



***“To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream;
not only plan, but also believe.”***

– Anatole France

August 6, 2012

Dear Colleague:

As the summer draws to an end, I am grateful that it provided me with an opportunity to spend some time in the Sierras, where I always enjoy exploring trails, paddling out in the kayak, and absorbing the beauty and serenity of the wilderness. For me, it is always a time of rejuvenation, reflection, discovery and inspiration.

In addition to setting my sights on getting to destinations I have never visited before, I also make a point of returning to favorite places, whether on foot or by kayak. And while I may think I know the trail well, or know what’s ahead as I paddle, the journeys are never the same. Just as the landscape is always changing, so am I. New circumstances inspire new responses and approaches. As a result, I experience **different perspectives** on familiar places.

Heavy winter snow dislodges boulders, leaving obstacles in my path. Or spring’s melting snow may have washed away sections of the trail, forcing me to find an alternative route to reach my destination. Winds blow down trees, revealing views that didn’t exist the year before. Wild flowers spring up where I don’t remember seeing them. New trees have taken root where fire has devastated the land.

The speed at which I hike also changes my perspective. When I’m short on time, I walk more quickly, leaving me with fewer opportunities to **notice what’s around me**. At other times I adopt a more leisurely pace and discover new features that previously had gone unnoticed.

On the water, the perceived difficulty of a kayak trip is also tied to the weather, and my own capabilities. Clouds and wind can make a warm, sunny day turn suddenly cold, changing an easy paddle into a test of endurance. At other times, it is my physical condition that shapes the experience. I may have **grown stronger** and more resilient in my paddling over the past year, transforming what I expected to be a challenging trip into a leisurely day on the water.

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That sense of perspective is not limited to outdoor activities. It parallels and applies directly to what we do here at College of the Canyons. I was reminded of this when I had a chance during my vacation to reconnect with former colleagues at another community college, where I was fortunate to serve for two years as the Chief Instructional Officer before coming to College of the Canyons.

As I talked and listened, I tried not to compare the two places. But it was hard not to do so. The differences are just too evident. My old friends – community members, faculty, staff, administrative colleagues, and board members – asked, as they always do when I see them, “How is it going at COC?” And this time they added, “How are you **surviving the challenges** we are all experiencing?”

I shared my thoughts, and asked how they were faring. These were illuminating conversations, and powerful reminders about the **importance of perspective**. Their take on things was 180-degrees opposite because of the difference in organizational cultures, and the nature of the communities within which the colleges exist. The can-do attitude, energy and enthusiasm that characterize College of the Canyons are an integral part our culture that predispose us to “see” things others do not see as we continue to reach **new levels of service and excellence** every day. Rather than taking the easy, or familiar path, we go where others do not naturally navigate. As Robert Frost said, “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference .”

Whereas others are simply focused on surviving, we commit ourselves to thriving. Our goal is to take the path that will enable us to become the place that people, businesses and organizations in our community can count on, one where they have a chance to explore their dreams, **pursue success** and discover what they can accomplish when they aim high, focus and keep moving forward. This goal is ever more important in times that are in flux and when much around us is changing.

In that context, with regard to those challenges facing every community college in California, I can only begin to tell you how proud I am of the faculty, staff, administrators, Board of Trustees and volunteers at College of the Canyons. What we have faced together in the past few years has at times felt overwhelming. Yet we resisted what for many was a natural path, and perhaps the easiest one – to lower our expectations, to stop saying “yes,” to stop dreaming, to stop thinking, to stop doing, and to use the onset of daunting circumstances as our excuse for doing so. We maintained the high standard of service that our community has come to expect while committing to **move forward with confidence** and hope into a future we are creating for the benefit of our students and the community, **creating opportunities** and partnerships at every turn.

Author Ernest Holmes stated: “Great things are done by people who think great thoughts and then go out in the world to make their dreams come true.” In my mind, that is the

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greatest differentiator between College of the Canyons and any other community college in California.

Some may say that our **results set us apart** from the rest. And, it is true that we accomplish more than most other colleges think is imaginable. Whether we're launching a Medical Lab Technician Training Program, putting people back to work through the Fast Track Training Institute, or introducing elementary school students to exciting career fields through the K-6 Science/Electronics program, or going for a world record with "Rock the Rhythm, Beat the Odds," or helping local businesses break into overseas markets by establishing a Center for International Trade Development, it is clear that we are doing things that few dare to do. And that is because we are willing to "**think great thoughts**," as Holmes pointed out.

