

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on August 27, 2015

Location: Carrier Dome

Remarks: Chancellor's Address at the 2015 Convocation for New Students

*The Chancellor was introduced by Aysha Seedat
Student Association President.*

Good evening. On behalf of my colleagues on the faculty and staff, I welcome you to Syracuse University.

Before I begin, I would like to tell you a little about this evening's faculty speaker, Professor Breagin Riley, whom you will be hearing from very shortly. Professor Riley is an outstanding scholar and teacher. She is an Assistant Professor of Marketing in the Whitman School of Management and affiliated faculty member in the Department of Psychology here at Syracuse. She holds degrees from MIT and Northwestern. Her classes include Consumer Behavior and Principles of Marketing, and many of you will be in them.

There are two very different audiences here at this convocation. In front of me, on the lower deck of this vast space, are 3,800 freshman and transfer students about to begin their university careers at Syracuse. And above you students, watching over you as always, are your families and loved ones. I have very brief, and separate messages to each of these two audiences.

To the entering students of 2015: In a few moments, Dean Maurice Harris will ask you to rise and to receive and accept the charge. The words I will speak to you, and the words you will speak to me, are adapted from a charge first spoken on this campus 144 years ago in 1871.

The Chancellor who spoke them, Erastus Haven, and the students who heard them, could not have imagined what Syracuse University would become in 2015.

Yet, those students in 1871 discovered many of the same things that you will discover here. Education is not something bestowed on you but something earned through hard work, discipline, and seriousness of intent.

A good education encompasses the full breadth of disciplines, from arts and humanities to the sciences. You will learn not only from your teachers but also from your peers. In the process, you will become a teacher yourself and forge friendships that will last a lifetime.

Those students in 1871 eventually left this University a better place, and they became better people. They have been followed by 143 other cohorts of students and countless faculty and staff, each of whom contributed here and changed this place. The University you see around you today is not just a bunch of buildings and people and course requirements; it is the accumulation of all the work and dreams and ideals and inventions of the students and faculty who came before you.

So much of what happens here is beyond the imagination of any administrator; it was invented and learned by students and faculty working here together. This includes the Goon Squad, who unloaded your possessions and moved you into your rooms - students invented that here in 1944. This includes the Senior Class Marshals, the students who led the procession today. For decades, the Marshals have been selected each year to hold the University's greatest leadership honor all year for their achievements in the classroom, on the campus, and in the community. This includes the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, the oldest continually operating ROTC on any U.S. campus. This includes so many programs and departments and clubs and activities, from the Daily Orange (one of the nation's top ranked college papers), founded in 1903, to the Crouse Chimes, installed in 1889 high up in the Crouse College bell tower, heard across campus and played by student Chimemasters for more than 125 years. Students have created 38 new organizations just since last year's convocation.

So incoming 2015 students, when you hear and accept the charge that dates back to 1871, I ask you to resolve to make this University your own. I ask you to build something here, to make something here, to leave behind something here, that you alone uniquely contribute. We all want to help you do that. This is your university. Make it your own.

To the parents and families of the incoming class of 2015: Three times now, I have dropped one of my own kids off at a University. Three times, I have sat where you now sit. Three times, I have been happy and proud of my kid, starting at a great university. Three times, I have been anxious and concerned, and not about the food or the residence hall. I have been concerned because I suddenly realized, sitting where you sit, that there would be a piece of my soul walking around a campus far away, beyond my ability to completely control or protect or influence.

I suspect that some of you right now are feeling what I felt each time I left a kid at university. My wife, my mother-in-law, my family, and I, had poured so much into each of our children – so much time and love and energy and worry and inspiration. It was a labor of love, but it was labor, and we got very used to it. Indeed, it defined the best part of our lives.

And then suddenly there I was in a vast auditorium, and some professor or dean or president in a robe was standing on a stage telling me it was time to go home, to leave my kid behind. I hated that president for telling me to go home. He did not know my kid. He did not seem to know how much love and work and joy our whole family had poured into my kid so that he could arrive at a great university. He did not seem to understand that we were not just dropping our kid off in some abrupt divorce, but embracing a transition while our family however it was constituted, remained very much intact, including with our kid at college.

Parents, and families, at Syracuse we do know all those things. We do know that you want to continue to be there for your kid who is now an adult. We do know that you want to learn how to be there for them in different ways that match the tremendous achievement of starting one of your own at a great university. We do know this because so many of us have sat where you sit today, including me. We do know this especially because so many of us, including half of the deans on this stage, are the first in their families to go to university.

So parents and family, congratulations and relax a bit. I left my kid at college, and it was hard, but the happy news is that I kept in touch and could still be there for my kid when needed. I did some laundry. I could visit on parent's weekend. I could get text messages. I could take joy, in a different way, each day in all that my adult son was experiencing at a great university.

Parents and family, thank you for all you have done and will do for these members of the 2015 entering class. Like all of us at Syracuse University, I know and daily remember that I am the beneficiary of all your great work, in developing these students. Because of your work, these students are our most sacred trust.

Good luck to all of you, students and families. And congratulations.

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