SPRING 2021 STATE OF THE COLLEGE

WELCOME

Good morning Ohlone Community, faculty, staff, students, and friends!

Just for the best viewing possibilities this morning, it is recommended that on your View Button in the upper right hand corner of your screen, you select “Side-by-side: Gallery.”

It’s my pleasure to once again be with you today and to celebrate with you all that we have been able to do as a College amid the challenges we have faced in 2020. We move into 2021 with optimism and hope. Now more than ever we need to be the cornerstone for our community, for our students and for each other.

Even as we continue navigating amid this once in a lifetime, exhausting pandemic, we continue striving at emerging on the other side of it stronger and more resilient. Much lies before us and that journey continues today. As I begin my second semester, on my 200th day in office, I still cannot think of a better place and a better group with whom to join in this journey. I have been amazed and impressed and deeply honored to serve this team. Thank you for all that you have done to get us here and thank you for all that you bring to the College, our students, your colleagues, and the Tri-City community we serve.

INTRODUCTIONS

It is important for me to begin this morning by introducing some of our most ardent supporters, the members of the Ohlone College Board of Trustees. As you see on your screen they are: Board Chair Richard Watters, Board Vice Chair Suzanne Lee Chan, Trustee Greg Bonaccorsi, Trustee Jan Giovannini-Hill, Trustee Lance Kwan, Trustee Vivien Larsen, Trustee Dr. Rakesh Sharma, and our Student Trustee Megan Aves. Thank you for being here today and for your dedication and support of Ohlone College, our students, faculty, and staff. I look forward to the day when I can meet with you in person.

With the November election, we had some changes to our Board membership and it would be important to thank former trustees Teresa Cox, who served 12 years, and Tawney Warren for their service to the board. It is wonderful to have Mr. Kwan and Dr. Sharma join us, and to have Mr. Bonaccorsi rejoin us.

I also wish to recognize and thank the members of the Ohlone College Foundation Board who are joining us this morning. Your ongoing support of the college and our students is not only truly appreciated, but also important for us to continue to serve, particularly in this time in which we find ourselves. Never before have we been challenged the way we are now to support our students in new and creative ways.

Speaking of our students, the executive officers of the Associated Students of Ohlone College are also here with us today, including ASOC President Krina Shah, and her executive board. In all my years working with student trustees and student governments, this group is one of, if not the, best I have ever worked with. Our students are well represented and in great hands with them. I applaud their tireless efforts to find ways to creatively serve in this environment while remaining outstanding students.
I would also like to welcome the many community leaders from local business and industry, local government, universities, school districts, non-profit organizations, religious groups, and police and fire departments. The support of our elected officials is also critical and I welcome the day when I can introduce you in person and individually so that we can all see and recognize you for your support and on-going advocacy for the college and education. Ohlone thanks you for your support and for your service to the community.

And of course, a big welcome all our faculty and staff. It is all of you who make us go and allow us to serve our students with quality and professionalism. It cannot be overstated that your adjustment in this crazy year has not only allowed the college to maintain our status, but shown levels of creativity, ingenuity, and resilience that I would challenge anyone to match. Thank you.

I cannot forget my wonderful executive team who not only support me and facilitate all that we are trying to do and who have nothing but love for the college and seeing it reach its potential. Vice President of Academic Affairs Tony DiSalvo, Vice President of Student Services Dr. Milton Lang, Vice President of Administrative and Technology Services Dr. Chris Dela Rosa, Vice President of Human Resources and Training Shairon Zingsheim, and Executive Director of the Ohlone College Foundation, Community Relations and Marketing, Binh Nguyen. I am also excited to announce an addition to the team. On February 1, Dr. Melissa Padilla Cervantes will join Ohlone and the executive team as Executive Dean of Equity, Inclusion and Campus Diversity.

And I would be remiss if I did not say a big thank you and introduction to our First Lady and my wife Shanta McDavis, who I believe is joining us from afar.

As we move into spring 2021, we have tons on our plate, in addition to continuing to navigate this pandemic safely. We are poised to reimagine and reconstruct how we do education, how we serve our students and our community and how we make the playing field more equitable.

