First, I would like to welcome everyone back for the start of the Fall Semester. I hope all of you had an enjoyable summer and are looking forward to the upcoming school year as much as I am.

Being new to the campus and my role as president, I have the same eagerness as that of a first-time freshman, and the nervousness one experiences at the beginning of any major change, no matter how positive the change may be or how much it has been anticipated. But my nervousness has been tempered by the great reception I have received from members of this campus. Thank you, it is much appreciated.

Before I get into the heart of my remarks I would like to make an observation that is both personal and relevant to why we are all gathered here today. I have been president of Cal State Dominguez Hills for just under three months, and in three months, I will be 62 years old. Now, why am I telling you this? Well, there is the hope that at least one of you will be thinking, “Man, doesn’t he look good to be that old.” Second, and more importantly, when I look back over the 62 years of my life, from kindergarten to high school, from graduate school to the many jobs I’ve held over the years, and finally standing here before you today, I realize my life’s path, the path that put me on this stage, is proof positive of the purpose of a university like Cal State Dominguez Hills and the extraordinary transformative power of education.

It was in elementary school when one of my teachers discovered that my desire to sit in the back of the classroom conflicted with the fact that I had terrible eyesight and couldn’t see the blackboard. That discovery lead to me getting glasses at a young age, which I have worn ever since. I went to college because a high school guidance counselor saw promise in me and contacted a local two-year college on my behalf. I received my Ph.D. because a professor invited me to work on a research project that sparked an interest that led me to graduate school.

And because I was an independent student, a euphemism for being poor, I worked my way through college. I mowed lawns as part of the grounds keeping crew, conducted campus tours for freshman as part of student orientation, served as a resident adviser in several dormitories, tutored students, wrote TRIO Grants in the Division of Student Affairs and processed student evaluations of faculty in the Office of Institutional Research.

And after college, all of my jobs have been in higher education, either at the board of governors level or at a university. At each and every educational step in my life I met people who helped shape the course of my career. At every step, I was a student of something and teachers were always there. At this step, as president of Cal State Dominguez Hills, I am still a student and yes, teachers are still here, including many of you.

Over the course of 62 years I was transformed from a poor boy born in Mt. Megis, Alabama, nibbling on red clay, to the president of an institution that has been transforming lives in the same way my life has been transformed, by great teachers and mentors and the power of education.

Back in May of this year I told Chancellor [Charles] Reed I had a firm retirement date in mind and would serve as interim president at Cal State Dominguez Hills for a year or two and then I was done. But over the past
three months I have been walking and breathing this campus, meeting faculty, students, staff, administrators, donors, and community leaders. And as I got a closer look it became clear to me that this is not a place where people come just to get an education, people come to Cal State Dominguez Hills to be transformed. The dedication and the commitment of Dominguez Hills faculty and staff under daunting financial and operational circumstances are unbelievable. And how much more is this campus capable of?

What can be achieved for our students is boundless if we are all working together, sharing, communicating, focused, controlling what we can control and dealing as best we can with things beyond our control. The thought of being part of what is going on here, another shoulder to the wheel, contributing to the potential greatness evident here, making a difference, was too great to pass up.

So a couple of weeks ago I met with Chancellor Reed and told him if it pleased him and the trustees, and he found support at this campus, I would love to be the permanent president of California State University, Dominguez Hills. I don't know if this will happen but I want you to know of my intention and that I will do my best to become a permanent member of this community.

This morning I want to cover three key areas, some briefly, some in a bit more detail:

1. I want to talk about our current enrollment and the realities of our budget situation, both of which have impacted the campus in recent years and will continue to impact our future in ways not yet clear.
2. I want to talk about decisions and actions this university took in the face of enrollment, budget, and other external and internal pressures
3. And I want to touch on some key initiatives during the year ahead

While I am relatively new to this campus, I am not the only new person here today. In your printed convocation program we introduce new faculty and staff who recently joined our campus. In addition to new faculty and staff, this fall we also welcome over 1,200 new freshmen and nearly 1,900 new transfer students to our campus. Let's give all our new faculty, staff, and students a warm welcome.

