



“Just as energy is the basis of life itself, ... so is innovation the vital spark of all human change, improvement and progress.”

August 2015

Dear Colleague:

I always look forward to Opening Day with excitement and anticipation. For me, it is a time to pause for a while and appreciate everything that makes College of the Canyons special: its people, atmosphere, energy, commitment to the community, dedication to high standards of scholarship, focus on constant improvement, relentless pursuit of excellence in everything we do, a college culture that is willing to take risks - to embrace imaginative ideas and innovative solutions in all that we do.

Opening Day symbolizes an important annual transition for us – a time when we proudly reflect on the too-numerous-to-count accomplishments that have established our nationwide reputation for excellence to a time when we actively prepare for the unknown challenges that await us. It is a time when we make a leap from the comfort of the **things we have done** to the adrenaline-pumping challenges of the **things we WILL do**. To me, that is exciting!

This year’s Opening Day theme focuses a laser light on two core values that have been hallmarks of our College for the past 46 years: the consistent achievement of excellence in all that we do and the willingness to think outside the box - to “dream it and then to do it,” to embrace new ideas, to imagine, innovate and create! This year’s theme – **Our Spirit of Excellence & Innovation: Then, Now and Always** – perfectly fits this college.

As we begin this new year, there are two things that I am certain about:

- The decisions we have made over the years, the way we have conducted ourselves in the past, our integrity, our sense of purpose and our incredible faculty and staff, have established College of the Canyons as one of the premiere community colleges in the nation. Our reputation for pursuing and achieving excellence is envied across the state and the nation as we serve as a model for many.
- The way we confront challenges, the confidence we have in our ability to create outstanding solutions, the knowledge that the marketplace of ideas is alive and well on our campuses, our belief that risk-taking is necessary to move forward - all of these are essential elements in creating a climate that encourages entrepreneurial and innovative solutions to challenges, and inspires the spirit that enables us to see opportunities where others see none.

Unlike some colleges across the nation, we don't let up much during the summer. We offer hundreds of classes, aggressively develop grant proposals, finalize educational and facilities plans, hire new classroom and staff talent and constantly lay the groundwork for new programs and opportunities for students.

Our student growth has been phenomenal and much of that is because we work hard to offer what our students need and want. Most of our students are getting the classes they want at the times they want them, and they are completing their goals in record numbers – moving on in their education according to their desires and goals.

You, the faculty and staff, **have been and will always be**, instrumental in helping students to succeed. Nothing makes me prouder than to see you extend yourselves to help each other excel; to reach out to students to provide that “little bit extra” that often makes the difference in student success; and to dare to do what you want to do. It is not lost on me that each of you likely have stories to tell of how you made a difference in the lives of students. Perhaps you cleared up a troublesome academic question for someone. Or maybe you took the time to listen to someone in need with great caring and compassion. Or you may have assisted in helping someone cut through a minor bureaucratic tangle. All of those things are important. But I believe that one of the biggest contributions you make to our college is one you are least likely to know about: **the positive example you set through your dedication, expertise and professionalism.**

As you undoubtedly know, as Chancellor, most of my days are chock full of activities and meetings, and while I love the work that I do, my schedule sometimes precludes me from getting out on campus as frequently or as widely as I would like. I miss that. So I really do relish the times when I can participate with you in brainstorming meetings, see you in person in open office hours when I can talk to you about what is on YOUR mind, and enjoy a few moments of crossing paths and exchanging a few words as we move to one place or another on our campuses. It is one way that I take the pulse

OPENING DAY 2015-16

of our campuses, receive necessary feedback on a host of issues and initiatives and, frankly, basking in the glow of your considerable successes!

I am particularly gratified to be entering the 2015-16 academic year with all of you! The team that we have in place is second to none in the 46-year history of this college and I know that we will meet the future with our batteries charged, our eyes looking forward, our foot on the gas and a clear focus on the paths ahead.

The energy that will enable us to continue seeing the opportunities ahead and turn them into reality is driven by you and your colleagues – by your commitment and your hope about the future.

