Graduates, as you reflect on your achievements and think about your road ahead, I want to share a brief message with you.

At last year’s Fall Commencement, my message to the graduates included a quote from Chinese philosopher Lau Tzu who said, “May you live in interesting times.” I then went on to describe some of the issues we faced and how graduates would need to apply their new knowledge, skills, and abilities in an unprecedented time of change, crisis and opportunity for our state and nation.

As I reflected on our circumstances one year later, what came to mind was the beginning of the Charles Dickens classic “A Tale of Two Cities” – “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times . . . .” I use these lines to frame my remarks because they reflect the “push and pull,” the “ying and yang” of the complex set of inter-relationships that exist among our goals and resources and the options and choices that confront us in this fiscal environment.

One of our goals is to increase our enrollment because the additional state funding we need to initiate new academic programs is based on enrollment growth. The good news is that this fall we have our largest enrollment ever - 8003. We also have our largest class of first-time freshmen: from 767 in fall 2004 to 1061 in fall 2009.

The bad news is that we will not get additional funding because of the State’s budget crisis. In addition, the really bad news is that we are required to reduce our enrollment by 6% for 2010-11.

An additional significant consequence of state funding reductions has been a 32% increase in the State University Fee for this year. While the CSU fees are low in comparison to public comprehensive universities in other states, paying that fee is still a challenge for some students who want to continue their education.

Another goal is to provide support to our faculty to increase their success rate in writing proposals for contracts and grants for research and educational programs. The good news: our funding for contracts and grants has grown significantly. Some of these grants, including Title V, support critical student academic support services for which there is no other funding available.
The bad news: I have been asked if we can use some of the more than $25 million of contract and grant funding to cover our state budget shortfall. The answer is “no.” Those funds can be used only for the purposes for which they were awarded.

We have a goal to increase our endowment, which is derived from fund raising and managed by the CSUB Foundation. The endowment grew from $7.3 million in 2004-05 to $16.4 million in 2007-08. The bad news is that our endowment lost value, along with those of most other institutions, as a result of the market collapse. Since a high percentage of our endowment income is used to fund scholarships, we were unable to fund or fully fund some scholarships in 2008-09 and 2009-10.

The ultimate example of “the worst of times” continues to be the California state budget crisis. We have seen the impact of this problem in severe budget cuts to state funded agencies, including the University. In fact, our state funding is less this year than when I started as President in 2004. This is our most critical problem since it is state funding that supports our core academic mission.

Therefore, we are in the process of reviewing all areas of the University – academic, administrative and athletics – to determine how best to allocate reduced resources to position the University to achieve its vision. Decisions will be made following consultation with the faculty and other appropriate University personnel as part of our commitment to shared governance.

I could go on with this “best of times,” “worst of times” listing, but, graduates, you get the picture. You might be asking, “How does all this relate to me?” I will answer that question in three parts.

First, I have said before that, “An individual, a university or a community can have an identity by default based on the perceptions of others, or they can construct their desired identity by taking proactive steps of self-definition.” At CSUB we have been taking proactive steps of self-definition, not simply waiting to receive state funding.

- When state funding was inadequate to outfit our Science III building with the computing capacity we needed, we raised $1.5 million from our corporate partners to purchase high-end computers for the labs. That enhanced computing capacity has given us the opportunity to pursue establishment of two new academic programs – a master’s degree in computer science and our first engineering program – computer engineering.

- When we needed space for our sophisticated simulation lab for Nursing, we secured two trailers from Edwards Air Force Base and modified them to meet our needs.

- When construction on state funded projects on campus was halted last December due to the state’s cash flow problem, construction on the Student Recreation Center continued because it was funded through a student fee referendum.
• Since no state funding will be provided to cover the start-up costs of our doctoral program in educational leadership, we will pursue funding through a foundation grant.

• We are pursuing public-private partnerships that would provide a source of campus funding independent of state allocations. We are considering this possibility as a strategy to advance construction of new student housing.

My message to you, graduates, is that you must define who you are, in spite of what is going on around you, and take steps to actualize that identity. You must remain open to using alternative strategies if you encounter obstacles to your preferred route to achieve your goals.

The second part of the answer to the question is related to a quote that appears on a plaque in my office. It has been in every office I have had over the past thirty-plus years. It is from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He said:

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

This is a statement about character. It serves as a reality check on the values that underlie our behaviors. Remember, graduates, your character gets tested not when things are easy, but during times of challenge and controversy, such as these times.

The third part of the answer is contained in a poem I learned, probably in the sixth grade, that has stuck with me over the years and comes into my consciousness from time-to-time.

It is “Invictus” by William Ernest Henley (1849-1903), written in the late 19th century. It is an affirmation of faith in the indomitable human spirit.

**Invictus**

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeoning of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.
It matters not how strait the gate,
    How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate;
    I am the captain of my soul.

Graduates, with your identity well-defined, and maintaining your character in challenging times, you will be the master of your fate. I encourage you to envision, then pursue with passion, bold dreams that enable you to create for yourself, your family, and your community the future you desire. I am confident that with your CSUB education, your intellect and vision you will be successful. Congratulations!