While our official enrollment census day is still a few weeks away, currently nearly 13,700 students are enrolled this fall, bringing our full-time equivalent enrollment to 9,841. As a result of mandated enrollment caps due to state budget reductions, rather than continuing to grow our student enrollment, further transforming lives and serving our community, we have been reducing enrollment. These reductions not only negatively impact our ability to grant access to the thousands of qualified students seeking a CSU education—striving to improve their lives—it has a direct negative impact on our budget.

During the upcoming year, I plan to hold a series of Town Hall meetings, providing members of the campus community with opportunities to meet and discuss timely issues of importance to the future of our campus. During one of these upcoming Town Hall sessions we'll talk more about our enrollment and the numerous issues surrounding that.

In the meantime, if you have enrollment related questions, seek out Vice President Sue Borrego. Sue and her staff have done a great job managing enrollments in an ever shifting political and financial landscape.

The Budget. There are not a lot of good things to say about our budget, other than the fact that Vice President Mary Ann Rodriguez and her staff, the University Budget Committee, and the vice presidents have done a
great job planning for the worst-case scenario. As most of you know, for the past several years the CSU has been dealing with state budget reductions in some form or another. Some of the reductions were off-set by student tuition increases but these increases did not cover the full reduction and did not address prior budget cuts or years of costly unfunded mandates, such as increases in health benefits. Overall, since 2007 Cal State Dominguez Hills has reduced its baseline budget almost $9.0M. This year we are in a similar difficult fiscal situation. The 2012/13 CSU budget enacted by the State assumes the passage of the Proposition 30, which is on the November 2012 ballot. If Proposition 30 fails, a $250M additional cut is looming for the CSU. For Dominguez Hills, we could be forced to cut an additional $5.8M in baseline funds. If the measure passes, however, we would essentially have the same budget this year as last year.

Prior to my arrival, Cal State Dominguez Hills actively began preparing for a worst-case scenario, developing plans to cover our $5.8M share of the potential budget reduction. Each division prepared budget reduction plans and presented these to the University Budget Committee, which in turn made recommendations to the president. If Proposition 30 does not pass, we have sufficient one-time funds to get us through this year, but will need to address the long-term potential impact of an additional $5.8M baseline budget reduction should the proposition fail.

So what is our fiscal context for the foreseeable future? We live in a state disinvesting in higher education at a record-breaking pace. Incessant budget reductions have eroded quality, access and morale. We are called upon to educate more students with reduced resources. Nationally, there is a changing perception about the role and importance of higher education, and there is increased competition from for-profits and online institutions.

A lot of things impacting us financially, we cannot control. But we can control what we do with the resources we have available to us. While we are not getting sufficient funds from the state, we have to use the money we have as effectively as we can while still making critical investments in the future of this university. And we can control our attitude towards our situation. How we think about ourselves. How we think about our future and how we work together as a team.

As I said at an earlier meeting with the Academic Affairs Division, all of our decisions should be guided by two questions:

1. What's in the best interests of our students?
2. What's in the best interests of our university?

Next month Vice President Mary Ann Rodriguez and I will host the first in the series of campus Town Halls I mentioned earlier, focusing on the budget. We will walk you through the details of the campus budget as part of my intention to be transparent in our fiscal operations and provide an opportunity for open dialog and discussion. In November we will have a second Town Hall to update the campus on the status of our budget if the tax initiative passes or fails and the short and long term impact on the campus.

Let me say a word about pressure and character. Writer Robert McKee said, “True character is revealed in the choices a human being makes under pressure. The greater the pressure, the deeper the revelation...” This applies to institutions of higher education as well. After all, we are no more than a collection of like-minded human beings gathered around a common purpose.

