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8-23-2018

### New Student Convocation

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*Syracuse University*

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#### Recommended Citation

Syverud, Kent, "New Student Convocation" (2018). *Chancellor's Office (2004 - 2013)*. 189.  
<https://surface.syr.edu/chancellor/189>

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# Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on August 23, 2018

Location: Dome

Remarks: New Student Convocation

*The Chancellor was introduced by Student Association President,  
Ghufran Salih.*

Good evening. On behalf of my colleagues on the faculty and staff, and on behalf of more than a quarter of a million Orange alumni, I welcome you to Syracuse University.

I will be followed in this welcome by Professor Jeffrey Mangram of the Syracuse University School of Education.

Professor Mangram is a decorated teacher and scholar who is an expert on helping students succeed. He has worked hard to lead the efforts of many at Syracuse to help you become Orange. In acknowledging Professor Mangram, I would also like to acknowledge and thank the many faculty, staff and students who will this fall be facilitating the shared readings of Trevor Noah's book, Born a Crime, - we have over 400 students, faculty and staff who have stepped up to this challenge and have been preparing all summer. I would ask the faculty, staff and students who have been involved in this great effort, please either stand or wave or shout out to call attention to yourself now? I thank all of you.

Incoming 2018 students: you have come here to become part of a great, engaged, thriving, diverse international research university. Syracuse is a lively and sprawling and dynamic and idiosyncratic place. It has a glorious and a complex history. A history in the sciences, in the arts and humanities, in the professions.

In sports, in public affairs, in communications and architecture and education and engineering and law, in management and information and veterans and in serving humanity.

I welcome all of you, more than 5,000 new students, to Syracuse - first year students and transfers, master's students, professional students, and doctoral students.

You come from all over this nation and the world. From every state, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands, the District of Columbia, and more than 70 nations on six continents, as well as more than a dozen Native American nations. Every single one of you equally belongs here. As far as all of us are concerned, you are all now forever Orange.

You are going to hear a lot of speeches this week and this semester. Good people are going to directly tell you what you should be doing. I want to speak to you about other forms of communication. Let me explain.

My first office job was in Washington DC in 1975. My boss was a master at communication that not only included words, but deeds. He was originally from China, and he somehow always paid attention to everyone in the place, even the youngest intern. He spoke to us even when he seemed to be addressing someone else. For example, whenever he took a new employee around the office, my boss stopped to introduce every single person in the building. He carefully explained by name exactly why each employee was wonderful and was essential to the place. My boss appeared to be talking to the new employee.

But both his words and actions told each person, whether they be the janitor or the chief of staff, that they mattered and the boss knew exactly why.

Entering students of 2018, more than ever before, you need to become masters of these broader forms of communication.

That is because in this wonderful and kaleidoscopic university and this world, there are always multiple audiences present every time you communicate.

In 2018, every time you speak, every time you use social media, every time you write, there will be all kinds of witnesses, not just the person you directly address.

And that means every single time is an opportunity to show who you are, what you value, and what you mean - not just through your words but by how you relate to others including your friends and family, community and the world.

I can quickly demonstrate this right now. Incoming 2018 students: There are at least three different audiences present right now. They are first you, the new students at Syracuse University; second they are the faculty, staff, and the upper level student leaders of the University who are interspersed all around you; and third, your parents, families and loved ones who are either seated in the very hot upper deck or who will watch this ceremony through the internet. I am now going to speak directly, first to all the veteran Orange people, faculty, staff, returning student leaders-people who already know this University. Then I will speak to your families and loved ones. As I speak to those two groups, I want you new students to listen not for what I am directly saying to them, but for what I am communicating to you.

So first to my colleagues, to the Faculty, Staff, and returning student leaders: I wear a tie whenever I am with students. Communications experts and consultants have in the last year urged me to lose the tie.

They want me to look more approachable and in tune with what they call “the iGeneration”. They tell me people will be less afraid to talk to me if I look more like them.

Why do I wear a tie? I will tell you, my colleagues on the faculty and staff and student leaders.

I do not wear a tie so I can look like a nerd who longs for the 1950s. Ties are uncomfortable and they constantly get dirty. I wear a tie because when I first started teaching I had a professor colleague who wore blue jeans and made clear in every way that he was just like his students and he was their friend. And then one day, a student came to my office in tears.

The student had told my professor colleague, during the student's first semester of school, that he too hoped to be a professor someday. And my colleague in blue jeans said to that student, who was the first in his family to go to college, he said to that student that as a friend he needed to understand that professors had to be intellectuals and this student just was not "intellectual material."

