Thank you to Interim President Kesselman and Chair of Stockton’s Board of Trustees Mady Deininger for their encouraging words. An institution’s culture is shaped by the actions of its leaders, and Dr. Kesselman’s and Chair Deininger’s commitment to openness and transparency is both promising and essential as we move forward.

We will soon be welcoming another outstanding freshman class. And I’d like to thank everyone for their exceptional work in recruiting these students, orienting them to what Stockton has to offer, and ensuring that they have a place to live.

This is our first Fall Faculty Conference as Stockton University and my first time speaking to you as Provost. It is an appropriate time for us to reexamine our identity and recommit to those ideas that have shaped who we are and that will guide us as we move forward into this next chapter of Stockton’s history. Chief among these is our focus on learning—for our students, ourselves, and our institution. It is rivaled only by our commitment to engaging with those around us, and applying that knowledge for the betterment of our wider communities. This emphasis on the academic core of our mission, and the ways that learning can be used to address problems in the world around us, has been part of the “Stockton Idea” since we were founded, and it continues to guide our decision-making today.

This core value, and its transformative potential, is an important part of what makes Stockton distinctive among institutions in New Jersey. As an illustration, one current student, Karlie Abbatiello, a dual degree student in Criminal Justice, described her liberal arts learning experience at Stockton as:

…opening up my mind about the greater good of education. I was a firm believer that college was a place where young adults went because that is what society expected and that attending college was the only way to make money. I have gone through a transformation during this course… I am happy I could reflect on myself in the larger concept of society, where I am and where I have the capacity to be once I am a successful Stockton graduate.

Thanks Karlie, for making my day when I read your reflection and for your openness to new ideas as you pursue your degree.

Stockton’s founding ideas have also shaped our current strategic themes: Learning, Engagement, Global Perspectives, and Sustainability, as well as Stockton’s ten essential learning outcomes. Indeed, Stockton’s ELO program is a great example of how a strategic theme like “Learning” has been put into action. This year, Stockton hosted its first ELO/ePortfolio Summer Institute with 45 faculty participants, and this fall we updated the ELO website and launched the second ELO pilot with eight participating programs.
Stockton is also making great strides in “Engagement.” Last September, for example, the Stockton Center on Community Engagement, led by Awilda Colon, partnered with the Atlantic City Police Department to launch a homework completion program at Stanley Holmes Village, a public housing community. Every day after school, Stockton students, faculty and Atlantic City police officers helped 63 children from ages 5 to 11 to stay on target. We are also involved with the Economic Inequality Initiative, a partnership with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities that engages students, higher educational communities and their partners in exploring, understanding, and confronting the complex causes and consequences of growing economic inequality. Carra Hood and Oliver Cooke co-chair Stockton’s team and will host events including a kick-off in late September, an Oxfam Hunger Banquet, and a panel discussion with the Philadelphia Federal Reserve on Atlantic City redevelopment.

From the theme of Global Perspectives, we remain committed to deepening and strengthening our global connections and providing students with the know-how to operate in the wider world as that world becomes more local. This year’s Academic Affairs retreat’s guest speakers helped us to be more mindful of the appropriate tone for embracing all members of our community. They challenged us to examine and confront our own inherent biases, and work toward a greater appreciation of diversity in all its presentations.

One of the most important ways we can do this is to infuse our teaching with our own globally-oriented research and service. So many faculty are showing leadership in this regard that it would take me more time than I am allotted to mention all the outstanding work that is in progress. Recent accomplishments such as the partnerships with Burapha University in Thailand shepherded by Joseph Lema in the School of Business and the Universidad del Rosario in Colombia led by Vicki Schindler in the School of Health Sciences are just two examples where our faculty and students are prioritizing global perspectives. Stockton has also acquired a site license for the AASCU Global Challenges materials making them available to you for use in the classroom. Tina Zappile has led these efforts, and there is a flyer on your table that gives additional information. Many other Stockton faculty members have worked abroad this past year; others have chosen to explore global culture in our local communities. You should all know that we value your investment in international cultural competencies and your willingness to share your experience with the Stockton community.

Finally, Stockton remains committed to Sustainability. Tait Chirenje served as a coach for three students on a successful 2020 proposal for their Osprey Mug Initiative. For this project, the students are creating reusable mugs for sale in the Stockton Bookstore, helping to reduce paper and plastic waste on campus. In addition to the creativity of the project, the 2020 Steering Committee was duly impressed by the incredibly comprehensive and convincing proposal that the students wrote and submitted with the guidance of their professor.

