

**Remarks by
Steven B. Sample
President
University of Southern California
Delivered at the 13th Annual Presidents Meeting
of the Association of Pacific Rim Universities
June 30, 2009**

I want to thank everyone at Caltech and our outstanding lineup of panelists and speakers for all they have done to make APRU's 13th annual presidents meeting a resounding success. Over the last few days, I hope you have enjoyed reconnecting with your colleagues from around the Pacific Rim. I also hope that your spouses and significant others have experienced some of the wonderful cultural activities the Los Angeles area has to offer.

L.A. is my adopted home, and I believe it is the *de facto* Capital of the Pacific Rim. You can read my address to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council about this subject on the APRU Web site, and I would welcome your comments on this paper by e-mail or fax.

I know some of you may disagree with my assertion that L.A. is the *de facto* Capital of the Pacific Rim. Some of you may consider that claim to be audacious, or even arrogant. Others may think it's delusional. But the great thing about being one of the founding fathers of an organization like APRU is that you get to make bold declarations before anyone else.

APRU has come a long way since our first exploratory meeting in Los Angeles in 1997. At that meeting, 20 university presidents and chancellors from around the Pacific Rim gathered at USC. I still remember the enthusiasm and the aspirations of those original participants. Together we developed a vision for what APRU would become. We imagined an organization that would bring together the best minds from around the Pacific Rim. We envisioned an organization that would foster international collaboration in research and education. We conceived an organization that would help presidents, chancellors, deans, faculty, and doctoral students get to know each other personally and professionally. We believed that by combining our strengths we could set the standard of academic excellence by which *all* research universities of the 21st century would be measured.

Over the last few years, APRU has made tremendous strides. We're promoting global understanding through our partnerships, collaborations, and student exchanges. And we're working to make the Pacific Rim stronger, healthier, and more prosperous by taking our research from the lab to the marketplace and by educating the next generation of leaders.

It gives me great pride to see that, in just over a decade, APRU is turning its original lofty vision into practical solutions that are improving the quality of life for countless people around the Pacific Rim.

As members of APRU, we are among the elite, the best of the best, the *crème de la crème*. Here's how I know we're on the right track. Last summer we added five new universities to our membership, bringing the total to 42. We've now *closed* APRU's membership until 2011. But here's something very interesting. We continue to receive inquiries about membership from major research universities around the Pacific Rim, and even from *outside* the Rim.

Other universities want to join APRU because they know we're doing something very special. They know we have created an East-West think-tank of unparalleled breadth, intellect, and potential. And they know we're building bridges of collaboration that will be vital to the future of this region and the world.

Today I'm speaking to you at a very uncertain time in the history of higher education, and in the history of almost every other field of human endeavor. During my nearly 30 years as a university president, I cannot recall a time that was as challenging for the noble calling to which we have dedicated ourselves and our institutions. The pressures all of us face are immense. On the one hand we are expected to continually make our universities better. We're committed to recruiting and retaining the very best students and faculty from around the world – not just from around the Rim, but from around the *world*. We're dedicated to conducting innovative research that improves the quality of life for all people who live around the Rim. And we're devoted to constantly expanding our universities' infrastructures, from laboratories and libraries to new technologies and equipment.

On the other hand, we are facing unprecedented economic challenges. Some of us are experiencing hiring freezes, budget cuts, and financial belt-tightening. Most of us are receiving dwindling support from our governments and private

philanthropists. Over the next few years, all of us will likely be asked to do more with less – *much* more with *much* less.

Those may seem like dire predictions. But I don't see them that way. Those of you who know me know that I'm a contrarian – which means I often see things very differently from other people. I'm also an optimist. As a contrarian, I don't automatically accept the conventional wisdom about anything. As an optimist, I believe there are opportunities hidden in every problem.

Over nearly three decades as a university president, I have learned that difficult times often bring out the best in people and in organizations. They have a way of focusing our attention on what is essential. They remind us of our core values. In times such as these, I am reminded that the most important thing for our universities is not our endowments or our capital construction campaigns. Rather, our most important asset is our *intellectual* capital.

As is the case at our individual universities, APRU's greatest strength is our collective intellectual capital, which helps us develop new solutions to our most daunting problems. I feel very privileged to be associated with a group of leaders of your caliber, men and women who lead institutions that are on the cutting edge of innovation, invention, and knowledge creation.