When I first accepted the position at Ohlone some months back, I had the arduous task of telling my 10-year old daughter about the change. So, after coming to an understanding of how far Ohlone was from Chaffey, her next question was, “What are they called?” I told her that we were Renegades. And as you can imagine, her next question was, “What is a Renegade?” I had to think about that one and figure out a way she would understand. So of course, I said, a Renegade is like a Desperado. And you know the question that led to. I showed her the mascot and she still did not get it. We will just park that story for now.

But that idea of how to identify ourselves is one that has sat with me. So, being the president, I figured I might as well produce my own interpretation. One definition I found when I looked it up was, “a person who deserts and betrays an organization, country, or set of principles.” In this time and era, let’s go with the idea of deserting or betraying a set of principles. I know this can be thin ice given recent events in our country. But here goes.

Our challenge is to be Renegades. But let’s be renegades in deserting a community college system that leaves students behind. Let’s be renegades to a system that talks an awful lot about equity, but struggles with truly putting it into practice. Let’s be renegades in showing our 115 system brethren that we are going to break away from business as usual and living with the same outcomes and results that our system has lived with for decades. Let’s rebel against mediocrity; let’s rebel against being the standard.
Let’s be extraordinary. Let’s be Renegades in how we serve students like they have never been served before. Let’s be Renegades in meetings students on their journey’s, wherever they are; Let’s be renegades in transforming higher education into a system that invites students to contribute in their learning, makes them feel welcome in the offices and the classroom. So if we’re going to be Renegades, let us as a community define what that means. That’s something I can sell to my 10-year-old. Hopefully all of us can.

Let’s talk about where we are and where we are going. I’d like to introduce you to the big things we will talk about this morning

- COVID-19 Response
- Economic Status and Budget
- Equity Movement
- Where We Are Going

To say that 2020 was a heck of a year would be an understatement. It was something out of the twilight zone, the Rod Sterling version, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the California wildfires that left us questioning whether we were on Mars or on the earth with its orange hues over the Bay Area, and the swell of America’s most challenging issue, the disease of racism—an issue that this country can no longer ignore. With these things, we had a choice in how to respond and I am proud to say that we chose the path of facing it all head on. I noticed a lot of people fondly saying goodbye to 2020 and welcoming 2021. While 2020 was a devastating year in many ways, 2021 can only provide us with the golden pathway we are seeking if we put in the work. We must continue to engage, remain healthy and make conscious choices to be our best.

Just to get the suspense out of the way, I will repeat my statement from the fall. The State of Ohlone College is Strong. We are a community of committed passionate and dedicated educators at all sectors of the college. That combination gives us the ability to do the unimagined.

So, let us start with our continued response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

We responded to the pandemic by moving classes online back in March and continue to keep instruction that way through the spring semester. Though we now have a vaccine in place, and the roll out of it has begun, albeit slowly, we still need to maintain our vigilance toward ending the spread and moving back to some semblance of normalcy. The health and safety of our campus community remains at the forefront of all of the decisions we make, and we believe that keeping our students, faculty, and staff home is the most responsible decision given the state of the spread of the virus. Our response in Fall and since the outbreak have not only been appropriate, but I would argue it was innovative and collective. The following video will share some of our successes accomplished by our Ohlone community.

The question we are currently wrestling with is what will we look like when we come back? While the honest answer is, I do not know, the reality is that we know that we will look different. We will have to teach and serve differently. We have seen just how easily we this crazy thing can take off. I anticipate we will be back together in the fall, but nowhere near how we were together in 2019. This crisis has
taken many distinct kinds of tolls on us. But what we know is that we will emerge from it and we will continue forward in our mission.

The one thing that has become clear, not only for us, but for our system as well, is that we have discovered our capabilities and realized ways of performing and doing business that we once either could not imagine, would not imagine, or just chose not to try and do. The possible has become reality.

We know that the pandemic over the last year has had a severe impact on our economies, local, state and federal. We must remember that this has been a global issue and has impacted the global economy. While everyone has been impacted in some ways, what we know is that it has disproportionately impacted our various communities in many different ways.

