Opening Remarks
August 22, 2011

Good morning. I want to welcome all faculty and staff back to campus – especially our new faculty and staff. Next to graduation, the opening of the Fall Semester is my favorite time of year. It reminds me of Spring Training in Major League Baseball -- there is a lot of positive energy and anything and everything seems possible. The students are excited and geared up for a new year. Faculty are ready to start over with new students. And of course, we always have Javelina Football. However, more about that later.

For the folks that are new, I want you to know that you are joining an outstanding institution. We have great faculty, great programs and students who are eager to learn. The past three years have been an exciting time to be part of this campus. We have grown enrollment and made many changes to the
University that indicate a very positive future and this year is no different.

However, before I share with you many new and exciting initiatives that we are implementing this year, I want to give you an update on the impact of the 82nd Legislative Session on the University -- primarily the effects of the budget cuts. Many, if not most of you, were gone for the summer and I want to take the time to bring you up to date.

For those that are new to the State, we have a part-time legislature that meets every two years for 120 days. On occasion, business is not completed during the regular session and the Legislature will has to stay for a special session. That is what occurred this year. As a result, our Legislature was in session from the middle of January to the end of June. The state had to cut $26 billion. It was a very difficult session and Higher Education bore the lion’s share of the cut.
I met with you last spring and I laid out the situation and our plans to deal with the cuts. We estimated a cut of between 6 and 10 million dollars over the next two years. Since we did not know what the final outcome would be, we had to plan for the worst case scenario. During that session, I identified three goals.

1. To balance our budget.

2. To preserve the academic mission and integrity of the University.

3. To keep as many people on the payroll as possible.

In addition, during our Spring meeting, I laid out our three major strategies to meet these goals.

1. We implemented a hard hiring freeze.
2. We developed the Voluntary Separation Plan.

3. We laid out the plans for a possible one-week furlough.

All in all, I am pleased to report that we met our goals.

A. We took a 15% cut to our budget (13.5 million over the next two years).

B. It could have been worse, without a “hold harmless” we would have given back 18% which would have been an additional 2.4 million dollars.

C. There were no special items nor TRBs funded. Therefore, we did not receive the money we requested for the Vet Tech Program, nor were we able to receive funding to remodel and to expand our Music Building. While these were setbacks for us, we decided to go forth with the
Vet Tech program and continue to lobby for TRBs in the next legislative session.

We balanced our budget by:

A. Cutting our operating budgets by $526,000 per year.

B. Eliminating 78 staff positions and 3 faculty positions. Only three individuals lost their jobs.

C. Eliminating and/or combining 12 academic programs and eliminating University College.

D. Reducing services and programs to students (Presidential Lecture Series and President’s Performing Arts Series).

E. We did not raise tuition, but were able to increase students fees by 4.58%. 
F. 49 individuals elected the VSP. This year we will save $400,000 and next year we will save $1.2 million from this program.

G. We saved $400,000 from the hard hiring freeze.

H. Good news -- we did not have to implement the furlough program!

I want to thank the entire University for your patience, understanding, feedback and cooperation during the past session. While I am not pleased we had to make cuts, I have no doubt that we, together, will continue to move the University forward.

This brings me to the present. As I noted earlier, despite the cuts, we have many new and exciting programs.
We have a new residence hall (Mesquite Grove West), a new college (Honors College), a remodeled dining hall in Turner Bishop, a new and exciting academic degree -- Vet Tech -- and a new food venue- Sushic- in the Memorial Student Union Building.

We are in the ballrooms today because we are making some needed improvements to Jones Auditorium and we will start remodeling the Memorial Student Union Building this semester to make room for our One-Stop-Shop. (Admission, Bursar’s Office, Financial Aid, Registrar’s Office, and a help desk for students).

After considerable amount of study, we have developed and implemented a new parking plan that we think will ease many of our current parking problems on campus. Two separate studies indicated that we have plenty of parking spaces, but we do not manage our parking lots in an efficient and effective manner. As a result, the new parking
plan addresses the issues identified by the consultants. In addition, under the leadership of Dr. Terisa Remelius and the support of the student body, we are starting a shuttle bus service on campus this week. There will be two routes and students, faculty and staff can use these buses. In addition, we are starting a daily shuttle bus service from Corpus Christi to campus each day. The bus will leave from the Del Mar campus, and parking on the Del Mar campus will be free. As many of you know, I meet regularly with the students, Senate Faculty Executive Committee, and the Staff Council on a regular basis. Hopefully, parking will not be the number one issue on your agendas this year!

