

REMARKS
HONORS CONVOCATION
President Joe Bertolino
April 29, 2018

Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome.

Honors Convocation is one of my favorite events of the academic year.

It's the special occasion when we celebrate Southern's best and brightest.

This is a chance for me, as president, to focus on what is best about Southern -- YOU -- the undergraduates who have performed with distinction in scholarship, leadership, and service to the university.

You are testimony to the fact that Southern provides a superb education for those who have the desire and the incentive to take advantage of it.

In my judgment, a "superb education" goes beyond book learning.

Yes, academic excellence is the soul of this university.

As an institution of higher education, we are here to help students learn,

and to develop the critical thinking skills that are so necessary in today's knowledge-based economy.

But we also want our students to evolve into individuals of character, who understand the importance of social justice and giving back to their community.

Ronald Kangas of Wayne State University, in his essay entitled, "No Time To Die," states that "Education is more than books. It is taking the time to cultivate friends and understand others." (Kangas, 1979)

Nel Noddings, a professor of Educational Philosophy at Stanford University, who I had the pleasure to study with at Columbia, tell us that education is not entirely

an intellectual task....it is rooted in teaching people self-respect, how to get along with others and how to celebrate life's celebratory moments. (Noddings, 1995)

I would like to think that the kind of education these individuals are talking about is what you all have experienced here at Southern.

As our mission statement says, "Southern is committed to academic excellence, access, social justice, and service for the public good."

Yes, you have put in a lot of long hours and late nights, devoted to your studies,

But you have also worked alongside your peers in service to the university and the community.

You have shown that you have what it takes to become critical thinkers, involved citizens, and, ultimately, leaders in your chosen fields.

Southern has a long tradition of educating leaders –

people who give back to the community and help others lift themselves up.

Our graduates' tendency to make a contribution – to give back –

is a sign that we are doing our job right here at Southern.

For one way we learn is to follow the example of those around us.

Truly successful people not only know how to manage their time and their obligations,

but they also know how to reach out for support if they need it.

And so, of course, each of you has had some help throughout your educational journey.

Earning a college degree is not something one can do in a vacuum.

If all college was about was sitting in the library, studying alone for hours on end, no one would ever earn a degree.

You all know by now that there's so much more to an education than that.

Learning is a collaborative enterprise.

As a community, we all pitch in to make Southern what it is.

Our professors have a powerful commitment to their students –

to make sure that each student reaches his or her unique potential.

And they see to it that each student gains as much as possible from his or her years at Southern...

and takes advantage of the astonishing resources that this university offers.

I'm sure each of you has more than a few memories of times when a teacher here made a difference in your life.

But education is a two-way street.

Believe it or not, your mentors and teachers have learned from you, too.

This university has gained much from your work here and from your spirit.

So, as you prepare to leave us, some final words of wisdom from Pulitzer Prize-winning author Anna Quindlen.

“Get a life.

A real life, not a manic pursuit of the next promotion, the bigger paycheck, the larger house. Do you think you'd care so very much about those things if you blew an aneurysm one afternoon, or found a lump in your breast?

Get a life in which you notice the smell of salt water pushing itself on a breeze, a

life in which you stop and watch how a red-tailed hawk circles over the water gap or the way a baby scowls with concentration when she tries to pick up a cheerio with her thumb and first finger.

Get a life in which you are not alone. Find people you love, and who love you. And remember that love is not leisure, it is work.

Each time you look at your diploma, remember that you are still a student, still learning how to best treasure your connection to others. Pick up the phone. Send an e-mail. Write a letter. Kiss your Mom. Hug your Dad. Tell people you love them. Get a life in which you are generous and which has meaning.” (Quindlen, 2014)

So congratulate yourselves on your accomplishments ... and while you're at it, congratulate and thank the faculty who taught, guided and mentored you, and the parents, family and friends who loved and supported you every step of the way.

In that very real sense, yours is a shared success.

And remember that, when you go out into the world -- share your success with others, and Get A Life.

Congratulations to all of you and I look forward to seeing many of you on Commencement Day!