Economically, the Covid-19 pandemic will follow the trend of most pandemics which shows that the share of wealth going to the bottom tiers of society decreases. Additionally, unemployment for workers with basic education has increased — which was not the case for people with advanced degrees.

Without protections for the most vulnerable workers, the pandemic’s impact on wealth inequality may be larger than previous outbreaks because of the number of workers without college degrees who have been laid off reports a study from the International Monetary Fund.

The study’s co-author says that, “People with advanced degrees see little effect on job prospects and find a way to keep jobs or are able to find a new one fairly quickly,” “People with only a high school diploma go through long periods of joblessness, which has a scarring effect on their incomes and health and family situation, and even prospect for their kids.”

This becomes yet another reminder of why we do what we do.

**ECONOMY/ENROLLMENT**

As a college we come into this spring semester facing the same uncertainties with the budget as we had in the fall. We still find ourselves working with the same funding formula. We find that the pandemic still has not settled enough for the state to determine its finances, so we are in a game of wait and see. However, we do maintain our Hold Harmless status from the state for three more years.

While you know that enrollments were up last summer, we saw a slight dip in the fall. The reason for my optimism is that there were districts more than 20% percent down, so we have held our own. We owe that to the work we did at not only serving our students, but the work to keep our staff and faculty in the best possible positions to serve and teach those students. Our January Cybersession enrollment was very strong and to date spring looks to be even or ahead of most colleges, including the Bay 10. We are just a little more than 5% down over a year ago.

We are still working at a three-pronged approach to our budget. The first is controlling expenses. Some of this is easy and some, more difficult. But we are working at this in ways to keep it natural and not overly impact the daily operations of educating, which is our core mission. We can be lean and still eat healthy. The second and third are similar in that they both work at increasing revenue. One aim is exploring opportunities to generate revenue that does not relate to our enrollment, or apportionment. Generally, there are three ways to increase revenue: Enrollment or Apportionment; Cost of Living...
Adjustments; and outside revenue. Based on what we have experienced from the state, relying on COLA is a guessing game, so we look at that as something we cannot count on. The third is of course enrollment. While this has been an area of challenge for us in recent times, I know that not only can we turn this around, but we will turn this around. We have the creativity, ingenuity, intelligence, and work ethic to make the most strides in this area. The tri-cities will know who we are, and we will be the first choice in affordable higher education when the dust settles.

The Governor’s Budget Proposal was released on January 8th for fiscal year 2021-22. While we are still watching to see what the final budget will look like in May and June, and analyzing how this will impact the Ohlone budget, the budget proposal looks promising for education, in general, but the state recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic is not over, and resources are needed to address the social and economic impacts.

The Community College system will receive a planned 1.5% increase in funding attributed to cost of living adjustments. For Ohlone, this translates to an estimated $776 thousand above our total hold harmless funding. Many of the long-time categorical programs such as DSPS, EOPS, CalWORKs, and CARE, will receive the same COLA increase.

Other programs such as Student Equity and Achievement program and Strong Workforce will not see an increase in funding, but funding stays the same. You would also notice that while some restricted programs remained the same, there are some decreases in funding for Ohlone College. This is largely because the funding is tied to FTES. We are all aware that our enrollment has been on a decline over the past several years.

Another good news is the paying down of deferrals. Nearly 78% of all 2020-21 deferrals are expected to be paid in 2021-22 and this is about $8.4 million for Ohlone. While this is not new funding, the payoff guarantees the availability of funds to pay our expenses in a timely manner without borrowing.

New Initiatives

- Emergency Student Financial Assistance Grants
- Retention Enrollment Strategies
- College Affordability
- Workforce Development

On top of these programs, there are new initiatives in the budget. The initiatives seemed to be the focus for community colleges to ensure continued economic mobility and success of the 2.1 million students enrolled in our system. The Governor is requesting an early action package this spring that will specifically address: Emergency student financial assistance grants and Retention and re-enrollment strategies. Other priorities revolve around College Affordability, Student Needs, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and Workforce Development. At this time, we do not have guidance as to how we can calculate what Ohlone would receive under these new initiatives and priorities.