Results matter, but the reason behind how we accomplish them is what truly sets us apart. When I share what College of the Canyons has achieved, people ask me "How do you do it?" Hearing that question reminds me that our normal is different. COC is an exception. Many colleges never even consider trying what we routinely accomplish. They simply do not believe they can, nor do they have the confidence to do so. We're used to imagining, testing, pushing, exploring, mapping new routes, and plotting varied destinations – and in the process finding new ways to better serve our students and the community. Our ability to do so is directly related to our **perspective**, and that is what makes College of the Canyons so different. It is our perspective that enables us to achieve exceptional results.

- We don't see ourselves as subjects of circumstance.
- We are not content to respond to what happens to us. Instead, we get ahead of the curve and lead the way.
- We design our future and create capacity. We **make things happen** and that spirit fuels our journey.

We set ourselves apart by our willingness to DREAM, to THINK, and to DO! We are willing to dream big dreams, figure out how to accomplish them, and actually go out and do what we set out to do. And that's why our theme for this year is **Dream. Think. Do! – It Starts With Us.**

DREAM. Think. Do!

It's no secret among those at COC that my all-time favorite quote is from William Arthur Ward, who said, "If you can dream it, you can become it; if you can imagine it, you can achieve it." I frequently talk about it in meetings and include it often in writings such as this one. You know I believe it in my heart. We owe so much to this simple philosophy, and our ability to **DREAM** is a critical factor that sets us apart from the rest.

If we continue to do what we've already done we will only experience and most likely get what we've already gotten. It's very easy in anything we do on a daily basis, what we choose to do on weekends, or what we choose to do when we go hiking or paddling, to go exactly where we've gone before. Why? Because we know we can do it. We know we are able to

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navigate that challenge. And while doing familiar and favorite things and building traditions is important, something else happens when we **dare to dream bigger** and then muster up the gumption to go there.

Dreams are our hope and wildest aspirations. They're a little bit panicky because they require us to stretch from what we are comfortable with doing, to reach for a place that will take us beyond and enable us to see a bigger part of the picture and the many options that are available as we look at the map and choose which rivers to navigate or trails to explore.

When we come together in College Planning Team meetings, advisory board meetings, staff meetings, board meetings, retreats, team meetings, department meetings and other get-togethers – we are planting the seeds for our collective dreams, and following in the spirit of Robert F. Kennedy who said, “There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask why... I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?” We **imagine possibilities**. We work across silos. We put our collective thoughts together. We break down traditional boundaries. We are driven by our dreams.

- Remember when the University Center was an untested concept?
- Or when the Canyon Country Campus was just a vague idea contained in a statewide long-range plan?
- And the Performing Arts Center was nothing more than an idea that had been discussed for years?
- Or a Sustainability Center that was the idea of a few passionately committed members of our college community?
- And the Community Garden was a fun idea with no readily available source of funding?
- And the \$1 million Osher Foundation Scholarship Challenge seemed like an unfathomable amount of money to raise?
- Or “The Zone” was just the latest fad diet?

These achievements all began as dreams. But we know, as Henry David Thoreau observed, “If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.” We have indeed met with success. Our dreams have opened up doors and created paths for others to move forward, inspired them to believe in themselves, and perpetuated the development of more dreams. We have led our students along the trail, shown them the view from the peak, and inspired and equipped them to climb the other mountains they can see on the horizon, confident that they can navigate the rough waters that they cannot predict.

The dream will never come true if you only keep it in your mind, however, and don't jump into the driver's seat to move it forward. I am proud of our continued willingness to do just that. We aren't simply dreamers. Thanks to you, **we are doers** who achieve results. We are better because of your tenacity, resiliency, courage and initiative.

Dream. **THINK**. Do.

The second quality that makes us different is our ability to **THINK**. Dreaming must lead to thinking, and by that I mean developing a plan to make the dream become reality. Christopher Reeve said, “So many of our dreams at first seem impossible, then they seem improbable, and then, when we summon the will, they soon become inevitable.” It is when we begin to think about how we can accomplish our dreams that we summon our collective will and empower ourselves to make them come true.

