

Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud
Delivered on Saturday, January 13, 2018
Location: Setnor Auditorium
Remarks: Winter Convocation 2018

*The Chancellor was introduced by President of the Student Association,
James Franco '18*

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

After my welcome, you will hear from Professor Keith Alford, the Director of the School of Social Work of the Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics. Professor Alford holds his doctorate from the Ohio State University. He has taught thousands of students at Syracuse University for 21 years. He is an expert in many subjects, including the delivery of mental health services to children and families. He has authored dozens of prominent research publications, and led many initiatives at this University and in this community that have improved the lives of our people. I am in awe of his insights, his decency, and his respect for people in a time when these things are so sorely needed.

You will also hear from Senior Class Marshal Angie Pati, a student in the College of Arts & Sciences of whom I am also in awe of, for different reasons. Angie is majoring in neuroscience and psychology and minoring in public communications, biology and health and wellness.

There are different audiences at this convocation. Some of you are the parents and families of new students, and you come from all over the nation and the world. Some of you are new students to this campus.

Many of you are new undergraduates, either starting as first-year students or as transfer students. Some of you are discovery students who have earned your first semester of a Syracuse education in our extensive programs throughout the world. Some of you are exchange students from many countries, here to spend a semester or year among us. And many of you are new students in a broad array of masters programs at the University.

People from every state study and work on this campus, as well as right now from more than 150 countries. This is going to be among the most diverse and international places you have ever been. How diverse? Let me give you just one example.

In my spare time, usually on Sundays, I teach students how to drive a car. It is a very helpful skill in Syracuse, and many people are unprepared to drive here. We get snow here, you may have noticed. In the last couple of years, my driving students have come from New York, Puerto Rico, Uzbekistan, Portugal, China, Korea, and seven other countries, as well as from Greenland. Yes, we have students from Greenland here. How many of you have met a student from Greenland?

I mention this today because one of the wonderful things about Syracuse is how wonderful our students are, including because of where they came from, which is from all over. I am deeply proud and grateful that this University has wonderful students from Norway, where my grandparents emigrated from, as well as from Hawaii and South Dakota and Texas and Maine, and Germany, and China and Haiti and El Salvador and Iran and Nigeria, and every other state and country in the world that can, at its best, produce wonderful people. In my experience every state and country can and does produce wonderful people, and they come here to study and work.

Let me speak to all the new students who are on this campus for the first time: in a few moments, Dean Maurice Harris is going to ask you to rise

and to receive and accept the Syracuse Charge. The Syracuse Charge is a set of words that I will speak to you, and that you will in part repeat back to me. The words we speak are adapted from a charge first spoken on this campus 146 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 2018. Back then, we owned one building, the Hall of Languages. And it was heavily mortgaged. We had almost no money. The spot where you sit right now was a hayfield, as was almost everything within a half mile of us. And yet.

Those students in 1871 shared lot of things with you. They had come to a University that from its founding accepted everyone, that never excluded people because they were women or foreigners or of a different race or religion. They had come to a University that gave a chance to people, that believed in people even if they were not perfect, and even if they had much to learn. They came to a place where the weather made people tough and dependent on helping each other out in tough times, and celebrating together in good times. Those students in 1871 who first heard this charge discovered many of the same things that you will discover here.

They learned that education is not something bestowed on you, but something earned through hard work, and through discipline, as well as through unplanned and unexpected wonders that happen all over a great university, at unexpected times.

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

Those students in 1871 eventually left this University a better place, and they became better people. They were followed by 146 other cohorts of students and countless faculty and staff, each of whom contributed here, each of whom 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 all the dreams and ideals and all the inventions of the students and faculty who came before you.

So much of what happens here is beyond the imagination of any administrator; so much was invented and learned by students and faculty working here together. So many people contribute in so many ways outside their classes. I include in this the students who are orientation leaders, resident advisors, and peer advisors, and who help with all of the graduate programs. For many decades they have given their time to welcome the incoming class.

This atmosphere has inspired so many programs and departments and clubs and activities that were generated by the work of students together with faculty, including the Daily Orange (one of the nation's top ranked college papers), founded in 1903, to the Crouse Chimes, which were installed in 1889, above me in the tower – the bell tower which is heard across this campus and played by student Chimemasters for more than 125 years. There are so many things students drive here that you can drive here too.

So incoming 2018 students, when you hear and accept that charge – 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 something behind here, that you alone uniquely can contribute. We all want to help you do that. This is your university. We want you to make it your own.

You can do this, as so many have before you. Let me just give you one example. A number of years ago, a new transfer student sat in this auditorium. On this occasion. She had done several semesters in community college. She'd come here to major in economics, with a minor in math. In her second semester here, a professor of mathematics told her that the Air Force had opened pilot training for women for the first time and urged her to try. She applied, with help from that professor. She ultimately became the first female commander of the Space Shuttle; Eileen Collins, Syracuse Arts and Sciences Class of '78, math major, economics major, transfer student.

Now I want to speak to the hearty few parents and family members, who made it from wherever to be here today, and those of you from far away who may read or see this later. Three times now, I have dropped one of my own kids off at a university. Three times, I have sat where you now sit or watched where you've watched from. 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 residential hall and not about the food.

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.

Some of you may be feeling right now what I felt each time I left one of my kids at a university. It doesn't get easier the second time you do it. It doesn't get easier the third time you do it. My wife, my family, and I, had poured so much into each of our kids – 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 suddenly, there was my kid, in some auditorium with some people in robes lecturing me and I was supposed to feel successful. I was

supposed to feel that, wow, my student is embracing a great university like I'd long hoped and prayed. But the real thing I heard was it was time to go home. The real thing I had to do was the hardest thing of all. I knew my kid had to make his own way as an adult.

I hoped that the university would have good people – like Syracuse University does – among its faculty and staff and in the student body. People who would catch my kid and inspire him. Like the people here who inspired Eileen Collins.

I left my kid at a university, as you must now do. The happy news I can share with you is that I discovered there were still ways I could be there with them. I could visit on Parents' Weekend. I could Skype. I could send money. But I could still take joy, each day and in a different way, in my kids who were now truly adults.

Parents and family, thank you for all you have done and will do for these members of the 2018 entering class. Like all of Syracuse University, I am the beneficiary of all your great work, in developing these students. Because of your work, these students are the wonderful people we get to teach and work with, and they are our most sacred trust here.

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

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