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Chancellor's Remarks at the 2016 Spring Convocation for New Students

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SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on January 16, 2016

Location: Setnor Auditorium

Remarks: Chancellor's Remarks at the 2016 Spring Convocation for New Students

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

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

After my welcome, you will hear from Ralph Zito, Professor and Chair, Department of Drama in the College of Visual and Performing Arts. Professor Zito is one the heroes of this University. A great teacher, artist, and leader trained at Harvard and Julliard.

There are two very different audiences here at this convocation. In front of me, in the center section of the auditorium, you 177 freshman and transfer students are about to begin your university careers at Syracuse. And next to 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 2016: 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 145 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 2016.

Yet, those students in 1871 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.

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 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 144 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 orientation leaders, resident advisors, and peer advisors, who for many decades have given their time to welcome the incoming class.

This includes the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, the oldest continually operating ROTC on any US 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. This includes many new student organizations created in just the last year.

So incoming 2016 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 behind something here, that you alone uniquely contribute. We all want to help you do that. This is your university. Make it your own.

One example. A number of years ago, a new transfer student sat in this auditorium. She had done several semesters in community college and came here to major in economics, minored in math. In her second semester here, encouraged by a professor, she learned that the air force had opened pilot training for women for the first time. She joined ROTC and applied. She ultimately became the first female commander of the Space Shuttle; Eileen Collins, Syracuse Arts and Sciences Class of '78, math major. I met with her three days ago. She has two kids, one starting college and one preparing in high school. And she says parenting is in some ways more challenging than commanding a space shuttle.

Which brings me to the parents and families of the incoming class of 2015: To you folks on the sides of the auditorium! 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.

Some of you may be feeling right now are feeling what I felt each time I left a kid at university. It doesn't get easier the second time you do it. It doesn't get easier the second time you do it. My wife, 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 suddenly, one day, I was looking over at my kid, and all the effort was worthwhile – we were successful, our kid was ready to embrace a great university, or so we hoped and prayed.

My wife and I did a hard thing that day. We went home. I knew my kid had to make his own way. 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 my kid. Like the people who caught and inspired Eileen Collins.

I went home, as you now must do. The happy news I can share with you is that, after a few weeks or months, my kids started calling me often, and I could still be there for them. I could visit on Parents' Weekend. I could help do laundry. I could 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 2016 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 our most sacred trust.

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

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