do just that.

Although the public discourse on the need for renewed engagement from higher education is expansive, these conversations have often centered on the role that elite (and often private) universities and community colleges play in alleviating these challenges. This conversation often misses the critical role

that regional state universities, like CI, play in providing critical pathways to economic and social mobility for the most rapidly growing demographic in the country. As the campuses that accept the largest number of low-income students and provide them with the greatest opportunities for economic and social advancement by earning a baccalaureate degree, regional state universities like ours play a critical role in providing society with the educational opportunities it needs to thrive in the future.

While the challenges we face are significant, these challenges present CI with an extraordinary opportunity. This is our invitation to reimagine higher education to serve a new student population for a new era. We are designed to meet this challenge but to do so will require a commitment to achieving several goals.

First, we must address the shortfall of baccalaureate degrees by increasing our graduation rates and eliminating the achievement gap. Our own success in this regard is evidence that this can be achieved. CI already admits a higher percentage of low-income, underprepared and first-generation college students than our peers, and we graduate them at a higher rate. But, we can do better and this will require us to reexamine how we facilitate educational achievement. We already know that hands-on, interdisciplinary and inquiry-based learning experiences are critical components for preparing graduates to be engaged citizens and effective employees and that they have a demonstrably positive impact on graduation rates for all students. Going forward, we need to ensure that all of our students benefit from the opportunities and challenges of these approaches. At the same time, we must maintain high academic expectations and support students as they work to meet those expectations. To that end, we will also need to redouble our efforts to carefully craft co-curricular experiences that directly support the achievement of academic goals.

In the pursuit of academic success for all students, we need only remember the first line of our mission statement “Placing students at the center of the educational experience.” With this mission in mind, the entire university community will work to strengthen collaborative efforts toward constructing clear pathways to graduation; examine and remove administrative barriers that impede student progress; and firmly establish a culture of evidence-based decision making. It is important that we continue to build a culture that emboldens creativity and innovation, while continuing to strengthen our commitment to concrete evidence. This will enable us to make adjustments, evaluate our own progress, and become more effective as we seek to meet our goals and realize the vision that faculty have for educational achievement.

Since the time of our founding, our faculty have crafted immersive service learning, research, and international experiences that encourage imagination, inspire curiosity, and embolden self-discovery. This work has also enhanced the cultivation of long-term partnerships that address community challenges and simultaneously foster engaged citizenship. Moving forward, we need to significantly expand these offerings to ensure that all students see them not just as opportunities they can choose, but as essential experiences linked to their success.

Next, as advances in technology continue to change the future of the workforce and as the world becomes increasingly global and connected, traditional classroom instruction is less likely to foster the development of leaders. To create life-long learners who can transcend disciplines, skillfully navigate

complexities and contradictions, establish dialogue across ideological differences, and embrace change, we must continue to innovate our approach to instruction. Reimagining the educational experience for our students will require a greater investment in the support we provide to our faculty as they seek to deliver these experiences while negotiating our changing world. It is more important now than ever to facilitate an inclusive, vibrant intellectual community, and to increase the resources dedicated to supporting faculty in service of their instructional and scholarly pursuits. We need to provide greater opportunities for faculty to innovate and collaborate, to experiment, to expand new lines of research, and to develop greater connections with their colleagues and academic partners. As we continue to build a thriving multicultural university, we all benefit from the diverse perspectives that our students bring to our campus. At the same time, we need to ensure that our faculty is similarly diverse, reflecting our fundamental commitment to the notion that inclusion is the source of the vibrancy of our intellectual community.

And finally, these goals—higher levels of achievement for all of our students and a commitment to support, strengthen, and grow our faculty—will only be achieved if we are successful in pursuing, developing, and benefitting from varied revenue streams that will support critical needs associated with increased capacity and sustainability. The state alone will not be able to provide the resources that we need to achieve our vision and we will need to explore entrepreneurial public private partnerships, deepen and expand philanthropic support, and further our collaborative efforts with regional partners. Just as we help students develop the capacity to think creatively and innovatively, we must do so ourselves, because we will only realize our mission by developing increased levels of support.

CI has experienced tremendous success since our founding but we are still at the beginning of a vast frontier. We have begun to redraw the boundaries of that frontier. Through our strategic initiatives process grounded in a commitment to evidence-based decision making; faculty, staff, and students are asking critical questions. We are focusing on challenges, devising strategies, and pursuing plans to advance our unique mission. In doing so we will continue to strengthen community partnerships, ensure we have the capacity to meet our goals, and serve our students with increased intentionality. All of these efforts rest on the responsibility and obligation we have to help our students achieve their goals, while continuing to engage in critical inquiry throughout their lives as they contribute to their families, communities, and to our society at large.

CI is critical to the future success of our region and our state. We will realize our own future as our students excel, as our region prospers, and as our society embraces a commitment to inclusive excellence. This commitment, which each of us makes every day, is the essence of community, and for that I am deeply grateful.