That day, in the presence of that student in tears, I made two resolutions. First, I resolved I was going to help that student become a professor with every ounce of my being or I was going to die trying. And second, I resolved I was always going to wear an uncomfortable tie when I was on duty with students. The tie would be my daily personal reminder that I have moral responsibilities to my students beyond friendship - that I have a responsibility to always believe in my students, to always believe in my students even when they may not believe in themselves.

By the way, to my colleagues here today who are teachers and student leaders -- about that student who was not "intellectual material" -- today he holds an endowed chair as a full professor at a great private university - a great private university that Syracuse is going to beat in basketball this season.

Now, I wan to turn to address parents, family, and loved ones in the upper deck and those watching on T.V.: Congratulations on getting to this day. Boy do I remember what this day feels like as a parent. My wife, who is an engineering professor here, and I have many times dropped one of our kids off at college.

Parents and loved ones, I had mixed feelings each time I delivered a kid to college. I was happy that my kid was starting at a great University. I was proud. I was checking out the residence hall and the roommate and the food and the course schedule. I was smiling on the outside listening to a lot of speeches and advice.

But inside, I had a knot deep in my stomach. I wondered how I was going to adjust to having a piece of my soul, my kid, walking around a campus far away, beyond my ability to control or influence. My wife, and my mother-in-law, my family and I had poured so much into each one of our children - so much time and love and energy and worry and inspiration. It was a labor of love, but it sure was labor, and we got very used to it. It defined the best part of our lives.

And then suddenly there I was in a vast auditorium, and some president in a robe was telling me it was time to go home. I hated that president. He did not know my kid.

He did not have a clue how much love and work and joy our whole family had poured into that kid to make attendance at a University possible. That president had not seen all the times that kid had triumphed, let alone the many times that kid had struggled, had been sick, had been in trouble, or had been just plain infuriating.

That president did not seem to understand that our family was not just dropping off our kid in some abrupt divorce. Instead, we were embracing a transition while our uniquely constituted family remained intact, including with our kid in college.

Well. Parents, family, loved ones: Relax. Cross off that worry. At Syracuse University we do know those things. We know how much you have poured into these entering students.

We know that you want to continue to be there for your kid who is now an adult. We know that you want to be there in different ways that match the tremendous achievement of starting off one of your own at a great university. We know that because so many of us have been right there ourselves as parents and family members.

Ok, now turning to you, the incoming students of 2018. What was I trying to convey to you while I was speaking to the faculty, to the staff, and to the returning students? And, what broader communication was I conveying to you when I was speaking to your loved ones?

Maybe what you heard when I was speaking to the faculty and staff and returning students was this: They should wear a tie too. They should not wear jeans. They should try all to look like the current Chancellor at Syracuse University.

Wrong! People at Syracuse University are from all over the world. Each of us dresses and looks and communicates differently. Each of us has our own stories and reasons for how we present ourselves. I don't want people to look like me. I was - through the story about my student -- trying to suggest that you don't know me just because of how I look -- you don't know my story - or even why I wear a tie. Maybe, just maybe, everyone you meet here, including those who look or speak or learn differently than you, has their own story. No matter how they look, they probably are here because they care about you. Please start out with that assumption. You will be amazed how often that is true.

Now, new entering students, what message did you get when I was talking to your parents and loved ones? Maybe you heard me saying that your family will now stop worrying about you now that you are with us in college at Syracuse. Fat chance. Trust me, they will all still worry.

What I was trying to convey to you when I was speaking to your families was this: They sacrificed so much to get you here. That sacrifice is worth something. And it is worth taking seriously, this opportunity you have at a great university. It is worth, I say as a parent, a phone call or text message regularly to tell them how you are doing.

Please remember at Syracuse that when you speak, when you write and communicate, all audiences matter and all in our Orange community have much to contribute. Remember that actions can speak loudly, even if indirectly, and can be a force to lift all of us up.

To all audiences who are here today, to all of us who are now Orange, I say this:

Today we will hear these incoming students recite the charge that Chancellor Erastus Haven gave to our University almost 150 years ago.

It is a charge that helps define what it means to be Orange, today as much as in 1871. As you participate in that charge, as that charge is accepted today, I want you to know that this University now belongs to these incoming students as much as to anyone else who is Orange. These students will ask things here, build things here, prove things here, leave things behind here, -- that are unique and enduring. To help this happen is our greatest responsibility. Welcome to Syracuse. And Go Orange.

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