Earlier today, a reporter asked me what “BOBCATSTRONG” meant to me and if I had seen evidence of it within the last 48 hours.

I told the reporter, and hopefully many 1000s who tuned into their news cast, that Bobcat Strong has at its core community – and not just any community, but one willing to stand up with compassion, courage, conviction, and hope.

I then shared that the first evidence of Bobcat Strong took place in a classroom when students stepped in and administered first aid to their classmate without hesitation, and when their instructor kept them calm while they heroically responded to the chaos all around them.

This willingness to stand up with compassion and courage is emblematic of our campus’ character.

I have seen it displayed long before the events of this week – for it is embedded in our DNA. Not surprising, I have seen it displayed around every turn I’ve walked these past 48 hours.

From faculty who, with courage, helped their students make some sense of meaning out of this tragedy, to staff who, with conviction, worked well into the night to provide support for those in need, to students who, with compassion, mobilized spontaneously to console and care for each other.

So we symbolically celebrate all of that this evening. The chancellor mentioned the reclaiming of Scholars Bridge – the bridge which has become part of the campus’ history starting with the much documented crossing 10 years ago when the campus first opened, to the annual crossing by every first-year in August as they begin their academic journey, followed by the re-crossing as they commence as alumni of UC Merced. An important campus tradition that reaffirms our values, asserted by Chancellor Leland in her comments.

A characteristic of a strong campus community has been described as one in which the heritage of the university is remembered and where rituals and tradition affirm its values.

Tonight, we reclaim Scholars Bridge as part of our heritage, our traditions, our values. But more importantly, we recognize in our united crossing, a symbolic gesture of strength, of our community. A community that is filled with compassion, courage, conviction and HOPE.

I stand with UC Merced!