

Jun 19, 2012

Q&A with Marye Anne Fox

“I am truly awestruck by all that we achieve.” —Fox

Marye Anne Fox will step down as Chancellor at the end of July after eight years of leadership service at UC San Diego. She has led our campus during a historic era of extraordinary growth and unprecedented financial challenges. She has assembled a diverse leadership team and set a visionary course for our future. Under her leadership, UC San Diego successfully completed a billion-dollar capital campaign, celebrated the campus’s 50th anniversary, enhanced the campus climate, and expanded at a record-setting pace to accommodate increasing numbers of students and a billion-dollar research enterprise. In this interview, she reflects on her time as Chancellor and talks about what’s next for her and the campus.



How would you summarize the last eight years?

Overall, it has been a period of fiscal challenge yet, at the same time, we've been able to increase the strength of our students and faculty. We've fought to preserve the affordability and accessibility to higher education in the face of decreased funding from the state. And we've been able to take advantage of low construction costs for projects that were already in the pipeline. That allowed us to expand our facilities to meet the needs of our growing student population and the expansion of our research enterprise. We added a lot more student housing, classrooms and lab space. We created neighborhoods, like Town Square and The Village at Torrey Pines. We transformed our campus.

What do you think are some of the major milestones that happened during your tenure?



One major milestone that comes to mind is the campus' 50th anniversary commemoration and all of the celebratory events, like our first-ever Founders' Day in Town Square and the innovation symposia. We established many new traditions that year, and I am pleased that we could create a legacy of celebration on the campus.

Another milestone is our redoubled effort to improve our campus climate and enhance diversity. We've committed funds, staff and resources to ensure that we're providing an open and welcoming environment for everyone on this campus. We also instituted organizational changes; the campus is in the process of hiring our first Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. We've greatly improved the leadership structure to foster diversity and a positive campus climate.

We also redoubled our commitment to sustainability. We've moved beyond traditional green initiatives, such as recycling, and we're now focused on cutting-edge projects that will transform our campus and our planet. For instance, we installed a 2.8-megawatt fuel cell on our campus that now produces almost 10 percent of our energy needs. It uses waste methane gas from the Point Loma Wastewater Treatment Plant, which used to be an air pollutant, and turns it into electricity without combustion. We've also retrofitted our facilities and all new buildings must be built to LEED standards. Our researchers are working to turn algae, or pond scum, into fuel alternatives. We have one of the greenest fleet of campus vehicles in America. The list goes on and on, and our students have initiated many of our green projects and studies. It's no wonder that UC San Diego is considered one of the greenest campuses in the nation.

What has been your favorite part of being Chancellor?

My two favorite things are actually opposites of each other, or maybe more like bookends. I've thoroughly enjoyed participating in the early-calling campaign each year, in which I've called students, many from underrepresented communities, to personally let them know of their admission to UC San Diego, before they find out online. When the students get the good news, they're usually excited and enthusiastic, and their energy is contagious. My other favorite part of being Chancellor is presiding over all of the commencement ceremonies. I get to celebrate their achievements, and see all of the proud faculty and family members. It's inspiring to watch our newest graduates begin new chapters in their lives.



What do people not know about the evolving role of a UC San Diego Chancellor?

UC San Diego is the size of a small, or even medium-size, city, and we operate like one. You have to be a leader, a CEO, a mayor, an academician and a fundraiser. UC San Diego is also unique because it's home to the world-renowned and unique Scripps Institution of Oceanography and UC San Diego Health Sciences which includes a School of Medicine, Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, two hospitals, and multiple primary and specialty care outpatient centers. This is a dynamic campus and it needs a dynamic leader.

What was your reaction when Pradeep Khosla was chosen as UC San Diego's eighth Chancellor?

I am excited for him and for the campus. UC San Diego has a bright future ahead, especially with such a skilled leader, educator and researcher at the helm. I am confident that he will further strengthen UC San Diego's status as a leading higher education and research university, and continue to enhance the campus' outreach and diversity initiatives.

When you think about your eight years at UC San Diego, what makes you the most proud?

As Chancellor and a Triton, I am proud that UC San Diego has continued to advance in reputation and is now among the strongest institutions in the world. I credit our bright students, our brilliant faculty and our hard-working staff.

Personally, I am most proud of receiving the National Medal of Science from President Barack Obama. I'd been to the White House before, when I served as a scientific policy advisor under the Bush administration, but when I received the medal, it was different – surreal – to be there to accept such an honor.



Why was it important to you to establish traditions on campus?

Traditions strengthen the relationship between students, faculty, staff, alumni and the campus. That's why I thought it was important to make the New Student Convocation a formal entry ceremony into the university and to have an All Campus Graduation Celebration at the end of each year. UC San Diego's 50th anniversary was also an opportune time to bring together members of the campus and community to celebrate the success of our young university. We truly have transformed rapidly from a fledgling campus to a world-renowned research university. I'm proud that we established a Founders' Celebration, which unites campus members with the people who started this campus and our alumni. And I'm proud of the Volunteer50 program, which was created to encourage public service and to recognize the existing community engagement of our students and employees. These traditions will continue to bring people together and build community on this campus.

What lessons will you take with you?

One of the main lessons, and it can be applied to many issues and challenges, is the need for community engagement. Our students, staff, faculty and community supporters are our best advocates. They understand the positive impact and value that UC San Diego provides to our region and nation. As the state has continued to slash our budget, we've turned to our community members and asked them to speak up, to contact their legislators, to tell their stories. And they've responded.

Some of our campus and community members, including Foundation Board trustees, have even traveled to Sacramento to talk with legislators. It's made a difference. We still need people to continue to advocate though. I don't think the need will ever go away.

I've also appreciated the insight and advice of the Chancellor's Community Advisory Board members. They've helped us with our advocacy work and our efforts to diversify our campus. In fact, years ago, CCAB hosted an Education Summit on campus to talk about how we can improve our yield of underrepresented students. Members have been involved in our early-calling campaign, they attend our student events, they host an elected officials reception, and they bring in fresh ideas. Their support has been invaluable.



What memories will you take with you?

I've enjoyed my time here and it's hard to pick just one. I can remember standing on top of the Village of Torrey Pines for the first time, on the 15th floor. I think it offers the best panoramic view on the campus, and it's probably one of the best views in the county. I remember looking out over the campus and thinking about all of the people who were working, studying and teaching here, supporting our mission of education, research, service and patient care. I am truly awestruck by all that we achieve.

Another memory is from our first Founders' Day. I really enjoyed meeting so many of our early faculty and alumni and staff. It was great to hear their stories about UC San Diego when there were only a few buildings scattered around.

What's next for you, short-term and long-term?

Short-term, I'm going on administrative leave for a year. Then I plan to find a balance between my passions of research and teaching, and my work promoting science education and policy. I will continue to encourage young students to pursue science, technology, engineering and math education and careers. And I plan to stay involved with the UC San Diego campus. Once a Triton, always a Triton.



Fun Faves

Favorite place at UC San Diego: I don't have one favorite place; I like to walk through campus.

Favorite place on Earth: I love the ocean in La Jolla, I like the dogwood trees in North Carolina, and the big sky in Texas.

Favorite time of day: Sunset in La Jolla

Favorite hobby: Golf

Favorite food: My husband Jim's Texas bbq ribs

Favorite Seuss book: *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*

Favorite words to live by: "We must wish and work." – from a childhood writing assignment

Keep up with campus news by subscribing to *This Week @ UC San Diego*