

Welcoming Remarks - Spring Semester '08
Laney College President Dr. Frank Chong
January 16, 2008

I would like to welcome everyone back for the Spring, 2008 semester.

The holidays can be stressful, but also relaxing. Hopefully, for you, there was a lot of the latter . . . and not too much of the former! For me, it was an opportunity to slow down a little bit and celebrate with family.

As it turned out, the greatest gift that I received over the holidays was the precise moment that my blackberry cell phone broke!!!

Suddenly, I was free! . . . I couldn't text message . . . I couldn't check my email . . . I couldn't make a phone call! I was no longer a prisoner to my handheld device!

I was actually able to read . . . sit in front of the fireplace . . . watch Netflix with my daughters . . . and catch up with old friends.

Priceless ! ! !

As we embark on the new year, I am filled with *cautious* enthusiasm.

As always, my enthusiasm is fueled by the accomplishments of the faculty, students, and staff.

As I reflect back on the fall, I think back on your accomplishments here at this institution, Laney College, that we all care so much about. What remains in my memory is:

- The numerous vocal and musical concerts and other performances hosted by our multi- talented Music Department.

- The wonderful play, *Turning Tables*, that **Michael Torres** and his students put on right here in the Laney College Theater.
- The Business Symposium, led by **Ron Jones, Anna Beavers** and our own **Dr. Elaine Chen Ramirez**, that was a smash hit and only gets better every year!
- The Basic Skills Conference on Reflective Inquiry, convened by the Carnegie Foundation and other partners, marvelously facilitated by **Meryl Siegal and Catherine Crystal**.
- The fabulous Day of the Dead exhibit in the June Steingart Art Gallery that continues to thrive under the loving care of **Dr. Leslee Stradford**.
- The success of the Laney College Eagles football team, who won the Mid-Empire conference championship, and capped their season as champions of the 15th Annual (American) Graffiti Bowl.
- I will always remember the dedication and selflessness of Head Football Coach **Jay Uchiumi**; and Women's Track and Field Coach **Curtis Taylor** who were recognized as "Coach of the Year" in their respective sports. They are worthy representatives of an athletic program that sent over 30 of its athletes to Division 1 NCAA schools last year.

In the midst of our joy over these, and many other accomplishments, our college community was reminded again this fall that life also brings sorrow.

Tragically, a promising member of our student family, **Sandy Kim**, lost her life in a fluke accident at San Francisco State, where she had transferred after earning two degrees at Laney just last spring.

We also lost **Raleigh Peppers**, a fixture in our mailroom for so many years and a friend to so many of you.

In the welding shop, his co-workers gave a moving send-off tribute to **Guido Saavedra** who was not as widely known, but deeply loved by those close to him.

And finally, we mourn the loss of our beloved accounting professor, **Larry Chin**, to cancer. Larry is terribly missed by all of us who were fortunate enough to know him.

To all of you who experienced sadness and loss in your personal life during the semester, our hearts reach out to you.

When we wrestle, day in and day out, with the issues of the particular moment, it is easy to lose track of the big picture.

As we look forward to 2008, let's take a look back at big things we were able to accomplish together in 2007:

- Phase I of the campus modernization, or as I like to call it, our "extreme makeover," which addressed health and safety issues, is largely complete.
- Phase II of the makeover, addressing renovation, is moving ahead nicely:
- All of our classrooms have had a makeover – with new paint, flooring, lighting, furniture and window coverings!
 - Reconstruction of Laney's fine dining restaurant, known heretofore as "The Beginners Inn," is in full swing and should be completed this summer.
 - The Athletics Field House and new sports fields project is underway.

- An architect has been selected to design our brand new library. ***Shirley Coaston** will be pleased; and I thank her for all her hard work on this project.*

All of the improvements we are making in our physical environment will make a difference in the lives of our students for a generation, or more, to come.

I strongly believe that our great location, coupled with our newly improved facilities, leaves Laney College well-positioned as an incubator for change.

Toward that end, we have developed successful, innovative partnerships with our community:

- With Alameda County and our Business Department.
- With the Employment Development Department and our Biology Department.
- With the Marriott Hotel and our ESL Department.
- With the other Peralta Colleges, and the Contra Costa Community Colleges, on workforce development, through the East Bay Career Advancement Academy.
- With the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Oakland Unified School District, on the Gateway to College Project.
- With the CAYSEE Foundation, where a partnership this fall helped over 30 students pass the high school exit exam and be able to continue on to college -- many of them at Laney.

It is our partnerships -- with the county, non-profits and industry partners -- that keep Laney relevant, responsive, and continually ready to serve our communities.