These few examples show clearly that faculty members are taking full advantage of the many opportunities to become involved in projects and initiatives with institution-wide impact and significance.

As impressive as these efforts are individually, Academic Affairs must also review this good work strategically. Stockton has long heralded the value of shared leadership, but as we grow and our programs expand, we need to be sure that the structures that allow for that inclusive governance are re-evaluated regularly as well. As you know, at the end of the last academic year,
we created task forces to foster opportunities for the entire Stockton community to provide input into important, ongoing projects. Thanks to Brian Tyrrell, Diane Falk, and Donnetrice Allison, the Taskforce on Atlantic City initiatives met over the summer and made progress on their charge to develop proposals regarding fiscally responsible academic opportunities in Atlantic City. These proposed projects must reaffirm Stockton’s institutional values and its commitment to serving constituents in a diverse, urban environment. Stockton’s curriculum, Essential Learning Outcomes, and LEGS themes can bind these locations together. We will look for pedagogical opportunities that might only be realized in this new setting. Communication with the community will take place in a variety of venues including an AC task force website, articles in the Stockton Times, and forums where you will be able to provide input and feedback.

The Task Force on Shared Governance has also been actively meeting this summer, and I want to thank the faculty on the committee, Rodger Jackson, Judy Copeland, and Pat McGinnis, for their dedication and commitment to this important initiative. The Task Force’s charge is to actively engage faculty leaders, staff, administrators, and Board members in a discussion of the definition and best practices of shared governance, to assess the state of shared governance at Stockton, and to develop recommendations to strengthen it, including creating opportunities for joint planning and communication. In our work, it became clear that a key precedent for defining shared governance requires reviewing the University mission. The Task Force has committed to spending the next several months soliciting campus-wide input so that the Task Force can craft a mission statement that reinforces Stockton’s core values, including interdisciplinarity, student engagement, and collegiality while honoring the institution’s past and providing guidance for the future.

Our collaborative mindset will also be essential as we begin our Middle States Periodic Review efforts. The Periodic Review provides the chance to reflect on and articulate how well we’re meeting the goals we set for ourselves four years ago, as well as an opportunity to push ourselves to be even more deliberate about how we choose our projects, set our priorities, and allocate our resources. Sonia Gonsalves and Michelle McDonald will lead the Periodic Review effort and will put out a call for team volunteers. The next 15 months will be crucial as we begin assembling information to report on how we’ve progressed since receiving our reaffirmation of accreditation in 2012. For example, our Middle States report recommended that Stockton further develop an integrated strategic planning process as well as continue to implement a comprehensive and sustained process for the assessment of student learning, including general education.

We have faculty and staff working in all of these areas, and both the plans and results we have achieved over the past several years have been encouraging. Our key academic indicators remain strong, the quality and quantity of our enrollment efforts have increased, we are on our way to completing the Academic Quad in our master plan, and our financial position, although facing tough challenges, remains healthy.

A more integrated effort will help us even more. As President Kesselman mentioned earlier, Stockton’s students should remain central to the University’s mission. Consequently, the overall academic enterprise will be the core of our integrative planning efforts. Our good colleague and friend, Peter Baratta, the University’s new Chief Planning Officer, will be working closely with Academic Affairs to preserve Stockton’s tradition of excellence in teaching, commitment to scholarship, and dedication to service. A more intentional, integrative planning process, one that
incorporates the ideas, goals, and values of each Division, will solidify Stockton’s student-centered values and traditions.

Such integrative efforts are already underway in Academic Affairs. For example, Carra Hood worked with Coordinators, Directors and Deans to re-imagine the five-year review process for graduate and undergraduate academic programs, Offices, Centers, and Institutes and has created a visualization that showcases the data and can be used to improve institutional planning and resource allocation.

Another way of measuring how well we’re meeting our goals is through job satisfaction. It would be easy to be influenced solely by the very positive experiences that most Stockton faculty reported on the COACHE Faculty Satisfaction Survey. It would be easy, but not comprehensive. We know that not all faculty experience the University in the same way and that there are groups of faculty who have reported less support, fewer opportunities to collaborate, and a less than satisfactory experience of collegiality. We want all faculty to be well supported, appropriately connected, and fully respected by their peers. At both the Provost and Academic Affairs retreats we discussed the steps that we can take to set the appropriate conditions for all-embracing faculty support as it pertains to their work. We have already taken some actions to address specific concerns that faculty identified on the COACHE survey.