As we think about what we want to do, how we are going to do what we dream about at College of the Canyons, as we look to serve our community in the best ways, we must always think about and be welcome to new ideas. And we do.

I’m sure you can all think of things that have come across your desk or landed at your doorstep in the process of carrying out your responsibilities at College of the Canyons and see that, how you think about what you do determines in many cases the quality of the outcome and the way that you feel about yourself. Whether you are able to experience the success of doing something you have never done before is predetermined by what you tell yourself about your capability, your capacity and your ability to move forward. As Olympic volleyball player Misty May-Treanor said, “We all know what we have in us. We just need to get out of our own way.” We need to give ourselves the freedom and permission to **achieve what we are capable of becoming** and doing.

The same is true out on the trail or in the water; it’s very easy for me to paddle the same old route, because it’s predictable. I’ve done it, and it’s familiar. I know the hazards and can predict what I will find when I get there. On the trails, I know I can finish the hike because I did it before. And while it’s enjoyable and the perspective is always different because it’s a different year, a different time, a different day and different environmental conditions, the real thrill is in trying something new I’ve never done before.

Last summer when I hiked in Squaw Valley with a group of friends, we ventured out on a new trail and headed for a destination we had never experienced. It had been on my “list of places to go” for a long time. I had heard about it, seen it in photos, and imagined myself there for several summers. So I finally **made plans to get there**. I researched the trail; secured a map; reviewed the record-breaking snowfall levels the area had received the prior winter season; made sure I had the right gear in my backpack; gauged the time needed to complete the hike; and determined the best starting time.

We set out on what proved to be a challenging hike that delivered obstacles we did not anticipate. But we learned that we could navigate the terrain and elevation with the best of them. It was not natural for us because we had never done it before. Bouldering was not in our repertoire of competencies. And frankly, in doing so, we were uncomfortable, as most of us are when we attempt new things. But by pushing ourselves to try something new, and

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succeeding and learning that **we could do it**, we were inspired to consider even more challenging trails. Together with my hiking partners, we committed ourselves to reaching our destination, and we made it. (And, frankly, we may not want to visit there again!) The experience was made up of several unpredictable events that are part of our memories and serve as reference points for us as we evaluate what we “can do” next.

At College of the Canyons, our planning processes enable us to push forward on new trails toward previously unreached summits. They provide a road map that guides us into the future. We understand the planning cycle and how to develop plans to get us where we need to be, when we need to be there.

While none of us has a crystal ball, we’ve been accused of having a very accurate one because we have historically had an uncanny ability to anticipate trends, predict future needs, sidestep glitches in state design approvals and state funding, and **stay ahead of the curve** as we have developed College of the Canyons. We use a telescope and scan what’s out there. We take the long view to see what’s on the horizon. We study what students and businesses need down the line. We chart courses to get there. We hire new faculty and staff. We anticipate and create new revenue streams to fund the plans. We purchase new properties and add buildings if we need to. We modify the plans as time moves on. And, we ultimately arrive at our intended destination in great shape with enhanced capacity, looking forward to what’s ahead from a whole different perspective.

This year has been particularly rich with planning as we:

- Began the process of updating our **Education and Facilities Master Plan**;
- Revamped and updated our **Technology Plan**;
- Cataloged our **accomplishments** related to the 2008-11 Strategic Plan and **demonstrated our success** and the tangible results of planning as 84 departments completed objectives related to the College’s Strategic Goals. Departments also identified an additional 745 accomplishments relative to the Strategic Goals;
- Finalized our **Strategic Plan** for 2012-15, which focuses on creating a positive environment and generating the resources necessary to support excellent teaching, student learning, and the completion of students’ goals including attaining degrees and certificates;
- Published “**Planning for Success**,” an executive summary of our strategic plan accomplishments to share our achievements with the community;
- Produced a comprehensive **Professional Development Plan** to guide the continued growth of our collective skills and capabilities;
- Developed new three-year department plans for each individual academic department; and
- Completed and submitted the **Accreditation Mid-Term Report**, which was “accepted” with commendation back to us at the Accrediting Commission’s meeting in January 2012.