Again, this is very early in the process of budget development and we will surely see changes as we move through the process until June, when the state is expected to adopt the 2021-22 budget. While the budget proposal looks promising and looks good for education, there is still not enough allocated for community colleges to fully fund the needs of the entire system.
No one knows exactly when we will come out of this current state, but we for sure will come out of it, and we will have displayed an expanded capacity for teaching and learning and a resiliency that we hope the next generation will not have to match.

Recovering from the pandemic and moving our economy forward will fall heavily on the community college system. We will be the drivers of the workforce. But what we know is that things may emerge differently. We have proven that we do not have to move at the speed of molasses to make change when we really, genuinely want and need to. So now is the time to serve our purpose.

It cannot be lost on us that the pandemic and the economy has taken it greatest toll on those who are poor, who are Black and who are Brown. Which is why we must continue responding to ensuring that Ohlone College is a diverse, equitable and welcoming learning institution, outside and inside of the classrooms.

I hope I can put this into some context for us. Three weeks ago, I received a text from my gardener that he was not going to be there because he was sick. Now for the record, I can mow my own lawn, but I choose not to, and I am not really good at edging and the finer detail work. Plus, I have a black thumb, which is evidenced by the plants in my office. But that’s another story. Two weeks ago, I received another text informing me that he would not be there again. I had no worries, it’s winter and so it is not growing that fast. He informed me he had contracted Covid. So, I told him to take care of himself and get well. On Monday, the Martin Luther King holiday, my wife, and I were both surprised when he showed up and was mowing the lawn. My wife had to move her car so he could get into the back yard. She had a conversation with him and asked how he was doing. The long and short of it is that he felt like he had to be back at work because he could not afford to lose any customers. She said he was afraid that people would drop him if he did not come back.

I felt so horrible. That he was so worried about losing customers that he might choose coming back rather than giving himself the proper time to heal and get healthy. And I realized that he is the embodiment of what we do and why we do it. When we do our jobs right; when we serve our purpose and fulfill our mission, we allow people the opportunity at economic security. We provide people with the tools to not walk so narrowly on the financial branch, but to place themselves in secure financial positions. And to do that we have to not just think of the now, but think of the future and how we serve as the economic driver.

This next video takes us a bit into our future as we think about our work and the planning necessary to prepare our students INSERT JOBS OF THE FUTURE \VIDEO/3:09

If we remember nothing else from that, let’s remember that we need to invest in people. We need to invest in our community, we need to invest in creating equitable systems.

CALL TO ACTION

I would be remiss not to mention the work the College has done in its efforts to tackle the issues of racism and inequity that exploded to new heights and realms of consciousness in 2020 and continuing today. Just because 2020 is gone and we have moved into 2021 by no means that this work has ceded. As a matter of fact, that is the norm in our society. We have a flash, and we relax and forget. Just
because the protests aren’t happening daily doesn’t mean the work has left. One of the things that struck me when I walked onto campus last year were the words, “Unity in Diversity.”

The inauguration of President Joe Biden was a wonderful sight for many. But lest we forget that it was not a wonderful sight for all. For all the talk of unity the work lies within us. We must have the desire and will to speak truth to power, to open our hearts and minds with those we do not agree completely. The difference between Tuesday and Wednesday is that there is a new dawn of hope, and that I can use the term systemic racism in this speech without worrying that our Title IV funding will be taken.

When the year began, I outlined four strategic approaches we would take to change structure of inequity. Those are Policy, Budget, Curriculum and Hiring. We have begun the work with those, and yet there is so much to go.

**Policy:** Our board of trustees has taken up the call, and among other things, reflecting on their role in policy development; hosting a workshop on DEI and the Chancellor’s Call to Action led by Dr. Regina Stanback-Stroud. Next month they will look to finalize a resolution on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and their commitment to it.

As a staff we have begun working at it as well. The College Council and Faculty Senate have taken up the charge. We have hosted retreats and trainings to look at our equity lenses. We currently have a draft in our participatory governance process on how we implement the Call to Action and strategy recommendations from the Chancellors DEI Task Force to meet the Ohlone College operations.

To ensure all have the opportunity to engage in this conversation and process I will be hosting five open forums to discuss the document and receive feedback and input.

