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## Letter - Beginning our journey of innovation together

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## Beginning our journey of innovation together

Jul 6, 2020

Dear fellow Pacificans,

Jean and I have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of warmhearted welcomes during our first official week at University of the Pacific. Letters, posts, texts, calls and emails from faculty, staff, students, alumni, supporters, community leaders and our regents vividly demonstrate what makes Pacific such a special place: our people and their devotion to our university. This experience was another reminder of why Jean and I are so excited to embark on the newest stage of the Pacific journey together with you. Thank you all.

Since we don't have the ability to gather as a community right now, I wanted to take this opportunity to share with you some thoughts on our university's future. But before I do, please indulge me in some well-deserved recognitions.

My first day as president was Wednesday, but I have been working closely with the Pacific leadership team for the past two months. That has provided me the opportunity to watch our university in action during COVID-19. I have seen up close the strong and unflappable leadership of Maria Pallavicini, who selflessly embraced the role of interim president and guided us safely through these uncharted waters. We all owe Maria a tremendous debt of gratitude. I am fortunate to have her as a partner leading our university forward.

I also am appreciative of the tremendous efforts of so many others. Our regents, led by past chair Kevin Huber and newly elected chair Norman Allen, the vice presidents, the deans, particularly Michael Hunter Schwartz, who stepped away from his beloved McGeorge School of Law to serve as interim provost, and our amazing staff, who have made sure Pacific has not skipped a beat despite COVID-19 forcing us from our campuses.

But perhaps most impressive has been our faculty. Our faculty colleagues seamlessly redesigned and transformed their in-person courses to fully remote experiences in a matter of days in March, making sure that our students received the top-flight Pacific education they expect and deserve. And now faculty are designing their fall courses to deliver in class and remotely at the same time, preparing for all contingencies.

Thanks to all of your extraordinary work and support, we are in an excellent position to take on the challenges that lie ahead. And there are significant challenges in the coming days and weeks.

We simply don't know right now whether COVID-19 will allow us to safely return to our campuses next month. We do know, however, that our faculty will be ready to provide the best education possible to our students—no matter how or where it is delivered. We also know that our staff will

continue to work tirelessly and adapt to support our students and faculty. And we know that our regents, alumni and supporters will be there for our university and students, as they have been throughout.

Meanwhile, the murders of Black Americans by police and the Black Lives Matter movement are leading to a broader reexamination of Pacific's role in social justice issues. I spent most of my first day as president on Wednesday speaking individually with faculty and staff who have been immersed in these issues. From these early conversations, it is clear we have much work to do. This month I will hold a series of conversations focused on Black Lives Matter and social justice issues at Pacific, starting today with the Pacific Black Alumni Club. Conversations are an essential first step, but they need to be quickly followed by actions. "Doing better" is no longer sufficient. Pacific should be a national leader on diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education. That process must start now.

These are historic challenges that we must face today. But I also want to take a moment here to talk about other dimensions of our long-term future.

It is common that the appointment of a new university leader comes with a new mission and vision. Some schools need that. We do not.

Our greatest strengths are our unwavering principles, values and clarity of mission. We are focused squarely on the success of our students in a way that few universities match. We smartly integrate the liberal arts and professional education while providing students a powerful learning combination of immersive academic study, experiential learning and service to our communities. We offer a truly distinctive educational opportunity: the personalized, caring learning environment of a small college combined with the choices of a major university. We know who we are and what we want to achieve.

I firmly believe that University of the Pacific can be the very best university of this kind in the nation—the student-centered, small, national, comprehensive university. We have the ingredients: passionate and diverse students, inspiring faculty, dedicated staff, three campuses in a strategically important region of the nation and the traditions and values of an authentically student-focused institution.

I am equally convinced that the pathway to our success is through real, bold innovation. Does that mean changing our mission, values or principles? Absolutely not! But it does mean that we need to innovate what we do and how we do it. American higher education, like so many other sectors, has seen massive disruptions to its economic and structural models. Pacific is not immune. We are facing the same fierce competition for students, escalating costs, uncertain political environments, rapidly changing job markets and wavering public confidence in higher education. We have seen how those challenges have manifested themselves—sometimes in negative ways—at our university. We must think and act differently or face a path downward.

The good news is there are few American universities better positioned to innovate than Pacific. Innovation is in our DNA, as former Provost Phil Gilbertson meticulously detailed in his excellent history of our university, "Pacific on the Rise." We launched the first university in the State of California 169 years ago. We were the first California university to welcome women. We created the first music conservatory west of the Mississippi and the state's first medical school.

Tully Knoles, our longest-serving president, led the bold effort to move Pacific from its San Jose campus 70 miles away to Stockton. During his iconic 24 years as president, Robert Burns moved

Pacific forward dramatically by designing around the concept of differentiation. And President Don DeRosa focused on innovation from the very beginning of his extraordinary 14 years leading Pacific, urging his new colleagues to be “pioneering and risk-taking” in his inaugural address 25 years ago.

How do we return to pathways of innovation that made Pacific both excellent and distinctive? To start, we must first break down the structural, psychological and cultural barriers to innovation that exist at so many U.S. universities.

We need to constantly question the status quo. Why do we do things the way we do them? And is there a better way?

We need to shed the turf-protecting, siloed-thinking territorialism that paralyzes so many universities.

We need to streamline bureaucratic processes.

We need to eschew rigid hierarchies and hierarchical thinking.

We need to question self-imposed rules and regulations.

We need to look outward for solutions.

We need to seek and build new partnerships to grow and to reduce our reliance on tuition.

We need to think and act positively, displaying an indefatigable spirit of optimism.

We need to see ourselves once again as a national university.

We need to focus on the future, not dwell on the past.

We need to act with a sense of urgency.

And – most importantly—we need to do all of this together.

Once we break down the barriers to innovation, anything is possible. The currency of innovation is ideas, and we have an abundance of amazing, creative minds. Imagine unleashing the creativity of our professors, students, staff, alumni, supporters, regents and leaders to build on our strengths as we look towards the future. The possibilities are limitless.

I will add one final note here. Too often, ideas start and end with finances. We are told we don't have the resources to seize on an opportunity or leverage a great idea, so the idea is killed before it has a chance. Sometimes it seems like there is a race at universities to get to “no” as fast as possible. I believe that kind of thinking is a formula for failure. I would ask us to apply our collective creativity to think about new revenue sources in the same way we think about new programs, new markets, new audiences and new teaching methods. Like much of higher education, the traditional revenue model is becoming untenable. We rely on tuition for the overwhelming majority of our resources. Tuition, however, already is too high for many students. Together, we must find new models through creative partnerships. And, importantly, we must decide what we are going to forgo. As Harvard's Michael Porter wrote in his seminal 1996 work, strategy is about making choices. “The essence of strategy,” he wrote “is choosing what not to do.”

Now, what happens if we fail to harness that spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship? I believe we would survive, following our current path and making incremental changes along the way. But I don't believe maintaining the status quo should be our goal. We have the opportunity to take our very good university and make it great—to be the finest university of its type in the nation—by charting a new course with new thinking and new approaches.

But we can only do this if we do it together.

I hope you will view today as the start of the conversation.

I look forward to the journey with you.

Sincerely,

Christopher Callahan  
President