Cal State Dominguez Hills has been under a lot of pressures: unprecedented state budget reductions, rising tuition rates, reduced access, insufficient and inadequate laboratory equipment, and crowded classrooms; the list goes on and on.
As I said earlier, I’ve spent the last several weeks focusing primarily on talking to people on this campus, and those are the pressures articulated to me by faculty, staff, and students. If true character is revealed in the decisions we make under pressure, what decisions have the faculty, staff, administrators and students of Dominguez Hills made in response to the above-mentioned pressures and what do these collective decisions reveal about the true character of this university?

Despite pressures that push against excellence, our faculty excelled: For example, Dr. Kamal Hamden has brought more than $20 million in grants to Dominguez Hills to support STEM teacher education, working closely with LA, Compton, Inglewood and other school districts. While the world celebrated the success of discovering the Higgs boson particle using some of the most sophisticated super computers on the planet, Cal State Dominguez Hills’ own Dr. John Price quietly built his own cluster computing system, using discarded computers, allowing him and his students to run physics computations required for their research.

Dr. Terry McGlynn, associate professor of biology, received a National Science Foundation International Research Experience for Students grant, providing opportunities each year for a cohort of undergraduate students, a graduate student, and a K-12 teacher to spend eight weeks in the summer at the La Selva Biological Reserve in Costa Rica conducting tropical ecology experiments under the mentorship of Dr. McGlynn and other U.S. and international research partners.

And here at CSUDH, four faculty from psychology and communications banded together to provide mentoring, research guidance, and co-publishing opportunities to both undergraduate and graduate students and successfully propelled two students each year during the last three years into Ph.D. programs while simultaneously coauthoring a book and several top-tier journal articles.

And our School of Health and Human Services has established a premier Orthotics and Prosthetics program, the only such program in the State of California.

Cal State Dominguez Hills also has been successful in developing and implementing a multi-faceted program geared towards improving post-baccalaureate degree completion by underrepresented students via a program commonly referred to as PEGS, which as many of you know stands for Promoting Excellence in Graduate Studies.

Despite the pressure from a reduced philanthropic environment, our Advancement team, under the leadership of Vice President Greg Saks, obtained more than $4.12 million in cash and in-kind commitments, supporting academic programs and student scholarships during Fiscal Year 2011/12, a 25% increase over the prior year. And we received a $1 million gift from the Annenberg Foundation to establish the Wallis Annenberg Endowed Professorship for Innovation in STEM Education, the university’s first endowed faculty position.

Despite the pressure of insufficient numbers and resources, our staff excelled, continuing to look for ways to support our faculty and students: The Library’s Affordable Learning Solutions initiative, which since its inception has involved 130 faculty members, has saved students over $600,000 if each student had selected a full-price print textbook. Enrollment Management and Student Affairs secured two Upward Bound Grants for close to $3 million for 5 years, a Student Support Services grant for $1.5 million for 5 years, and a Gear Up grant for close to $3.5 million for 6 years.

Then there is the Summer Bridge Academy, a joint effort between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs and Enrollment Management that continues to generate remarkable results. For the fourth year in a row the retention rates of students participating in the Summer Bridge Academy tracked 15-20 percentage points higher than students not participating in the program. Results of this program have yielded regional and national attention, including a quarter of a million dollar gift from the Rosaline and Arthur Gilbert Foundation to expand some program elements to all students.

And our Physical Plant staff, by strategically investing a relatively small amount of money up front and capitalizing on utility rebates, they successfully lowered the University’s monthly electricity bill by replacing lamps and light fixtures around campus with low wattage induction bulbs and energy efficient fixtures.
Despite the pressure of crowded classrooms, rising tuition rates, reduced access, insufficient and inadequate laboratory equipment, our students excelled. At the end of May, our former physics student, Harold L. Fairweather Jr., was admitted into the Ph.D. Physics program at UNLV for Fall 2012. Only the second graduate from Dominguez Hills to be admitted to a Ph.D. program in physics.