*“If you want to be successful, it’s just this simple. Know what you are doing.
Love what you are doing. And believe in what you are doing.”
Will Rogers*

We are Driven

Over the past 46 years, we have planned and accomplished what many other colleges can only dream about because we love what we are doing and we believe in it. Excellence has consistently been the result. What is most important is the breadth and scale of our innovation and excellence. It is not limited to a handful of departments. Rather, excellence is a characteristic that defines our college as a whole, and is seen in college-wide accomplishments that result from everyone working together with **D**esire, **R**esolve, **I**nitiative, **V**ision and **E**ndurance – or **DRIVE**. That collective effort exhibited by all of **you** enables us to achieve results and build a reputation envied by other colleges in the state.

- You have a **desire** to improve, grow and change.
- You are **resolved** to create a plan to make it happen.
- You take **initiative** to put your plans into action.
- You are guided by a clear **vision** of your destination that helps you navigate around the roadblocks and barriers along the way.
- And, your **endurance** allows you to see things through to completion.

What our college can accomplish because of the **DRIVE** exhibited by the team here is incomparable and distinguishes us in the areas that matter most. When I’m out in the community, I hear people comment on our leadership, our focus on student access and success and our willingness to partner with other organizations. It is also well known in the community that our successes are attributable in no small part to the consistent and dedicated leadership that the college has enjoyed for many years: from the Board of Trustees, to the Chancellor, to senior administrative staff and many long-time faculty and classified staff. This unprecedented kind of leadership reaps its own rewards in a variety of important areas and enables us to achieve outcomes that form the foundation of all we do.

Last year saw us complete the lengthy and rigorous process of accreditation, which resulted in achieving the **highest re-accreditation status possible** for a full six-year term. That outstanding result

OPENING DAY 2015-16

came from the dedicated efforts of the more than 100 faculty, staff, administrators, students, and board members who helped to compile our self-study report and document our success.

A key factor in our accreditation success is our **fiscal strength**. We've never laid off a full-time employee or eliminated a program in five recessions over the past 27 years. We are consistently commended by our auditors for careful financial management in all areas of operation, including grants, the Foundation, and Measure M bond expenditures. Those results are achieved when faculty, staff, and administrators recognize and act on their responsibility to carefully spend resources and invest their budgets where they can create the most benefit for students – by enhancing **student access and success**.

These are just a few examples of what our collective drive has accomplished:

- *Community College Week* magazine named us as the **second fastest growing** college of our size in the nation last year.
- We are **one of only 12 districts** (out of 72 statewide) whose class offerings have returned to 2008 levels.
- At the same time, we are **ranked among the top five** community colleges in California – and number one in Los Angeles County – for our completion rate by college-prepared students.
- The **Class of 2015 was the largest** in college's 46-year history, with a 9 percent increase in graduates over previous year.
- We now offer **21 associate degrees for transfer (ADTs)**, putting us among the top three colleges in the state for meeting our ADT goal, and more importantly, giving students more options to seamlessly transfer from our college to the California State University system.
- We **save our students more than \$750,000** per year in textbook costs through the use of open educational resources – free electronic educational materials that can be used in place of traditional textbooks.
- We have consistently acknowledged that community college students often have a greater difficulty managing their academic schedules because many have other life responsibilities such as work and unusual life responsibilities. As a result, we have consistently offered flexible start times, weekend short classes, night classes and class options on both campuses to increase their chances of being able to attend the classes they need.

We achieved these results because students find faculty, staff, and administrators who are willing to go the extra mile to get them enrolled, fill every available seat in a classroom (and then some!), and add classes to meet the demand of bulging waitlists.

