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8-26-2021

### New Student Convocation

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#### Recommended Citation

Syverud, Kent, "New Student Convocation" (2021). *Chancellor's Office (2004 - 2013)*. 238.  
<https://surface.syr.edu/chancellor/238>

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# Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on August 26, 2021

Location: Carrier Dome

Remarks: New Student Convocation

Welcome Everyone!

After my very brief remarks, you are going to be welcomed by our Faculty in the person of Yingyi Ma, Professor of Sociology and Director of Asian and Asian-American Studies at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. Professor Ma is an exceptional teacher and scholar. Her work focuses on education and migration in the United States and China. So, I thank her for speaking to you today.

This ceremony began with Tadadaho Sidney Hill's Thanksgiving address and Dean Brian Konkol's invocation. In different ways, they each reminded me to start each day expressing gratitude for the big and little things I used to take for granted before the pandemic. I want to model that by saying grace for two things. First, as I stand here in this 30 pound academic robe on a sweltering day in Central New York, I give thanks for all the many people at Syracuse University who ensured that this would be the first convocation in our history that is air conditioned.

Second, I give thanks for John Liu, our interim Provost this past 18 months. John ably led all the academic programs of this university throughout the pandemic. He concludes his service next month. Please join me in thanking John Liu for his leadership.

I'll have a few words for you in the lower decks in one moment, but my main message is to your families and loved ones, some of whom are sitting in the upper decks today and many of whom are watching from around the world online.

Parents, families, loved ones of the students starting here today: Congratulations on getting to this amazing day. Boy, do I remember what this day feels like as a parent.

My wife is an engineering professor here, and we have many times dropped one of our kids off at college.

We had mixed feelings each time.

I was happy that my kid was starting at a great university. I was proud. I was checking out the residence hall. I was meeting the roommate. I was checking out 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 even influence. My wife, my mother-in-law and 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 here 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 great University possible. That president, indeed, had not seen all the times that my kid had triumphed, let alone all 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 a kid in some abrupt departure. Instead, we were doing our best to embrace a transition while our uniquely constituted family remained very much intact, including with our kid in college.

Well. Parents, family, loved ones: Please don't think that we at Syracuse are clueless in this way. We do know these things. We know how much you have poured into these entering students, who are now adults. We know you want to continue to be there for them in different ways - ways that match the need for these adults to start off on their own in a great university. We know the treasure you have entrusted to us, and so many of us take that responsibility very seriously.

I also want to say to the incoming students of 2021, and to the second year students:

At the end of all these speeches, you are going to receive the “Charge”. The charge is words that go all the back to the founding of the university 150 years ago. They are a concise description of what college is that is as accurate today as it was when Erastus Haven, our second chancellor wrote them. What you will do is promise to embrace a great university - you promise to learn, to teach, to make lifelong friends, to grow.

New students, this year, those words are particularly poignant. For the last 18 months, you have been told over and over again, what NOT to do. You have lost so much. Loved ones and activities. You have been told not to sing, not to act, not to play sports, not get within six feet of each other, and not to gather in groups of more than five people. You have been told that being in a classroom is a risk and that dating is even riskier.

So many of the things - the activities and traditions - that define life on this campus are the very things you have lost until now.

So, as you are reciting your charge, all of us, on this stage and online and in the upper decks - we are wondering whether you are going to be able to seize this day and return to the exuberant, hopeful, exciting full range of life that defines being Orange.

Are you going to seize this day, or are you going to curl up in the fetal position in your room on zoom for another semester? We are all hoping, as much as you are able, you will seize the day.

And you have a way today to show us. Are you going to be a fearful, isolated wallflower entering class, or are you going to shoot the lights out here? Here is how to give us an early indication. At the end of this ceremony, Micayla MacDougall of the Class of 22 is going to lead us - with this wonderful band - in the singing of the alma mater. The words are going to be plastered on the largest jumbotron on any campus in the world, and on the other boards. For more than 100 years, Syracuse students have stood, if they are able, when the alma mater is played, they put their arms around the shoulders of the students on both sides of them, even if they are strangers, and swayed. Like this. And even if they had lousy voices, they did not stand there mute. They belted out those words, particularly the word Orange.

For so long, we have not been allowed to sing or sway. How about it - are you part of this place, are you ready for all of college life, or you afraid to embrace it? Please show us who you are during the singing of the alma mater.

Many thanks, welcome to Syracuse, and GO ORANGE!

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