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Our planning is infused with an overwhelming optimism for the opportunities we know lay ahead in our future. That sense of certainty comes from the mindset that believes in possibilities and **looks for solutions** even when none are readily apparent.

This year, my outlook on planning was inspired and informed by the Math Department's 075 course and a book that is required reading for that class. In "Mindset: The New Psychology of Success," Stanford University Professor Carol Dweck says those who achieve success, as we do here at College of the Canyons, display "**a growth mindset.**" As she explains it, the growth mindset:

- Believes that everyone can grow through application and experience and that a person's true potential is truly unknowable because it is impossible to foresee what can be accomplished with years of passion, toil and training;
- Challenges you to not seek out the tried-and-true, but instead relish experiencing what will stretch you; and
- Asks you to develop the passion for **stretching yourself** and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it is not going well.

In short, the growth mindset challenges all of us – students included – to accept the **personal responsibility** to thrive, even during some of the most challenging times, both personally and professionally. So, potholes, roadblocks, detours, misunderstandings, boulders in the trail, temporary setbacks, disappointments, rough waters, life-changing events, equipment failures and turning points at home and at work that are unplanned and unpredictable become learning experiences. It asserts that those who have a positive attitude, character, integrity, courage, and a belief in dreams do not tremble at the first sign of adversity. Everyone gets knocked down. The questions each of us face countless times every year is, will we get up and **keep going**? Will we venture where few dare to tread?

Because of our unique perspective, the answer this college provides is a resounding "Yes!"

- We **push ourselves** to keep pace with technology and change, and work to integrate what we have learned into our departments even when we know change is painful.
- We have the courage to **reach out** beyond our campus and into the community to develop mutually beneficial partnerships, even when we're not sure what response we might receive from others when we do.
- We go out on a limb and launch **creative new initiatives**, even if we aren't sure where to find the money or can't see how all the pieces fit together.
- Where others find problems, our perspective enables us to **discover possibilities**.

Dream. Think. **DO**.

And that brings me to my third point of what makes COC different – the fact that **we are not afraid to take action and make the most of those possibilities**. Without our administrators, staff, faculty, community members, volunteers, Board members, supporters and stakeholders rolling up their sleeves and refusing to take "no" for an answer, no matter what circumstances in which we find ourselves, many of our dreams would never have

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become reality. When I think about what dedication means at College of the Canyons, I am reminded of Thomas Edison's take on the subject. He said, "I never did anything worth doing by accident, nor did any of my inventions come by accident; they came by work." He had the dream, he followed a plan, he tried, he sometimes failed, but he kept at it and often succeeded. And thanks to you, that's exactly what we do at COC!

Keeping after it is all about resilience; it's about being willing to get up and try it again, and try it differently. I'm sure you could make a list of things you did for the first time this past year, that you did differently, that you did with different people in different departments, and as a result, reached different outcomes.

The same is true in any physical endeavors you attempt. **Your ability to do so is centered on your anticipation of what is required for you to do it.** And then when you get started, even though it isn't easy to keep after it, you keep trying and you keep doing. The measure of satisfaction is in the outcome; it's in getting to the top of that mountain; it's in making it further than you thought you could paddle. It's in seeing different results in your students because you did something differently; you kept after it and you learned, and you got the job done.

Believing enough in your dreams to take action and doing what's necessary to accomplish them takes courage. The **courage** I see at College of the Canyons deals with courage of one's convictions; the courage to follow ideas and dreams even if they aren't popular; the courage to speak up and to think differently; the courage to do what one never thought they could do, the courage to marshal resources; the courage to put yourself out there and network; the courage to take risks; the courage to stand up for principles and the courage to paddle against the tide if you really believe in something; and the courage to keep going, no matter how steep the climb or how many boulders one finds on the trail.

We have seen that over and over again this year as divisions and departments **pulled together** to deal with the curves thrown our way due to the state's fiscal situation. And along the way, we demonstrated flexibility, resilience, a willingness to do things in new ways, and the ability to generate new resources and partnerships while continuing to invest in developing our staff and enhancing our capacity.

