



**Convocation
August 28, 2009
Gampel Pavilion**

**Peter J. Nicholls, Ph.D.
Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs**

You are arriving at the University of Connecticut at an exciting time. This is a University on the move. Under the leadership of a dynamic President and a world-class group of Deans, we have an academic plan in place that has set an exciting agenda for the University. I can assure you that we have a common determination to move the University of Connecticut into the ranks of the finest research universities in the country.

Opportunities and challenges come with change. As many great philosophers and writers have noted, change is such an intrinsic part of the human condition that, paradoxically, it is our only constant. But that doesn't mean that every change is the same. Some, like yours from high school to college, and from home to residence hall, are truly momentous, indicating a major transition to adulthood and greater responsibilities. As your parents, family, and friends leave campus in the next few hours, you will take charge of your own life. Your decisions will determine if your years at UConn will be a series of problems, a chain of wasted hours, or a continuum of great opportunities seized, upon which you will build a happy and fulfilling future.

I'd like to focus for a moment on one great opportunity that UConn offers, our new and innovative curriculum for general education. For many of your parents, general education is synonymous with the old distribution requirements in which you take a course or two from a number of categories and somehow magically achieve a general education while you feel like all you have done is checked off the necessary boxes or jumped through the required hoops.

But general education at UConn is not like that because we do not believe that education is just passing tests or memorizing information. Instead, at the University of Connecticut, we stress that learning is for life. So our general education curriculum provides opportunities and challenges, just as life does and will. Our general education curriculum encompasses the traditional areas like the arts and humanities, social sciences, and sciences, but also includes diversity and global

awareness. It stresses the skills that you will need for life, and to continue learning throughout your life, competencies such as writing, quantitative reasoning, a second language, computer technology, and information literacy.

We have wonderful support for you as you meet the challenges of general education and move into your majors: dedicated advisors, committed faculty, tutoring services, enrichment opportunities such as study abroad and undergraduate research, and much, much more. But it's up to you to take advantage of them. That's the difference between the child that you were and the adult that you are now. Children are led; adults seek their own paths and seize opportunities when they find them.

Most importantly, general education, and all education at the University of Connecticut, should introduce you to the unexpected. That may be the greatest lesson we have to teach as part of learning for life. We want you to explore subjects you have never heard of, discover ideas that you never imagined, and follow your own imaginings and passions. You must remember, in the words of the great American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, that "*Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.*" We will help you channel and develop that enthusiasm, but in the vast array of opportunities that UConn offers, you must be open to discovering what makes you enthusiastic about learning and what you need to learn for life.

Parents, family, and friends, you have done a good job or your students would not be here today. So while we will do everything in our power to assist them, you must be confident that when you leave you are leaving them in good hands, the best hands: their own hands. Students, you are poised right now between past and future. Honor your past and the people who helped you to get here by making wise decisions, learning for life, and building great futures. Give yourselves a wonderful four years at UConn filled with learning, friends, fun, and the satisfactions of opportunities taken and challenges met.

Welcome and good luck!