Three CSUDH students took top honors [in 2011] at the 25th Annual CSU Student Research Competition, a systemwide competition featuring the best academic projects across the CSU. Two of our students, John Garcia and David Marks, both took first place in the Humanities and Letters category. And junior business and administration student, Bree Nguyen, took second place in the Business, Economics and Public Administration category despite being the only undergraduate entry, competing against graduate students.

A record number of students, six, from the Clinical Laboratory Sciences Program earned scholarships [in 2011-12] from the American Society for Clinical Pathology in partnership with sponsor Siemens Healthcare Diagnostics.

And the McNair Scholars Program, since its inception, has 51 Dominguez Hills students who have gone on to earn master’s degrees; and 45 students are currently enrolled in Ph.D. programs. And in 2013, we expect three of our McNair program alum to complete their Ph.D. degrees.

In sports, our softball team won the CCAA Championship for the Toros; and the team earned CCAA Coach and CCAA Newcomer of the Year awards. The 2011-12 Toros boasted 5 All-Americans. Matthew Young was the first player from the CCAA selected in this year’s Major League Baseball draft. He was chosen by the defending champion St. Louis Cardinals.

And yes, I have to mention our alumna, our Olympian, Carmelita Jeter, who overcame hamstring injuries and other setbacks—remaining focused and committed to achieving her dreams—to conclude her first Olympic Games this summer with one Gold, one Silver and one Bronze medal. Her tenacity and dedication to hard work was nurtured here at Cal State Dominguez Hills.

These examples I mention are just a few of the good things being done on this campus despite the pressure it has faced. There were so many more I wanted to include in my remarks and many, many more I encountered during my campus visits. This campus has been tested, been under pressure. But the character that has been revealed is one of self-sacrifice, putting mission and students first.

The character of this campus also is one of integrity, doing the job you’ve been asked to do, excelling, even when those who ask you to do it don’t always provide the support necessary to do the job as well as you know you can do it. And the good character work of this campus has not gone unnoticed or unrewarded: Cal State Dominguez Hills earned a 10-year reaccreditation by WASC [in 2008], in recognition of our ongoing institution-wide commitment to attaining academic excellence.

This campus' greater focus on student success and learning has benefited our students tremendously: 79.6% of full-time, first-time freshmen who started at Cal State Dominguez Hills in Fall 2010 persisted and returned for their second year. In comparison, only 69.1% of the previous year's cohort (Fall 2009) persisted into their second year. Fall 2010 is the first time persistence rates moved out of the sixtieth percentile range.

Cal State Dominguez Hills was listed in the *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* 2012 publication on the Top 100 Producers of Minority Degrees: Nationally, Cal State Dominguez Hills ranks 38th in conferring baccalaureate degrees to Hispanics. We rank 60th in conferring baccalaureate degrees to minorities. We rank 88th in conferring baccalaureate degrees to African Americans. Only one of two in California to make this list. The other, CSU Northridge ranked 94th.

Cal State Dominguez Hills has been tested. And to repeat, what has been revealed is a character full of self-sacrifice and integrity. When a challenge is there, this campus takes action.
The reality however, is there are still challenges we have to face. One issue that looms large has to do with our graduation rates. Our first-time freshman six-year graduation rate will be under 25% this year and most likely will be the same next year. The CSU system average is 51%.

Our transfer student four-year graduation rate is 59%. The CSU average is 65%. I know that: Many of our students are first generation students; Many of our students come from low income families; Many of our students come from under-resourced school districts and arrive in need of remediation; Our students work and have other obligations outside of the classroom; Budget cuts have reduced the number of faculty and advisers. These factors are real and do have significant impacts on retention and graduation rates. But we know what works in terms of student success with our student population:

- Summer Bridge Programs
- Internships
- Research
- Math and English Institutes
- Intrusive and proactive monitoring and advising
- Theme-based classes
- Cohort groups
- University 101

Pilot programs have been implemented on this campus which demonstrated great success in increasing retention from year to year. But they have been limited in scope If we know what works to improve retention and graduation rates, either by our own efforts or based on research and programs nationally, then we owe it to our students and to ourselves to implement those ideas on this campus.