At the same time, our drive and leadership are the foundation on which we build powerful partnerships with our community that yield amazing results. Helen Keller said it best: "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." Consider these examples:

OPENING DAY 2015-16

- In one year, the college's Economic Development Division generated **\$3.7 million in grants** to serve local companies.
- The division offered cutting-edge training for **866 companies** and **5,000 individual employees**.
- As well, the division participated in and contributed to **39 business startups**.
- It helped clients **create 323 jobs**, contributed to a **\$26.3 million increase in sales** for business/industry partners, and helped raise **\$15.3 million in new capital**.
- Our K-12 Arts Education Outreach Program – recognized by the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. – has introduced **more than 70,000 local students** to the arts by bringing them to campus to experience a show in the Performing Arts Center, or through artists visiting their schools.

These and a hundred other examples demonstrate your commitment to partnership and your understanding that we can do more together with partners than we can by ourselves.

College of the Canyons is a dynamic, thriving institution always looking for ways to improve what we offer and how we serve our students, local business and industry, and the community at large. This summer we undertook an update of our Strategic Plan, which included reviewing how many goals from the current plan were accomplished.

Are you ready for this? Since 2011, there have been a total of **1,779 accomplishments** by COC departments! We're never content with the status quo. We are committed to being relevant, being engaged, and shaping our future by enhancing student access, engagement, and success. We must improve. It is who we are and what we do. That means we are always innovating. So how do we do that that, and why do we stand out?

*"If you want something new, you have to stop doing something old."
Peter F. Drucker*

Innovation: It's Who We Are

We are able to innovate because it's who we are as a college. Innovation is part of our culture and stems from our collective attitude of optimism and belief in possibilities, our courage and willingness to try new ideas, our commitment to teamwork, our desire to take the initiative and not wait to be told what to do and our unwillingness to compromise on our high standards. As a result, "the world is but a canvas to our imaginations," as Henry David Thoreau once said.

Because of our motivation to reach high, we have:

- Hosted three Student Learning Outcome Days of Assessment to help faculty develop assignments that assess the learning outcomes for a given class.
- Launched Weekend College and gave students a new option for achieving their educational goals while maintaining work and family responsibilities.
- Partnered with the California Attorney General and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department on the "Back on Track LA" partnership to help reduce recidivism through inmate education.

OPENING DAY 2015-16

- Became the first California Community College to create a student exchange program with Mexico's Universidad TecMilenio.
- Installed the only pulsed laser weld monitoring system available in an educational setting, enabling students to train on cutting-edge equipment not available to many professional welders.
- Established a committee to develop a plan for a Center for Civic Engagement that will enable students to understand how they can influence the growth and development of communities in which they are involved.
- Partnered with the state Chancellor's Office to develop and lead the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative, a five-year, \$24.5 million program to disseminate best practices and help colleges across the state to improve accreditation and audit outcomes.

We have been recognized locally, regionally, statewide and nationally for our excellence through innovation and we should all be extremely proud of the talent that has produced both the teamwork we see every day here at COC but also our individual and high standards of excellence. **It is who we are!**

*"Excellence is not an act, but a habit."
Aristotle*

Excellence: It's What We Do

When you bring innovation to life, you are able to create amazing new opportunities that enable our students and wider community to achieve their potential. What we have accomplished in the last year since we gathered for Opening Day clearly demonstrates why we stand out.

As a team of committed professionals, we:

- Completed the Facilities Master Plan for the Valencia Campus by opening Canyons Hall and the college's Institute for Culinary Education.
- Used the Early Assessment Program (EAP) to place incoming students in higher-level English classes and dramatically improve success rates.
- Completed "guided pathways" for each academic major to give students a clear sequence of courses to take that will help them reach their educational goals in a fast, efficient manner.
- Hosted a Skills for Success symposium that focused on equity issues and how those relate to student learning.
- Cheered our Men's Cross Country team, which won a state championship and secured a place in the history books for Coach Lindie Kane, the first female coach to lead a men's team to a state title.
- Celebrated with our Men's Golf team, which won its seventh state championship and gave Coach Gary Peterson the distinction of winning more state titles than any other community college coach in California.