**Budget:** The college has committed to looking at how we spend our resources. The commitment is to look at ensuring we are engaging in equity practices when committing to funding. As we move into Budget Development for the 2021-2022 fiscal year in the next month or so, DEI commitments will be given priority. We will be adding more detail and structure around this conversation moving forward.

**Curriculum:** Our faculty were active in the preliminary stages of curriculum review and reform last semester in answering the call. Kudos to the STEM faculty for working directly at looking at bringing equitable practices into the classroom. I have also been in conversations with faculty senate leadership about supporting wishes to expand similar work and training throughout the college. I look forward to continuing to work with Senate President Myers this semester to move their efforts forward. Just yesterday they senate held an engaging and informative workshop with the state academic senate leadership to help continue the movement and the work.

We know from a litany of literature and research that the number one factor in a student’s choice to stay at a college their sense of welcoming and engagement inside of the classroom. This a foundational and fundamental movement towards being and equity-based college.

**Hiring:** We know that a foundational view of equity is getting students to the classroom which begins with their sense of belonging outside of the classroom. How they are made to feel when they walk on the campus, how they feel when they walk into the dining commons, or bookstore, or any of a hundred offices on campus dictates whether they belong. Our commitment must be to hiring and training people who not only believe in equity and diversity, but who live it and practice it just as they breathe. This will
take deep campus conversations and looks at what is important to us when we are adding to the community. It cannot be implied. It must be direct. But the time is now to change what the expectations are for those whom we want to hire. We must state plain and clear what working at Ohlone means and what those expectations are so that we do not waste their time or ours. Our future employees must know from the moment they look at Ohlone that we are committed to an equity based, anti-racist education and educational environment.

Our commitment to being an equity-based institution, to diversity, equity, and inclusion, is not an initiative. It is a way of life. It is part of our DNA and framework. Our equity and justice are built in our guided pathways framework, our commitment to ensuring our students finish their programs in the shortest amount of time possible, to ensuring they complete transfer level math and English in the first year so that they are not wiling away in a mountain of prerequisites with no sight and no hope of an ending.

As we work to prepare our students for the real world, lest we remember that many of them are in the real world already. Sometimes we want to teach them; we want to show them the harsh realities of post education life, but we want to do so with policies and barriers that we do not impose on ourselves. Where is the equity in that? We want them to meet all the deadlines for three, four, five simultaneous jobs with penalty for being late, and yet we do not want to hold ourselves to those same standards. In this crazy environment we expect students to show themselves on camera, regardless of what their living situation might be, or regardless of what other personal issues they may have. And yet at any given meeting we have members of our community who are not willing to show themselves on camera. We would be well to remember, that regardless of our position, to some we are part of the privileged community. Even having a full-time job with benefits puts us in a class ahead of so many. This is just a way of saying, let’s be cautious before we choose to judge others too quickly and err on the side of understanding and inclusion.

MOVING FORWARD:

Moving forward, it is critical for us to remember our calling and our role. As educators we have the responsibility of creating generational wealth and preparing our students to compete for, enter and remain successful in their respective career markets. When we think about what our future looks like, I refer back to the jobs of the future video, and the quote, “we have the greatest brains, talent and resources in the world. There is no reason we can’t and use excuses that it’s too hard.” That sentiment exemplifies my belief in what we have here at Ohlone College. I would add that we also have the commitment and passion for educating our students and building our communities.

To close, with much respect, I will paraphrase and adapt a portion of Amanda Gorman’s inauguration poem, “The Hill I Climb.”

“We’ve learned that quiet isn’t always peace. In the norms and notions of what just is, isn’t always justice.

And yet, the dawn is ours before we knew it. Somehow, we do it. Somehow, we’ve weathered and witnessed a college that isn’t broken, but simply unfinished. And yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine, but that doesn’t mean we are striving to form a college that is perfect. We are striving to forge
our college with purpose, to compose a college committed to all cultures, colors, characters and conditions of man.

And with that, I bid you a wonderful semester.

Thank You.

You will find on your screen the schedule of the rest of the day. I thank our guests for attending and know that you are welcome to hear Drs. DeGruy at 10am and Berry at 1pm.