I know this will cost money. But let's not worry about that now. If we decide we want to go in that direction, I feel certain we can find the money.

Becoming a national model for student success will be one of my key goals and a topic you will hear more about in the weeks ahead. And I am convinced we will be successful!

Despite what my ego tries to tell me, I know a certain truth. And that truth is I have had few successes in life solely on my own. Nearly everything I've accomplished in life has benefited from the encouragement, involvement or inspiration from others. I also know it is rare that great ideas spring unannounced from the collective unconscious. Most great ideas spring from a thorough understanding of the facts.

So in order to get great ideas from the campus community to help advance this university, I need to ensure everyone has a good understanding of the facts and the variables that drive this university; revenues and expenditures, enrollment, graduation rates, policies, etc. In addition to the Town Halls, I mentioned earlier, this month I will begin scheduling a series of lunch and afternoon coffee meetings with small groups of faculty, staff and students to share information and get your ideas.

We need bold, innovative, and aggressive thinking on how best to improve and advance this university. We need this from our vice presidents, managers, faculty, staff, and students. We will make mistakes. I will make mistakes. Mistakes and failure that come from pushing the envelope on behalf of the best interests of our students and the university are acceptable risks. We learn from them and move on. Mistakes or failures that come about because of self-interest or inaction when action clearly is called for are unacceptable.
All of the workshops, literature and advice aimed at new presidents say, go slow. Make no big decisions until you’ve spent a year listening and getting a feel for the campus. Well, my wife says I’m impatient. I’m very patient with people, but I am impatient when it comes to doing what we know needs to be done. We cannot be patient when it comes to faculty and staff hiring. We cannot be patient when it comes to investing in information technology and academic equipment. And we cannot be patient when it comes to improving student success and graduation rates.

Let me wrap up my remarks with a comment on what we have to do versus what we get to do. Students, when you complain about a particularly tough course or a mid-term paper or a difficult exam, remember: Millions of students in this country and around the world don’t get to go to college. It is a privilege that you get to do this. The same goes for faculty, staff and administrators. Some days we act like we’re going to die because we have to go to work. Moaning and groaning all day. You know who you are and so do your colleagues. I have to be honest, sometimes that can be me. I’ve been here less than 90 days and already I have complaints. I complain when I have to go to a meeting at 7 a.m. and there’s a dinner meeting at 7 p.m. the same day. But I remind myself daily, I don’t have to do this job. Being president of a major university is a rare honor and I get to do it. None of us has to do what we do here at this university. We are lucky because we get to do it.

Let me read a quote from “When Nietzsche Wept” written by Dr. Irvin Yalom.

> What if some day or night a demon were to steal after you in your loneliest loneliness and say to you:

> ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again—and you with it, speck of dust!’

> Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: ‘You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine!’

So, I ask you, how will you look back on your days at Dominguez Hills? Remember, all of this will end. This day will end. This semester will end. This job will end. One day you will be looking back on your days here.

For me, I want to look back on my days here at Dominguez Hills and proudly say, “Yeah, I was part of that!” I don’t even know what “that” is, but if we build it together I know it will be awesome.

Every administration, faculty, staff, and student body has their turn. Good work has been done here in the past. Now, this is our turn. As we look forward to the future of this institution, let’s build something awesome, let’s build something divine.

As I said earlier, I don’t have to do this job, I get to do it. Being President of this University is an honor and a privilege. And I thank the people who made it possible and I thank all of you who have been so gracious in welcoming me here.

Thank You.