Along the way, you proved that you can **create success** even when others say you can't or won't attempt to do so themselves. Even though others hold back, you move forward. When you dream it with all your heart – when you honestly believe you can do it, when you have the will to do so, when you overcome obstacles, you change nonbelievers into believers, and you help to create an irrepressible groundswell of optimism. So many of you have taken that to heart over the years, and the results are evident throughout our campuses. In just the past year, we:

- Launched **Skills for Healthy Aging Resources and Programs (SHARP)**, the first and only initiative of its kind in the country, to train students in effective strategies for caring for older people.

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- Established the **Civil Rights Center**, which opens this fall and will provide students with hands-on training on how to investigate and process work and housing discrimination claims.
- Joined with the City of Santa Clarita to create a plan for a **Business Incubator** in the old Newhall Public Library.
- Received approval from the state Chancellor's Office to establish a **Center for International Trade Development** (CITD).
- Debuted the **Chancellor's Cabaret Series**, a selection of intimate, cabaret style vocal jazz performances at the University Center.
- Partnered with the Newhall School District to initiate the **K-6 Science/Electronics Initiative** and promote increased awareness in science and technology through the creation and design of hands-on activities focused on Electronics and Physics.
- Secured donated space at the Westfield Valencia Town Center and opened the doors to **The Habitat Lounge**, a new student exhibition area dedicated to helping COC architecture and interior design students showcase their work to interested businesses and community members.
- Expanded our older adult and community education programs by offering exciting new learning opportunities.
- Introduced **Math 075**, a pre-statistics math program that allows students to complete both arithmetic and pre-algebra in one 8-week course, leading to a five-fold increase in student completion of statistics coursework (from 13 percent to 78 percent), for students with initial elementary algebra placement.
- Began building the permanent **Athletic Hall of Fame** display in the lobby of the Gym.
- Continued to develop **open educational resources** (OER) for our students, saving them more than \$220,000 they otherwise would have spent purchasing textbooks.
- Celebrated the **30th Anniversary** of the Early Childhood Education Center.
- Hosted "**Rock the Rhythm, Beat the Odds**," featuring more than 7,000 students and thousands more attendees in the stands to showcase the importance of art and music *in* education, while attempting to set a Guinness World Record for the world's largest drum circle.
- Celebrated the achievement of Maral Sakayan, one of **just 20** community college students from across the nation included in USA Today's **2012 All-USA Community College Academic Team**.
- Completed the first **COC/CSUN pilot cohort** of eight students who graduated from the COC Registered Nurse program in December 2011 and will complete their Bachelor's of Science in Nursing this year.
- Sponsored the first-ever **Mathematics, Sciences, and Engineering Division Speakers Symposium**, featuring local industry engineering specialists and experts in fields such as Biomedical Science, Biotechnology, Material Science, Medicinal Chemistry.

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- Developed two more new degrees under the SB 1440 streamlined transfer framework, an Associate of Science-Transfer in Physics, and an Associate of Science-Transfer in Theatre Arts, bringing our total of **SB 1440 degrees** to four.
- Debuted an exhibit of Graphic Multimedia Design student work at the **Santa Clarita City Hall Gallery**.
- Launched the first annual **Student Writing Conference**, titled "Writing Matters," which featured Lisa See, author of the critically-acclaimed international bestseller, "Snow Flower and the Secret Fan."
- Involved our students in the **Heroic Imagination Project** (HIP) to present "heroic" information to local high school students, conduct research on the results, and present the findings at the Western Psychological Association convention.
- Revitalized the **Sustainability Committee** and formed the Santa Clarita Environmental Education Consortium (SCEEC) to raise funds for our sustainability efforts.
- Secured a \$1.2 million **Upward Bound** grant to establish a program in partnership with the Hart School District that helps prepare at-risk youth for college-level work.
- Started work on the **Institute of Law, Ethics, and Public Policy**, an interdisciplinary effort guided by a committee representing various academic departments.
- Graduated another class of **LEAP** participants and immediately got going on implementing their innovative projects.
- Grew our **year-over-year Foundation revenue** for the third consecutive year.
- Generated **\$2 million** to assist local businesses in developing their capacity and contributing to the revitalization of our local economy.

