I thought it was quite notable that this venue was chosen for the biology graduation. As recounted in Librarian Meredith Eliassen’s book on SF State, we are just two blocks from the original SF State Building, when we were called the San Francisco Normal School. That building was located on Powell near Clay St. It had been the Boy’s High School. It started with 31 women students in 1899. And, the first department chair in science was a woman, named Effie McFadden- she was an 1897 graduate of Stanford University with a bachelor of arts in biology. She taught botany, zoology and nature study.

In the April 18, 1906 earthquake and subsequent fire, the original building was destroyed as was much of this area. Eleven weeks after the earthquake, after students had been taking a ferry to Oakland for classes at a temporary location, classes resumed at SF State’s new campus which was relocated to Haight and Laguna. Early on, things were pretty strict. Women students were prohibited from having open neck attire, and were required to have long sleeves and wear dresses down to the ankles. *Pretty much all of us would fit that dress code today.*

Professor Edith A. Pickard, a graduate of the University of California specialized in zoology of marine creatures and did research on parasitic ciliates found in the gills of mollusks. She also served as an advisor to what we would now call pre-med, pre-dental and pre-pharmacy students. Professor Lea Reid (1883-1973) was one of several women who earned the title Professor of Biological Sciences in this period. She received her BS (1916) and MA (1917) from the University of California and did additional graduate work at Stanford. Her expertise was in broadleaf trees of California and she authored a number of state bulletins. She taught at SF State from 1925 until 1955.
By 1934, the biology department, now a separate unit, had grown to seven faculty with five of them being women. Effie McFadden retired in 1938. Then college president Alexander Roberts said “Her tribute lies in the multitude who are honored by her friendship.

John (Jack) S. Hensill, as in Hensill Hall, was the first of the later deans, for what would become CoSE, to join SF State. He arrived in 1947 with a Master’s degree and a few years to go on his doctorate at Stanford as a member of the Division of Natural Sciences. He joined a department of three men and three women and a university with 3400 students and, something that might sound familiar, no room in lab classes. A problem we are still working on seventy years later. Two years later, SF State was allowed to grant Master’s degrees for the first time. Soon after that, SF State began to move to a campus by Lake Merced in 1953.
In 1956, a physicist specializing in theoretical physics and astrodynamics named Robert Ambrose Thornton joined the San Francisco State College. Thornton, who had both African American and Cherokee heritage, went on to become the first dean of the School of Science in 1964 and also the name for our Thornton Hall. Just before Thornton arrived, the person who I think was the first Bowman joined the faculty at SF State. Robert or “Bob” Bowman had recently completed
research in the Galapagos Islands on Darwin Finches. It was one of fifteen field visits he did in his 33 years at SF State. He spent considerable time studying variations in the beaks of Darwin Finches, and maybe as a bit of an engineer, compared the different shapes to different varieties of mechanical pliers.

These days our biology department is quite a bit larger, with more than forty faculty and one of the largest numbers of student majors at SF State. Our faculty involve students in their research and also have them serve as co-authors in top journals. SF State’s biology department is not only one of the largest among public master’s institutions, I believe it is the very best. Our biology department sends alumni to the very best graduate schools and our alumni are faculty at some of the best universities in the world. Our alumni are also founders of biotech companies, teachers of community colleges and high schools, discoverers of new drugs and drug therapies, medical professionals saving lives and advocates for our planet. Our biology department also has a very large and loving heart.

The commitment of SF State biology faculty and staff to supporting students of all kinds and helping them clear obstacles to their success, is unbeatable. Recently, I was with Dr. Marquez-Magaña at the National Institutes of Health for a presentation on NIH diversity programs. On almost every slide, and more often than any other institution present, I saw SF State’s Seal. It was really pretty
amazing to see our leadership in training and workforce development programs. That SF State Seal, says *Experentia Docet*, or experience teaches. Here is what that experience taught me – **I am very fortunate to lead a college with such an outstanding biology department.** I am also fortunate to have spent my first two years as dean working with your department chair, Mike Goldman. He is one of the most gracious people I know – even when I have called or spoken with him about a challenging issue he has always thanked me for doing so, no matter what the topic.

Graduates of 2017, as you leave us and go on to your next stop in life, take a moment to celebrate that you come from a long line of biology success at SF State. We look forward to being inspired as we hear of your accomplishments. Thank you!

*Based on San Francisco State University by Meredith Eliassen, Thornton bios by Meredith Eliassen and others, many issues of the Franciscan yearbook, SFSU faculty senate reports, news media, obituaries, Hensill’s personal history interview, SFSU biology website, etc.*