I am also extremely pleased to note that we now have an official “Faculty Handbook.” We have been operating in absence of one since my arrival as President three years ago. I want to thank all faculty senators, and particularly Drs. Michelle Garcia and Ed. Rowley, along with Provost Gandy, for the leadership in this collaborative effort. It took hard work and compromise to make it happen and I
consider this a milestone in the history of this University. In a nutshell, we are working together and moving forward.

I have a few other important announcements before I talk about the work we have to do this year.

1. Degree works – we are implementing a system that will allow students, faculty and advisors to track degree plans and determine exactly what is needed for graduation. In addition, students can examine how changing majors impacts their degree plans and the time it will take them to graduate. This program will launch later this semester, and several training opportunities will be available.

2. Storm Ready Center – We are the only university south of San Antonio to be named a Storm Ready Community. This distinction comes from a nationwide community preparedness program, and it means that we have the
appropriate plans and programs in place to deal with storm situations. It’s an honor to have this distinction, and it shows that we are doing the right things to keep our campus safe and efficient.

3. EAP – We are implementing an Employee Assistance Program that will allow employees and their eligible dependents to receive up to five counseling sessions for professional or personal issues they are facing. More details about this program will come out later this week.

And now, for the hard work that we must accomplish this year:

As we know, our retention and graduation rates need improvement. As I have mentioned on numerous occasions, we must do a better job of keeping and educating our students in a timely manner.
Last year, we brought to campus one of the most prominent experts in the nation with regards to student success -- Dr. John Gardner, the executive director and founder of the Foundations of Excellence Project, to provide an assessment of campus. This organization is most noted for development of the First Year Experience. Many of you here today attended the briefing provided by Dr. Gardner and heard his recommendations. We are doing many things right to help our students achieve. However, we lack purpose and coordination in our individual efforts across campus.

Following his visit, I appointed Drs. Gandy and Remelius to lead a campus-wide initiative to bring to fruition Dr. Gardner’s recommendations. This summer named Dr. Nancy King Sanders as the Associate Vice President for Students Success and believe me, she is off and running. Presently, we have fourteen campus-wide initiatives related to
student success. I want all of us to remember this academic year and the “Year of Student Success.”

If I have learned anything as the President of this University, I have learned anything is possible if we work together. I look forward to bringing you up to date on this initiative at our Spring Faculty Meeting.

Finally, if you have not heard the news, Chancellor Mike McKinney stepped down as the Chancellor of the Texas A&M System on July 1, 2011. I want to thank Chancellor McKinney for his support of me and this University. Much, if not all, our recent success can be attributed to his support of this University.

Last week, the Board of Regents named John Sharp as the sole finalist for the position. Mr. Sharp served as Comptroller of the State of Texas and has a long and productive record of public service to this state. He grew up in South Texas and has many ties to this
University and the Kingsville community and is highly respected throughout the state.

Karen and I, along with the other presidents and spouses, were able to have dinner with Chancellor Sharp last Friday night and the presidents had a working breakfast with him this past Saturday in Austin. I like his vision and experience and I am confident that we as an institution will continue to receive the support from System the keep our momentum going forward.

Finally, I cannot go without mentioning our football team. For those of you who are new to campus, you will quickly find out that football is King, not only on campus, but for the entire Kingsville community and South Texas. We have a long and proud record of winning at Javelina Stadium.

I am more than pleased to report that we led the nation in football attendance at the Division II level
last year and led the nation in attendance for the playoffs.

We start the season ranked #7 in the nation and I believe we are ready to compete for the national championship. As Coach Atterberry noted recently, we are not happy with anything but number one.

If you haven’t experienced a home game, it’s quite an event – from tailgating to the game and the extra activities that take place around game time. We hope to see you around campus and at the games this fall.

We’re also proud of our Volleyball team and we’re looking forward to see them in competition this fall.

Again, welcome to and back to campus. Have a great semester.