That's an impressive record of accomplishments, and I both applaud and am inspired by the efforts you led, either directly, or behind the scenes, to bring these achievements to life! For you as an individual, and for us as a team, there is **great strength** in knowing you are capable of achieving what you set your sights on and that, no matter what, you'll figure out a solution to any problem. I know that, here at COC, we are confident enough to reach our goals, to achieve our dreams, to create unique solutions to difficult questions and to creatively and constructively figure things out. My confidence is built daily as I see the beautiful buildings, the warm, welcoming, friendly and stimulating places that all of you help to create every day. They support the potential of people, programs, and partnerships, and provide a daily reminder that we **DREAM, THINK, and DO!** far more effectively than other community colleges.

The Trail Ahead

Consistent with the **spirit and enthusiasm** that has helped get us to where we are today, College of the Canyons has demonstrated its resilience – something we definitely need as we continue to move ahead. Few colleges will have the courage or the energy to do so.

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Why? Fear of the unknown, a lack of confidence, a false sense of comfort in the status quo, and inertia will paralyze some and intimidate others. They will not leap ahead, gain a competitive advantage, or lead and clear the path to make way for forthcoming dreams and opportunities. Unlike these institutions, College of the Canyons will do all of this and more! As Gifford Pinchot said, “The vast possibilities of our great future will become realities only if we make ourselves responsible for that future.”

The perspective and capacity that we have at College of the Canyons sets the stage for what we can become in the future. It energizes us all as we do what we do in our own COC way – the care for others, the focus on what’s good for students and what will help in the short and long-term, the ability to **see the big picture**, yet pay attention to detail. Our perspective is the fuel that drives this place. When posed with questions that are met elsewhere with a “no, it is not possible,” instead we answer “can do” and “we will” and we do it! You should take pride in the role you play in enabling us to do so. I know I am proud of **you** and all that you contribute to our collective efforts!

Regardless of what awaits us in the future, I am confident that as we have through the last five recessions, we will meet the challenges, inspire our students to do the same, and put the wheels in motion to **achieve great dreams**. Now at the beginning of our 43rd year, it is more important than ever that we strive to help each other reach the goals that we set for ourselves. Faced with difficult job prospects and an uncertain economy, our students are counting on us to provide them with the skills and resources needed to realize their dreams. As you take pride in what you have done, the difference it has made, and what your leadership and involvement have impacted, remember: **it’s up to us in public education to dream bigger dreams and to make those dreams come true.**

We are prepared for the changes; we have built in the capacity; we have hired talented, capable people; we are confident we can succeed; and we have the courage to give up what we are and do for what we can become. We have prepared ourselves to be successful and to thrive in all times, for as Charles Kettering said, “High achievement always takes place in the framework of high expectation.” Whether it is adversity, or prosperity, we always make the most of what we have and make it work. I know our college is **up for the challenge**.

Sarah Ban Breathnach said, “The world needs dreamers and the world needs doers. But above all, the world needs **dreamers who do.**” I know this year will be amazing and one of our best yet. It will be one of significant expansion, growth, change, and many new opportunities because our unique perspective enables us to DREAM, to THINK, and to DO! I’m excited to get started on the many firsts that will be celebrated and enjoyed by all and appreciated by more than we know.

With the renewed enthusiasm and energy that come from our summer break, I invite you to mark the beginning of the 2012-13 academic year at our annual Opening Day Luncheon, 11:15 a.m. Friday, August 24, in the Main Gym. It will be a time to look back at how our college has grown, and recognize and thank our colleagues who are celebrating milestone

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anniversaries in their careers at College of the Canyons. It is also a chance to do something new!

The campaign to build a home for our Culinary Arts Program will be a key area of focus in the coming year. To give you a taste of what's ahead, students and faculty from the Culinary Arts Department will be on hand to provide samples of unique cheeses and delectable chocolates, along with their recommended wine pairings (sadly, we can't serve the wine!). Additional displays will highlight other priorities we will pursue in the year ahead. This is a great opportunity to reconnect with your colleagues and whet your appetite for what's on the horizon in 2012-13.

We have many exciting journeys ahead – possibilities to be imagined, plans to be forged, and work to be done to continue to make our college the best it can be. It is up to us to dream, to think, to do and to make it happen. And together, I know we can!

So let's get started!

Go Cougars!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dr. Dianne Van Hook". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Dianne Van Hook
Chancellor