Later this month, 40 invited faculty leaders and program coordinators will join with Academic Affairs and Student Affairs administrators in a full day workshop on inclusive faculty searches. They will share the workshop strategies with program members and other colleagues. These faculty development initiatives can catalyze change in our community if we disseminate what we learn and become resources for our colleagues who were not able to participate. I look forward to learning more from the participants.

The responsibility for a fully satisfied faculty rests with all of us. Our work in this regard does not end with a successful search. We must commit to follow up with our newest faculty members to ensure that they are well supported. In fact, our mentoring work is not over when our early career mentees are tenured. They too appreciate the opportunities to continue working with their senior colleagues. We must all commit to working cooperatively with our colleagues to strengthen the programs, schools, and the University.

As we welcome 48 new faculty who will enrich our diversity profile in many ways, I am confident that we will take the appropriate steps to support their success. I understand that at last week’s union workshop Jennifer Barr, Jess Bonnan-White and Elisa von Joeden-Forgey outlined some of the benefits of collaborating with colleagues and shared their methods and successes. This represents the best of Stockton; faculty doing good work and sharing their know-how with their colleagues.

The summer retreats led us to select mentoring, communication, and collegiality as areas of active attention and amelioration for this academic year. We are doing a good job with mentoring overall, but we have room for improvement in some cases, and we want to make those improvements. Our COACHE faculty review team has called on us to address collegiality and communication, and I ask each of you to reflect on the part that you can play to make these areas of strength by the next Fall Faculty Conference.
Last year we piloted a revised out-of-program mentor initiative. Several mentor-mentee pairs availed themselves of this opportunity, and although new faculty were not required to select an official out-of-program mentor, many did so and formed supportive working relationships. When offered the opportunity, nearly all out-of-program mentors agreed to continue serving in this capacity. I encourage any faculty member interested in serving as in-program and out-of-program mentors to talk with the Deans of your School and with Bill Reynolds, Director of the Institute for Faculty Development.

Before I conclude my remarks, I’d like to offer a few final announcements.

- First, one of the concerns expressed by faculty over the years is their lack of input regarding the University’s winter and spring commencement speakers. President Kesselman has expressed his full support in involving faculty in this process of recommending speakers. To this end, Brian Tyrrell and I are reviewing the current process and will report back to the President on both our findings and recommendations.

- Second, in spite of this year’s budgetary challenges, Stockton remains 100% committed to the 2020 initiative process. For the 2015-16 year, students, faculty, and staff will once again be able to apply for funding to support one-time and pilot projects that support the University’s LEGS themes. 2020 abstracts for the Fall semester will be accepted starting today through October 1st. To complete an abstract form, just go to the University’s web page and type in “2020” in the keyword search. You can also phone or email Peter Baratta if you have any questions about the 2020 process.

- Next, I will be convening a Provost reading group that will use common readings as a framework for discussing issues on campus. Our first selection will be *Whistling Vivaldi* by Claude Steele, the same book that will be read by our first year students in their freshman seminars. It will guide our continued conversation on the impact of unconscious bias for students, faculty and staff. Please respond to my forthcoming email invitation if you would like to join us in discussing this book.

- A special thank you to the Constitution Day Planning Committee for arranging this year’s Constitution Day event scheduled for Wednesday, September 16th at 6:30 p.m. We are pleased to welcome as our keynote speaker: Bryan Stevenson, author, attorney, and founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative who will be speaking about “racial justice and the Constitution.” Please join us.

- Finally, the statewide Employee Charitable Campaign will be starting a few weeks earlier this year. Stockton has assembled a team who are developing a plan of action to help the University collect more donations than ever before. Our annual giving results place us at near the top of the entire higher education system in New Jersey. Our goal this year is to be the undisputed champions of charitable giving and we hope you will consider participating in this year’s efforts. Please watch your email for additional information from President Kesselman and the planning team.
As we enter our first full academic year as Stockton University, I want to thank all of you for creating and sustaining this outstanding community; each and every one of our new and returning faculty members has a crucial role to play in continuing Stockton’s traditions and pursuing initiatives that reinforce our institutional values. We are building on 45 years of Stockton faculty resourcefulness and dedication to our students. Our foundation is strong and our goals are attainable if we work together. Let’s make this our best year yet. Again, my warmest welcome to our new members of the faculty and an equally warm welcome back to our returning faculty. Thank you for your attention.