Let me talk for a moment about APRU's core values. This consortium was founded on the principle of helping university leaders from around the Rim make connections at meetings, conferences, and symposiums. At these events, the participants would have the opportunity to meet a lot of colleagues from different countries and from disparate disciplines. Naturally, two or three of these individuals would discover affinities. We hoped that from those shared interests, professional collaborations would emerge. These are what my USC colleague Dick Drobnick calls "serendipitous partnerships."

Many of those partnerships have succeeded beyond our wildest imagination. Let me tell you about one of those successful collaborations. This is the story of a USC political science professor who participated in our APRU fellows program. Before he attended the program, this particular professor had no contacts in Asia. During the program, he of course met several ambitious researchers from many different fields. But he really connected with one geography professor from the National University of Singapore. The two professors applied for and received a small grant from APRU, which led to their collaboration on a paper. Later they

published an article in a prestigious journal. The journal article prompted them to write a grant proposal together. Today the two professors have a two-year grant, funded by the Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research and the U.S. National Science Foundation, to study urbanization and environmental sustainability in India and China.

The example of these two professors is only one of APRU's many success stories. By connecting university leaders and faculty, APRU is planting seeds of collaboration that eventually blossom into productive partnerships for many years to come. But such partnerships require time before they can reach full-flower.

Unfortunately, we live in a world that values the instant: instant messaging, instant results, instant gratification. However, that's not how collaboration works. Over the years, I've learned that *lasting* partnerships don't just happen. Enduring partnerships need to grow naturally. They require a common vision, they must be nurtured, and they take time.

But here's the important thing to note. When those collaborative partnerships begin to take off, they are much more productive and effective than a single researcher or a single institution working alone. Likewise APRU is stronger than its individual universities. Together we have access to more resources, generate more innovative ideas, and have a greater effect on the entire Pacific Rim community.

A great example of such transformative partnerships is the APRU World Institute (AWI), which was formed in 2006. AWI brings together researchers, policy advisors, and business leaders to address some of the most important issues in global health, climate change, and water resource management. The great thing about the APRU World Institute is that it allows us to collaborate with key partners *outside* of APRU. For instance, last week several APRU institutions partnered with Johns Hopkins University to put on a workshop entitled "Forging Public Health Partnerships in Response to the Global Economic Crisis." This is just one of the ways that APRU can help provide timely, practical solutions to daunting societal problems. And I think the APRU World Institute will play an essential role in helping this consortium become a major player in global leadership in the years ahead.

APRU was founded to promote scientific, educational, and cultural collaboration around the Pacific Rim. Sometimes I'm asked if those original

values are as important today as they were in 1997. The short answer is “no.” Why do I say that? Because in my judgment our founding principles and values are even *more* important today than ever before. As our world becomes increasingly interconnected, the challenges we face will continue to become more and more complex. Problems that were once solved by single countries acting alone will need to be faced by entire regions working together.

Universities, business, governments, and other organizations will need to combine forces to address economic instability, pandemic disease, environmental protection, technology transfer, energy, crime, poverty, trade, transportation, and a host of other issues.

The important thing for us in APRU is to build bridges of collaboration *before* we need to use them. There is a cost for building these bridges. Our universities pay for dues, travel, lodging, and meals. It’s also very expensive for presidents, chancellors, and senior leaders to invest their time to attend these meetings. But I think a much greater cost would occur by our *not* building these partnerships in advance.

Every organization has its watershed moments. This is one of those times for APRU. I think all of us need to ask ourselves what type of organization we want APRU to become. Will we shrink from the many challenges ahead? Or will we face these difficulties with courage, creativity, and ingenuity, and above all with cooperation, knowing that future generations are depending on us?

As one of the founding fathers of APRU, I have great faith in this organization and in all of you. I believe that together we can make significant contributions to the people around the Rim. As leaders in higher education and as members of APRU, we have before us a long list of challenging opportunities. Together let us face these challenges with boldness and imagination, knowing that we are participants in one of the greatest eras of human history. And let us celebrate the fact that we are part of an elite organization that has the intellectual capital, the resources, and the will to continue to enhance the Pacific Rim now, and in the decades to come.