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News from Merced College

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHANCELLOR SCOTT ADDRESSES MERCED COLLEGE CONVOCATION

“It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.”

Or so wrote Charles Dickens. These two sentences introduce Dickens’ classic novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. They also served to illustrate the current condition of California’s Community Colleges and were used by the chancellor of the 110-campus system to both inspire and challenge Merced College to continue its historic tradition of providing excellence in education, even during these troubling economic times.

“This college is so central to the life of Merced and the surrounding communities,” said Dr. Jack Scott during his keynote address at the College’s Convocation today. “You’ve been serving this area very well for more than 40 years. You must continue to do that with much less. That is our mission.”

Chancellor Scott, a former community college president and a leader in education during his tenure in the state Legislature, said that there are many reasons to celebrate community colleges even as they struggle to deliver services to the 2.9 million students they serve each year.

“I don’t believe that I’ve ever seen community colleges held in such high esteem as they are today,” he said. “The undersecretary of the US Department of Education, Martha Kantor, is a former community college chancellor. Jill Biden, the wife of the vice president, is a community college instructor, and President Obama has said very clearly how important community colleges are to this nation. I think we have much to cheer about.”

While the state is suffering through the worst economic downturn since the 1930s, Chancellor Scott said, and while community college budgets have been cut to the bone, “we have to tighten our belts even more, and when we pull out of this recession we want to be able to serve as many students as we can.”

He said that a recent study by the Public Policy Institute found that among California’s three higher education systems, the community colleges had the highest approval rating from those polled.

“You are part of an important enterprise,” he told the gathering. “And I know that this college is going to pull together to meet these challenges.

“Community colleges aren’t just a need, they are the fulfillment of the American ideal,” he said. “We take the hope and dreams and aspirations of millions of Americans and make them come true. We need to focus on the joy of what we are doing.”

After his remarks, Chancellor Scott entertained questions and answers with faculty and staff. He addressed concerns about categorical programs, those programs that serve the most needy and disadvantaged students, the toll budget cuts have taken on human resources, and various aspects of funding and options to continue programs with significantly reduced budgets.

“Let’s put this in perspective,” he said. “California depends on highly educated and trained individuals. Education is not a cost. It is an investment.”

SCOTTADDRESS 08/09