

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud  
Delivered: March 20, 2020  
Location: Via video

A Message from Chancellor Kent Syverud

Greetings. This week, Syracuse University is 150 years old. We had planned to come together this week, to take pictures on Shaw Quadrangle, to share memories and fellowship with our community here in Syracuse and around the whole world. Instead, our global campuses are closed, our classrooms, our labs, our libraries, our dining halls, our athletic venues and our performance spaces are empty. Our health and safety are threatened by a global pandemic. We know we will prevail, but at this time we do not know how long the pandemic will last. It will surely be for weeks, if not for months.

In this time of uncertainty, of loss and of social isolation, I have separate messages for our current students, for our class of 2020, for our faculty and staff, and for our worldwide Orange community.

First, to all of our current students: your University is going to do the right thing by you—even if it takes some time and trouble to work out the details. For example, and most importantly, the faculty, staff and the Syracuse University community worldwide are going to do what it takes to enable you to complete your classes this semester. Your classes might not be conducted exactly in the way we once expected, but you will be able to complete them. Even though we are not learning face to face, we are and will remain in community. Your professors and instructors, your advisors and the staff that support you—whether on campus or virtually—are facing many of the same challenges that you are. I ask that you approach them with empathy, flexibility and understanding as we all adjust to a new teaching reality.

Second, to the class of 2020: I know that you in particular feel the loss of the end of your time at Syracuse University acutely. You may have left campus in the full expectation that you would make more memories with your friends here. You were looking forward to spring activities and Commencement weekend, to making your loved ones proud and to celebrating the culmination of all your hard work. I know that the current uncertainty around May’s Commencement ceremony is distressing. We still don’t know whether public health dictates will require us to postpone or change the details of Commencement. I ask that you bear with us as we find the best path forward. I promise you that you will have a Commencement. You have earned it. We will ensure that it is special.

Third, to our faculty and staff: I recognize that you are disproportionately bearing the burden of our necessary decisions in light of this unprecedented global health emergency. We have asked you to do more and to pivot quickly. I am aware. I believe that you are the heart and soul of Syracuse University and that, as much as you care about our students, you are also balancing the demands of work and family in a time of extraordinary disruption. I have seen your great creativity and resourcefulness in these circumstances. You are quite simply the best. My request to you is that as you face new challenges in the weeks ahead you reach out to colleagues, to Human Resources, to leadership or directly to me with questions, concerns, ideas or suggestions.

­­­­­Finally, to the worldwide Syracuse University community: In the last 150 years, your University has overcome incredible challenges. With grit and with grace we have faced and overcome depressions, disasters, terrorism, pandemics, wars and hatred. At our best, we faced these challenges together. We did so not by turning our backs on each other and those in need, but by finding new ways for human beings to support and to care about each other. We did this no matter what divided us at the time and no matter what challenges we faced. Once again in 2020, I believe we will get through challenging times together as we have so many times in the past. If we do this right, we will have a 150th year that makes us truly proud of who we are and of what Orange stands for.

I pray that each of you and our Syracuse University community will rise once more to a great challenge. I pray that each of you and your loved ones remain safe and healthy. I leave you with this blessing from the Hendricks Chapel choir; this blessing which has been sung at the end of every service for decades. This blessing was composed by Peter Lutkin, who received an honorary doctorate from Syracuse University in 1900. It reminds us of the strength and hope that buttresses our University and that will help us be Forever Orange.

####