My talk today would not be a “**Frank**” speech if it did not address the notion of leadership. In my first address to the college community, in 2006, I spoke on the theme that “Laney Leads” And indeed, we do.

In my opening day remarks last fall, I challenged faculty, staff, students and administrators, alike, to expand the circle of leadership.

I asked more people to step up, to tackle the vital challenges we face as a college community this year -- an accreditation self-study . . . educational master planning . . . and on-going construction and modernization.

One particular group of unsung heroes and heroines has stepped up, and they deserve special recognition -- our department chairs!

Department chairs are the frontline leaders who build the schedule, hire the instructors, keep the curriculum vibrant and current, and lead the effort to develop Student Learning Outcomes.

We have nearly 40 department chairs who work directly with their colleagues, deans, vice-presidents -- and often with me -- to revitalize existing programs, develop new ideas and ALWAYS be on the lookout for funding, grants and more resources for our students and faculty.

I think particularly of Department Chairs such as:

- **Cheli Folsom** who is providing the leadership for developing Student Learning Outcomes.
- **David Ross** who is reinventing the Math Lab.
- **John Beam** who is always advocating for the wellness of our students
- **Jay Lehman** who brilliantly conducts our Music Department.

- **Arturo Davila-Sanchez** who has taken a leadership role on the court interpreters project.
- **Angela Cherry** who inspires young people to be great, not just good, with her dedication to Phi Theta Kappa.
- **Nick Kyriakopedi** who is re-invigorating the Environmental Technology Department.
- **Inger Stark** who brings tireless commitment and never forgets that students come first.
- **Denise Richardson** who always looks to new programs to better serve our students.
- **Ron Mackrodt** who has developed a new woodworking program targeted to Spanish-speaking immigrants.
- **Donna Marie Ferro and Cindy Nim**, co-chairs, who are working with our counselors to improve our matriculation services.
- **Louis Quindlen** whose very person *symbolizes* motivation and commitment.

I could go on and on, but I wanted to point out just some of the many marvelous, and on-going, contributions of our department chairs!

As we begin this new semester, we have increased release time to department chairs and, under **Dr. Elnora Webb's** leadership, merged some departments in order to create stronger departments with greater integration and collaboration.

The work of department chairs is vital to the success of Laney College, and I am committed to provide the necessary support and resources you need to succeed.

Whether in the form of more full-time faculty, improved facilities or modernized equipment, we will continue to support our department chairs.

Let me speak briefly about the Laney College Educational Master Plan, a crucial blueprint to guide us as a college and educational institution. We will be devoting a good portion of today's professional day activities to the development of the plan.

Simply put, the Educational Master Plan poses a fundamental question: *"Who are we going to teach, and how are we going to teach it?"*

Our answer will be developed, collaboratively, with student, faculty and administrative input. Dr. Webb and faculty leaders will facilitate a discussion of the master plan this morning.

I encourage you to participate in the process and the discussion, and to take an active role in shaping the educational master plan!

My enthusiasm for the future of Laney College is tempered only by the looming backdrop of a state budget crisis that anticipates a revenue shortfall as high as \$14 billion in the coming fiscal year.

In the midst of this financial uncertainty, I urge all of you to focus on the success of Proposition 92, the Community College Initiative that will appear on the Presidential Primary ballot on February 5th.

The election is going to be very close, but if passed, Proposition 92 will provide a more equitable funding stream for all community colleges including Laney.

Please vote, and do all you can to tell your family, friends, colleagues and students about the importance of Proposition 92!

Finally, as this new year of 2008 begins, there is one crowning achievement that literally highlights all we have done together this year -- and I speak of the new sign atop the Laney Tower.

The Laney College sign, long familiar to Lake joggers and freeway drivers and Oakland visitors from around the world, is back!

The new sign is fresh . . . green (and not just in color!), and energy efficient. It symbolizes a sense of renewed hope and a growing recognition that Laney College is a vibrant, innovative, caring institution of higher learning -- a college that not only leads but even more importantly, prepares emerging leaders.

In that spirit, and in the glow that the sign will represent when it is lighted -- in a ceremony to which you will all be invited in a couple of weeks -- I wish you all a happy new year, a prosperous year of the rat and a successful spring semester.

I want to close today with a quotation from "Making it Happen:"

"Losers always have an excuse;

Winners always have an idea.

Losers fix the blame;

Winners fix the situation.

Losers make promises;

Winners keep commitments.

Losers let it happen;

Winners make it happen.

Losers say, "Why don't they do something?"

Winners say, "Here's something I can do."

You are all winners. Thank you for being part of our winning team at Laney College.