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Winter New Student Convocation

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Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud
Delivered on January 12, 2019
Location: Setnor Auditorium
Remarks: Winter New Student Convocation

*The Chancellor was introduced by Kyle Rosenblum, Vice President,
Student Association*

Thank you, Kyle. 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 Sandra Hewett, a professor at our College of Arts and Sciences. Professor Hewett was recruited to Syracuse University to enhance and build interdisciplinary neuroscience programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. She is at the forefront of research about how the brain functions after injury. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses. She also mentors post-doctoral fellows, graduate students and undergraduates in her laboratory, many of whom have gone on to their own illustrious careers in science and medicine.

You will also hear from Student Association President Ghufan Salih. Ghufan is an information management and technology major in the iSchool, with dual minors in physics and English and textual studies.

There are different audiences at this convocation. Some of you are parents and families of our new students. Some of you are our 40 new first-year students, or our 90 incoming transfer students. Our new undergraduates originate from 19 states and 10 countries.

Today, we also greet 37 discovery students who are returning from spending their first semester abroad in our extensive programs throughout the world. You are not new to our University, but you are new to our campus in Syracuse.

Our campus today also welcomes 18 exchange students from many countries, here to spend a semester as our guests. We also welcome 191 new graduate students, in an array of graduate and professional programs today. You are from 18 states and territories and 21 countries. Finally, we welcome Fulbright Scholars today, who hail from nine countries and who will be studying and working in the School of Education this semester.

People from every state study and work on this campus, as well as right now from Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands, many Native American nations, and 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've had 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. Our students are 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 we want them to come here to study and work.

Let me speak to all you new students who are on this campus for the first time. 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 148 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 2019. Back then, we owned one building, the Hall of Languages, which was under construction. And it was already 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.

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 148 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 atmosphere has inspired so many programs and departments and clubs and activities here, 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 2019 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.

You can do this, as so many have before you. Let me give you a few examples. First, years ago, a new transfer student came to Syracuse University. After studying at a small college in nearby Oneonta, NY, he transferred to Syracuse University intending to study English. However, he instead took courses about football strategy given by the assistant coaches. He was a fixture at the top of Hendricks Hill overlooking Archbold Stadium every Saturday. He tracked each play the Orange ran. He went into sports as a living. He went on to hire the first African American head coach, the first Latino head coach, and the first female executive in the NFL. His teams won three Super Bowls and he was inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame in 1992. Oakland Raiders Owner Al Davis was a transfer student.

A second example: In 1967, a new transfer from Lynchburg College came here to major in journalism and English literature. The same year, she trained

and completed the Boston Marathon — the first woman to complete the Boston marathon, and at a time women were forbidden in that marathon and regarded as incapable of being long distance runners. She later won the 1974 New York City Marathon. Kathrine Switzer, transfer student, earned her bachelor's in 1968 and her master's in 1972 from Syracuse University. She was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 2011 for creating a social revolution by empowering women around the world through running.

Another student transferred from the University of Rochester in 1937. She published her first story, "Janice" in the Syracuse University literary magazine. She went on to become one of the most brilliant and influential authors of the twentieth century. She is widely acclaimed for her stories and novels of the supernatural. Her short story, *The Lottery*, generated the largest volume of mail ever received by *The New Yorker*, and remains required reading in high schools. *The Haunting of Hill House* has been adapted for feature films twice. Shirley Jackson, transfer student, graduated in 1940.

There are so many other Syracuse transfer stories. Eileen Collins, Marty Whitman. They all made this place their own. You can too.

Now, to the parents and families of the incoming class of 2019: 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 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. I can tell you

one of my sons was a transfer student. My wife, my family, and I, had poured so much into each of our children — so much time, love, energy, 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 him. Like the people here who inspired Al Davis, Kathrine Switzer, Shirley Jackson, Eileen Collins, and Marty Whitman.

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 2019 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. Welcome to Syracuse.

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