

2020 State of the University Address Highlights UCSF's Resolve and Resilience During a Challenging Year

By Nina Bai ^[1]

From the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to the nationwide movement to address racial injustices, 2020 has been a year of unprecedented change and global upheaval — challenges that the UC San Francisco community has met head-on with resilience and resolve.

In his seventh annual State of the University address, Chancellor Sam Hawgood ^[2], MBBS, highlighted the extraordinary response of UCSF's frontline care workers, researchers, educators, learners, and staff to the COVID-19 pandemic and the University's renewed commitment to combatting systemic racism. He also called attention to major University milestones such as the successful closing of UCSF's five-year fundraising campaign ^[3] and significant progress made toward planning for a revitalized Parnassus Heights campus.

As a sign of the impact the novel coronavirus has had on the year, the annual address — typically delivered to a live audience gathered at Cole Hall on the Parnassus Heights campus — was held as a virtual event for the first time.

“The unpredictability of the major events that have reshaped our lives have created the sense that everything has changed,” the chancellor said during his speech titled “Resolve and Resilience.” “But what hasn't changed is our mission and commitment to the communities we serve.”

During the 50-minute program, Hawgood recounted UCSF's quick pivots toward understanding the novel coronavirus and the work to develop and test new therapies, its partnerships locally and statewide to bring testing to underserved communities, and the work it is pursuing to examine our own institutional biases.

“I firmly believe it is our values and shared purpose that have enabled us to serve as an indispensable part of our society's response to these crises, to look beyond ourselves and provide stable leadership to our communities reeling from the pandemic,” he said.

Amid the challenges of this year, Hawgood asked the community to remain focused on the four goals that he announced during the 2019 State of the University Address — fostering innovation; building value-added partnerships; bolstering financial resiliency; and nurturing UCSF's culture and empowering its people.

“These goals are even more crucial today,” he said. “I believe they will serve us well as we rise to the immediate challenge of COVID-19, and they will serve us in the longer term as we plan for the coming decades.”

Hawgood reminded the community that it is imperative to balance the short-term needs of these trying times with our long-term strategies, including fostering “a culture of inclusivity in which equity drives our shared success.”

“No matter how urgent and compelling the current moment feels, we have the responsibility to those that will follow us in the decades to come to balance the needs of today with the need to plan strategically for tomorrow.”

UCSF Response to COVID-19

In his review of UCSF’s response to the pandemic, the Chancellor described COVID-19 as an accelerator of pre-existing trends that were already on the horizon.

“Across society, experts in various fields are beginning to describe COVID-19 as a catalyst that is speeding up and supercharging forces that existed before the arrival of the novel coronavirus,” he said.

These include positive trends seen across the nation and at UCSF, such as the digital transformation that has allowed more opportunities for telehealth, remote work, and online teaching and learning.

But it has also accelerated the widening gap between “the haves and the have nots,” the increasing inequities in health access and outcomes for Black, Latinx and Native American communities, and political disruptions to global health and scientific collaboration. To those, the UCSF community has responded swiftly, Hawgood said.

“Teams across UCSF have rallied in response to the pandemic with speed and selflessness, acting as if by instinct,” he said. “And as I’ve heard many of you say with pride: we were made for this.”

Teams across UCSF have rallied in response to the pandemic with speed and selflessness, acting as if by instinct. And as I’ve heard many of you say with pride: we were made for this.

CHANCELLOR SAM HAWGOOD



Hawgood recognized the thousands of people across the entire University who have contributed to the response, from researchers, to those on the front lines providing care, to faculty and learners who transformed curricula for virtual learning, and those keeping our operations running smoothly, including driving shuttles and keeping the facilities safe and

clean.

“UCSF scientists and clinicians from disparate fields are refocusing their research efforts and adapting their expertise towards fighting COVID-19,” he said.

The chancellor highlighted work from researchers who are studying the genomes of COVID-19 patients, mapping out the immune response, searching for the cellular proteins targeted by the new virus, and developing inhalable technologies to prevent infection. UCSF clinicians are conducting at least 23 clinical trials related to treatments for COVID-19, he said.

UCSF infectious disease and public health experts, many drawing from their experience fighting HIV/AIDS, recognized early the outsized impact on underserved communities. They quickly organized testing for marginalized communities around the Bay Area and the nation, rapidly built a state-of-the-art COVID-19 diagnostic laboratory within days, and partnered with the state to train thousands of contact tracers.

UCSF’s influence on public health can be traced directly to the partnerships with community groups and local and state public health leaders, many of whom were trained here. “Our society is in desperate need of health leaders like these – whose decisions are grounded in science and fact – and who work for the interest of all,” said Hawgood.

Fighting Racial Injustice

Just as the UCSF community has stepped forward to fight COVID-19, it needs to confront what Hawgood called a “second pandemic:” systemic racism.

UCSF has long recognized the connection between health disparities and systemic racism and has had a longstanding commitment to health equity and social justice.

“But as the national conversation on race and racism has expanded, we have recognized the need to look in the mirror and examine our own institutional culture and practices as well,” said Hawgood.

In describing the Anti-Racism Initiative launched this summer ^[4], Hawgood connected the new effort to the important work that UCSF advocates have been advancing since the Civil Rights Movement that began some 60 years ago. He cited the importance of campus groups and programs such as the UCSF Black Caucus ^[5], Chicanx Latinx Campus Association ^[6], Diversity Matters Program within the School of Medicine ^[7] that continue to build on this legacy.

At the intersection of race and health, UCSF is working to eliminate race-based medical algorithms that harm people of color, such as those that includes biases in the measurement of kidney and lung function, and exploring ways to address race in science and health more broadly.

“We must do the hard work required of us to listen, learn, and act – to make changes within our own institution, to remove behaviors and policies that perpetuate inequities,” said Hawgood. “We must also do our part, and aspire to lead, these anti-racism actions on broader national stages.”

Preparing for the Future

Even in these turbulent and uncertain times, UCSF has a responsibility to plan for the road ahead, said Hawgood, in reviewing his four goals of innovation, partnerships, financial resiliency, and people and culture.

In many ways, COVID-19 has accelerated innovation and expanded partnerships in the past year. ?Indeed, I believe the striking lesson we have all learned over the last nine months is that we can bring about massive, effectual innovation to scale rapidly,? he said.



UCSF
The Campaign

UNOR/H/O/OX/CRUS
ADERS/DETERMINED
THE/INSPIRED/MAV
RIC/PIONEERS/MAST
ERMINDS/INNOVATO
S/REVOLUTIONARIES
HAMPIONS/YOU/P
LUTE/UNORTH
CRUSADERS
MINED/INSPIE

