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2019 Commencement Address

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Recommended Citation

Syverud, Kent, "2019 Commencement Address" (2019). *Chancellor's Office (2004 - 2013)*. 211.
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Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on May 12, 2019

Location: The Dome, Syracuse University campus

Remarks: 2019 Commencement Address

*The Chancellor was introduced by Vice Chancellor and Provost
Michele Wheatly*

Welcome. Welcome graduates, faculty, staff, alumni, family, friends, and trustees to the 2019 Syracuse University Commencement.

These remarks are brief. After I speak, you will hear from my friend David Amberg, the President of the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

Let's start this glorious day with grace and with thanksgiving

This is a day of transition for so many of you today. It also marks three milestone transitions for our University. First, after four years of dedicated service, the chair of our board of trustees, Steven Barnes, has this weekend handed the leadership of our university board on to Kathleen Waters. I thank Steve for all his work and Kathy for stepping up when her University called. Steve and Kathy, please rise so we can thank you.

Second, today, after 32 years of service to our iSchool and University as a researcher, entrepreneur, teacher, dean, and Provost, Liz Liddy completes her service. She has truly achieved her calling to build and sustain what I think is the most wonderful iSchool in the world. Liz, please rise so we can thank you.

Third, today is the first commencement in more than a decade when Syracuse University and the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications have

been without our leader, Dean Lorraine Branham. Dean Branham passed away last month after a brave battle with cancer. Dean Branham was the soul and shepherd of the Newhouse School. She did so much for so many who are here today. Dean Branham's husband, Mel Williams, is here today to bear witness to Lorraine's deep love for the school and the people she served. Would Mel Williams please stand and be recognized.

Each of you graduates got here today because someone believed in you. Sometimes, someone believed in you more than you believed in yourself. Some of the people who believe in you and support you are on the faculty or staff, and they are sitting here on either side of me or working around this Dome or outside it. Some of the people who believe in you—your friends, your family, your classmates—are beside you or in the stands behind you, where once again they have your back.

Some of the people who believe in you are now separated from you by time or by distance, or they are only here in spirit or only by watching this ceremony through a live stream around the world.

I thank every single person, no matter where they are, whose belief in you made it possible for you to be here today. Graduates, no matter where they are, I believe those people who believe in you are happy, and they are proud.

And they should be happy and proud. Graduates and families: if ever there were a day to feel joy and pride, it should be today, as these wonderful human beings graduate from Syracuse University. Faculty, staff, alumni, trustees: if ever there were a day to feel joy and pride, it should be today, as your University officially begins its 150th anniversary year by bestowing 7,309 degrees in 39 academic disciplines on graduates from all over the United States and from 136 native American and foreign nations.

It is a day for pride. And yet. Graduates, we are in era when, if we are not proud in the right way, we risk becoming arrogant. We are in a time when

many people and institutions sometimes ignorantly proclaim that they are the best.

An era when exaggeration seems rewarded. An era when getting the facts right can seem rare. We are in a period where humility seems out of style. Sometimes today, it even seems a weakness to confess you don't know something and have more to learn.

I hope today that you and your university are proud in the right way, and humble in the right way. The way that Syracuse University at its best and all who are truly Orange have been proud for 150 years.

When Syracuse University started in 1870, it was not a perfect institution, and it was populated by imperfect people, in some ways like all of us. Back then, we had so much to learn and to do to become the University we are today. But even back then, at the very beginning, Syracuse University, more than any college I know, was open to the world. We admitted anyone who genuinely sought an education, and at our best we were willing to learn from anyone, from people and ideas that came from anywhere. This was our proud effort to become among the best universities in the world.

So for example: Many colleges in this country today are proud, as we are, to have students from all over the world. But at Syracuse we graduated our first international student in 1872, less than a year after our founding. For reference, Syracuse University did not even get its first chancellor until 1873, a year later. Syracuse University students started studying abroad for credit in 1874, when Mary Carey Davis pioneered that innovation and went on to a great career—in India.

From the very beginning, Syracuse University and Syracuse University students have been humble enough and smart enough to know that we have something to learn from people everywhere. We should be proud that we have always gotten better by being open to the world.

Like my colleagues here today, I have learned so much from many of you who graduate today. I have learned a lot from some of you who are covered with honors and glory.

I have learned from Santita Ebangwese, of Rochester, New York, who is a University Scholar in bioengineering and a future physician. From you, Santita, I have learned what inspires the depths of a parent's love as I have observed your father careen from his job in Rochester to make it to every one of your volleyball games, in any weather and any location, and quietly and not so quietly pull for you from the stands.

I have learned from Ruby Batbataar, who is a Class Marshall and graduates today in mechanical engineering. Ruby is Syracuse University's one student from Mongolia. Ruby is a brilliant entrepreneur who invented a remarkable device that helps people with mobility challenges stand up from a seated position. From you, Ruby, I learned that great ideas come from people all over the world, including Mongolia, and that Syracuse University is at its best when it helps people rise.

I have learned from Hendrik Hilpert, of Eiterfeld, Germany, a 2019 graduate in finance from the Martin J. Whitman School of Management, Class Marshall, University Scholar, goalie and captain of the men's soccer team. From you, Hendrik, I learned that a key element of leadership is not just an extraordinary drive for your team to get better, but also taking and showing great joy in the achievements of others you care about and you work with.

I have indeed learned so much from our students who are recognized as University Scholars and Marshals today. I have also learned from a student proudly pursuing a degree while also working nearly full-time for University Catering. I have learned from Marcus John, who graduates today in computer sciences. Marcus is from Blue Gap west of Chinle, Arizona on the Navajo Nation. He is Dine. I have watched Marcus progress through college these past four years in the toughest subjects. At the same time, he is one of those

students in the black shirts who have been serving you and me and all of us at many events. Marcus is beloved in catering by all he works with for good reason, for he is among the most mature and responsible students I have known. I only learned recently that he has been working so hard because he has been helping to support his siblings while he is learning computer science. He is returning to Arizona to work nearer his family when he graduates. I am so glad his grandparents are here today, the first of his family members to see Syracuse.

Marcus, from you I was reminded what truly great students we have at this University—and I learned in humility that every single one of the graduates earning 7,309 degrees today, and every single one of the hundreds of thousands of Syracuse University students, alumni, and friends—every single one has something to teach me if I just open my ears and listen. Marcus, I am proud of you today and I'm grateful that you are part of Syracuse University.

2019 Graduates: The very best people, the very best institutions I know, are the ones that know we always have more to learn. Knowledge crowns those who continue to seek her. Every single human being, whatever we look like and wherever we come from, has so much to teach if only we will listen. I am so proud that Syracuse University at its best has learned from everyone and has learned from you. I am so proud to be Orange today, and I hope and pray you will always be Orange too.

Thank you so much.

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