OPENING DAY 2015-16

- Applauded the accomplishments of our Model UN Team, which regularly competes against – and beats – teams from prestigious four-year universities.
- Established an internship program with the Los Angeles Police Department to give our Auto Technology students an opportunity to hone their skills in a professional setting.
- Won a \$5.5 million grant to create four career pathway programs in partnership with the William S. Hart Union High School District and local business leaders.
- Mentored a Future Business Leaders of America chapter that dominates business competitions.
- Continued the Forensics Program that has grown to become a dominant national competitor.
- Promoted sustainability by reducing campus water consumption by 25 percent and installing electric vehicle charging stations.
- Created a community service project that gave Plumbing Technology students hands-on experience and benefitted a single mom battling cancer.
- Achieved a 77 percent placement rate among graduates of our Fast Track training program.
- Partnered with Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health to host an Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) Workshop to help the community better recognize and respond to threats of suicide.
- Created a fund-raising and support structure that enabled academic teams like Model UN, Forensics, and Future Business Leaders of America, to travel to national competitions.
- Hosted the second annual Digital Media Educators Conference to equip faculty with skills, information and technology needed to prepare students for careers in a wide array of industries.
- Organized a fund-raiser to assist victims of the Nepal Earthquake.
- Secured a five-year, \$2.6 million Title V grant to enhance the educational experience in serving its increasingly diverse student population.
- Hired almost 80 new staff members in departments across both campuses.
- Developed and implemented a comprehensive Student Equity Plan that will enhance access and success for targeted student populations.
- Partnered with the state Chancellor’s Office to develop and lead the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative, a five-year, \$24.5 million program to disseminate best practices and help colleges across the state to improve accreditation and audit outcomes.

That is an amazing record of accomplishment, and illustrates a point made by Vince Lombardi, who said, “The joy is in creating, not maintaining.” Our achievements are made possible because we are a team of committed professionals focused on innovation and excellence, rather than doing what we’ve always done. As a result, **we stand out.**

“Success is neither magical nor mysterious. Success is the natural consequence of consistently applying basic fundamentals.”

Jim Rohn

Then. Now. ALWAYS.

OPENING DAY 2015-16

The high standards, restless spirit of innovation, and belief in possibilities that you bring to what you do has laid the foundation for our past excellence, set the stage for our current achievements, and will propel us forward to what we can accomplish together in the future. Your **passion** for the continued success of your students, the **optimism** with which you approach challenging circumstances, the way you pursue partnership opportunities, what you envision for the future of your department, define COC and set it apart from places who get what they always get because they do what they always do. Your creativity, determined enthusiasm and compassion for those we serve will ensure that we will **continue to stand out** and be defined by excellence.

Our efforts will be supported this year by additional funding from the state. The 2015-16 state budget is one of the best I have ever seen during my career in higher education. It is a vote of confidence for community colleges, and demonstrates clearly that Governor Brown values community colleges and the impact we have on students. The state Chancellor's Office is still working to implement the details of the budget, so we don't yet have specifics on exactly what the budget will provide to College of the Canyons.

But we do know that we will have resources to foster innovation. Many of you have brought forward new plans that show **immense creativity**, and promise **measurable results**. Throughout last semester, there have been dozens and dozens of ideas generated through the College Planning Team, annual department Program Reviews, LEAP, Flex Sessions, Student Equity Plans, and the regional forum we organized on *Doing What Matters for the Workforce and Economic Development*.

*"Never, never, never give up."
Winston Churchill*

On the horizon

The upcoming academic year provides us with new opportunities based on somewhat unique circumstances. The state is providing us with some new funding and that is great. We are also being asked to focus more on student outcomes, to find and implement creative ways to increase our flexibility and responsiveness to student needs. We'll need to be extraordinarily resourceful in developing integrated plans to accomplish our goals but be mindful that we can lead, shape and inspire with a fair amount of confidence and humility. With the resources available to fund many of these efforts, we will move forward with implementation, and continue to lead the way in innovation and excellence.

Together, we will:

- Identify the funding needed to continue building out the Canyon Country Campus, where a 21,000-square-foot science lab and classroom building will become the next permanent structure to be built.
- Develop a "road map" to guide students through their entire College of the Canyons experience, from application to graduation.
- Surpass the grant revenue we generated in 2014-15. (In fact, with more than \$12.5 million in hand for 2015-16, we've already done it!)

