



**Convocation
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Gampel Pavilion**

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Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor**

Good afternoon Students, Parents and Fellow Faculty members. Welcome to the University of Connecticut. Today, we celebrate the arrival at the Storrs campus of 3255 new freshmen and 790 transfer students. Congratulations! Yours is the most diverse class ever to enter the University of Connecticut. Twenty-one percent of you are people of color, thirty percent from out of state and many of you are from low-income households. This is excellent news as it makes for a vibrant, stimulating environment in which to learn. The world is changing. Learning to work alongside people who are not just like you is one of THE most important 21st century skills you will need to succeed. I can't tell you how excited I am for you. Today I hope to provide you with a few pearls to enhance your journey.

Pearl number 1. Breathe. I want you all to take a deep breath in and let it out slowly. RELAX. After years of preparation, stressful admissions process and a summer of anticipation, you have ARRIVED at the University of Connecticut, a truly amazing place enriched with extraordinary minds, gifted teachers and passionate individuals.

Remember to breathe when you are anxious, nervous, stressed, angry, depressed, homesick. I want you to remind yourself to do this several times a day for the next four years and for the rest of your life. It really does help.

Pearl number 2. Get to know the faculty. College graduates often report that getting to know a faculty member personally was one of the most important components of their college experience. Your professors are here because of their own passion for learning and their desire to share their knowledge with you. Although many of your classes will be large, there are many opportunities to get to know your professors, and I very much encourage you to do so. You can make an appointment or visit during office hours to talk about the course or their research. You can ask career advice or talk about a topic you are interested in. Ask them about their career path, how they chose their area and why they are passionate about their jobs. If you are nervous about having this important conversation...go back to pearl number 1. Take a deep breath, calm yourself down and remember that professors LOVE, LOVE, LOVE to talk.

Pearl number 3. Take advantage of your fellow students. I already mentioned that you have a wonderfully diverse class in terms of ethnic backgrounds, economically and from point of origin. In addition, you will find an amazing diversity of interests, experiences and political viewpoints in your fellow students here at UCONN. Remember that much of what you will learn here will happen outside of the classroom. Take advantage of the opportunity to talk with people who have radically different views from your own. Keep an open mind and an open heart. Don't let fear of the unfamiliar close your hearts or minds. Don't be afraid to strike up a conversation at the union, cafeteria, gym. You may be talking to your next best friend, someone who will help you get a job in the future or you may just have a stimulating discussion about current events. One trick to meeting fellow students when you are in your dorm, is to keep your room door open. If you find your self-getting angry during discussions with fellow students who have different opinions, go back to pearl number 1 - BREATHE and agree to disagree for now.

Pearl number 4. Experiment and take intellectual risks. You may have already decided your major and charted out your career path. Or you may have no clue and are waiting for inspiration to hit you over the head. In either case, but perhaps especially for those who have already written your script for the future, I encourage you to challenge yourself with courses in disciplines that are new to you. You may or may not excel in these new areas but don't let fear of the unknown discourage you. These challenging experiences could open new doors to new majors or new careers that you never knew existed.

If you are timid in setting your goals, you may succeed in keeping your grade point average intact, but may miss out in discovering an unexpected life passion. By experimenting with new areas, you may just find that your prewritten script for yourself and your career path needs to change because you realized a new excitement for a career as a robot mechanic, Hollywood holographer or underwater ocean explorer. And if you are nervous about trying something new, have courage and remember pearl number 1. Take a deep breath.

Pearl number 5. Adversity could be good for you. When things aren't going well remember what William Shakespeare said about adversity: *"Sweet are the uses of adversity, Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, Wears yet a precious jewel in his head"*. I think what he meant by that was that there CAN be good in everything that happens to you. More than that, sometimes jewels come in ugly packages. In other words, there are some things we can never discover about life unless we are willing to grapple with adversity; there is no other way.

A few years ago a cartoon appeared in *The New Yorker* of a college girl sitting in a window seat in her dorm room writing to her parents. She writes, *"Dear Mom and Dad: Thanks for the happy childhood. You've destroyed any chance I had of becoming a writer."* The trick here is to use adversity to your benefit. Use your dark and hopeless moments to develop sympathy, compassion, empathy for others, courage and patience. These qualities make you a much better person. Also, of course, it will help to remember to breathe!!!

Pearl number 6. Find and follow your passion. Probably the most important thing I am going to tell you. You may have decided to be a doctor, lawyer, banker, nurse or engineer. Your parents may have decided that you should be a doctor, lawyer, banker, nurse or engineer. But your passion may be to take photographs or play video games. Although you truly love those activities, neither you nor your parents believe those skills lend themselves to meaningful work. But I encourage you to think outside the box on this one. I'll tell a couple of quick stories to make the point.

Story # 1. My son, William, is 20 years old and a junior in college. When Will was high school, I was very pessimistic about this boy's ever getting inspired or motivated by his classes and wondered if he would even get into college. Then a miracle occurred. As a junior in high school he took a photography course. For the first time this kid was turned on, plugged in and happy at school. Now he is a cinematography major, taking amazing photographs and is well on his way to the career that feeds his passion and his soul.

Story #2. At a recent annual meeting of the Connecticut Academy of Science of Engineering, Dr. Robert Ballard, underwater sea explorer spoke to a mixed group of scientists and a high school students who were being honored for their science fair projects. He surprised the audience by telling us that if he were to hire anyone in the room for underwater ocean exploration work it would be the younger group in the audience who had experience with video games and could manipulate the robotic arms in the submersible laboratories.

I believe that each and every one of you has a talent - something that you can do better than anyone else. How perfect for you to merge that talent with your life's work so that you can be happy and fulfilled in what you do for a living. You are preparing yourself for a world of job opportunities that is changing faster than ever and you can take advantage of this by being creative and FOLLOWING your passions.

Pearl number 7. Wash your hands and cover your mouth when you cough and then wash your hands again. Do I sound like your mother? Well I am a mother. I am also a virologist and I am concerned about the possibility that your freshman year could be disrupted to some extent by the swine flu virus. Let's work together to minimize the risks by following some simple guidelines. If you have flu-like symptoms - fever, chills, cough, sore throat, headaches, body aches, diarrhea or vomiting - telephone Student Health Services any time of the day or night. They are open 24/7. If it sounds like flu to them you will be asked to stay away from others and stay in isolation for 7 days or 24 hours after symptoms resolve. I know this seems extreme, but these simple procedures of frequent hand washing, using respiratory etiquette, and isolation for those with symptoms, will go along way to minimize the problems on this campus.

I could also ask you to STAY healthy by getting plenty of sleep, exercise, nutrition, no smoking, drinking - but enough already! You know what to do.

As you begin your time at UCONN and plan your four years here, I would urge you to remember that your undergraduate education is much more than a ticket to your first job. It is a once-in-a-lifetime journey. It is an opportunity to develop the skills and passion for being a lifelong learner in areas related to and outside of your future career. It is the foundation for your whole life.

To the parents in the audience, I assure you that UCONN will provide your children a variety of possibilities for growing and learning during the next few years. But it is your children, as individuals, who will choose what excites them, what generates intellectual passion, and what engages their very able minds. I encourage you to support their choices.

During the next four years, we will do our best to create opportunities for them to learn and discover, but it will be each individual's task to embrace opportunities and to pursue them with determination and energy.

Now everyone - take a deep breath in - and go have a fabulous year!!!!!!