OPENING DAY 2015-16

- Move forward with implementing the new Adult Education Initiative, which will align curriculum and expand offerings to adults in the community in a not-for-credit format, in partnership with the Hart High School District.
- Continue to implement the revised Math and English curriculum that faculty have worked to develop, and which will shorten the sequence of remedial classes that lead to college-level course work.
- Pilot the use of two software platforms – Pathbrite and Digication – that enable students to upload samples of their work, create, e-portfolios, and demonstrate completion of student learning outcomes.
- Continue to expand the reach of International Services and Programs as we recruit more students from China and Mexico and develop new partnerships in Eastern Europe and other countries where we do not yet have relationships.
- Move forward with implementing additional student equity initiatives, including the addition of Student Athletic Academic Mentors, the Principles of Excellence Program in the Veterans Center, a Library Speaker Series, and expanding Foster Youth Services.
- Hire more counselors, expand online orientation, and make online education plans available to students through the Student Success and Support Program (3SP).
- Combine the Associate Program and the Institute for Teaching and Learning to create the Center for Excellence and provide online faculty training.
- Launch the Center for Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility.
- Digitize and make available to the public the archives of retired Congressman Howard “Buck” McKeon, who donated his papers and memorabilia to the college.
- Implement cultural diversity programs and trainings for students and staff.
- Kick off the Pathways Grant with the Hart District for CTE career development.
- Operationalize the reorganization of the Instructional Division.
- Develop a plan to offer AA Degree option that utilizes only OER materials
- Formalize an Assessment of Prior Learning Program to maximize opportunities for re-entry students.

And these are just the things we know about! Other opportunities will present themselves in the year to come that will be equally exciting and offer unique possibilities to enhance the programs and services we provide to our students.

“Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.”

William James

WE ARE Difference-Makers

What a powerful place COC is and what a difference your leadership and commitment make in the lives of our students! As a person, and as chancellor of this district, I am **humbled by what you do**. I appreciate what you have done in the past and look forward to what you will do in the future.

OPENING DAY 2015-16

- We are where we are and will go where we will go because of you and your colleagues at COC.
- The energy and confidence you project is visible proof that **attitudes do make a big difference**—in both the short and long haul.
- The caliber of standards you set for yourself, the way you care for and about your students and each other, how you communicate with one another, and your commitment, are among the many things that **enable our college to excel** and make it a great place to work.

I look forward to the year ahead with eager anticipation. I'm excited because I know that as a team we will **push forward with innovation** and create **new examples of excellence**. That unity of purpose motivates me, and reminds me how blessed I am to work with such uniquely talented and spirited people who make this a special place, where leadership, action, innovation, compassion and commitment are evident in people, in offices, in departments, in classrooms and in events and initiatives across our campuses.

Given all that we have accomplished and are planning for 2015-16, we certainly have many worthwhile reasons to celebrate!

I invite you to join me on **Friday, August 21, at 11:30 a.m.** in the Gym for our Opening Day Luncheon Celebration. As we always do, we will honor our colleagues with a service award presentation and acknowledge our visiting retirees. The Sean Hughes Band will entertain us with a myriad of hits, an interactive surprise will kick off the program and of course, the festivities will culminate with the annual Opening Day video. New to this year's festivities will be a special **showcase of innovation**. Faculty and departments will be on hand with displays and demonstrations that highlight new initiatives and technologies that are being integrated into the classroom. Be sure to arrive early and experience how your colleagues are pushing the boundaries of innovation and redefining excellence. I know you'll be inspired by their creativity, their energy, and their unique insights!

I look forward to seeing you at Opening Day and celebrating **Our Spirit of Excellence & Innovation – Then, Now, and Always** and kicking off what will be an amazing year for College of the Canyons and one in which we will stand out – but light the way for others through opportunity and access.

Sincerely,

Dr. Dianne G. Van Hook
Chancellor