

NEW STUDENT CONVOCATION

President Joe Bertolino

August 26, 2016

So, here we are – WELCOME CLASS of 2020!

I hope you have enjoyed your first couple of days as a member of this community.

I know I have! Everywhere I've turned, campus has been a hive of activity getting ready for your arrival. The lawns were mowed, the gardens weeded, the classrooms and residence halls got a final cleaning. Student leaders were back for a retreat, new faculty received their first induction into campus life, and graduate students went through orientation.

Out on Farnham Avenue, the Health and Human Services departments welcomed team members old and new with a little blues and folk music, a couple of water-balloon tossing children, a load of hot dogs and hamburgers, and delectable home-made fruit smoothies (for the healthy side of things.)

Everywhere on campus, there was anticipation in the air...everyone was working, and waiting...for you.

And now, all of us are delighted that you're here, and we can't wait to help you feel at home and fully prepared to launch your college career.

You're arriving at a truly exciting time for Southern.

Last year we opened an expansive new science building, completed a major renovation of the library, added new academic programs that will help you get the in-demand jobs of tomorrow, and introduced exciting new opportunities for hands-on learning, both locally and across the globe.

Want to intern with some of Connecticut's leading bioscience companies? You can do it here through our new BioPath partnership with the City of New Haven.

Want to act with some of New England's most prominent thespians? You can do it here through the renowned Elm Shakespeare Company, now resident on our campus.

Want to study abroad in the hometown of the legendary rock group, the Beatles? You can, thanks to our growing exchange program with Liverpool John Moores University, in England.

All of that may sound great, but I know that it takes a while to get to know a new place and new people.

And you are probably experiencing a lot of feelings at this time – in fact, they can be a bit overwhelming: excitement, nervousness, loneliness, anticipation – it's all good.

Because you know what? I have these feelings too – this is just my first week in my new job, and it's a big change moving from the Northeast corner of Vermont to urban New Haven.

But here I am – a first-year with you, and I want to remind you, YOU are not alone!

Sure, there will be challenges and obstacles along the way.

But there are literally hundreds of people and resources here to help and assist you in facing those challenges head on and finding and seizing opportunities. We want you to succeed – and if you take advantage of that help – you WILL succeed!

Because Southern is a special place, a tight-knit, supportive community where you will become the person YOU want to be -- just listen to these comments from some of our current students:

“Southern's dedication to social justice and community engagement made it the perfect place to give back to the city that raised me,” Corey Evans, Class of 2017

“Southern appealed to me because of the research opportunities in the physics department. Southern offers so many opportunities for students to prepare themselves for the real world.” Katherine Perez, Class of 2017

“My internship experience on an archeological research project in Ethiopia changed my perspective. It took me to a place I would never have otherwise seen, and I got field experience that is basically unheard of for undergrads.”
Samantha Traylor, Class of 2017

As a newbie on campus myself, I’m going to learn about Southern, and our host city of New Haven, alongside you.

A great way to start is the Southern Bucket List in the Week of Welcome guide.

It includes a bunch of fun and interesting activities that happen both here and in the local area.

I’m going to be taking a good look at that list and let it guide me – after all, it’s advice from seasoned Southern students who know what makes this place special.

They’re sharing that advice with you because they want you to have what they see as the true Southern experience.

And believe me, after a full week of activities, and the start of your classes, you’ll soon be up and running.

So, who makes up your class?

Well, as of now, we have 1,406 registered Freshmen for Fall 2016.

Of these 1,406 students, we have....

- 37% who are male and 63% who are female
- and 41% are students of color
- 95% of our new students are from Connecticut – 150 towns and cities – and 5% come from out-of-state

- These out-of-towners hail from 18 states - California, Connecticut, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont and Virginia.

- And they come from four foreign countries: China, Canada, Denmark and Germany.
- The top 5 majors of the entering class are Nursing, Undeclared, Business, Education and Psychology.

But your class is more than stats and accomplishments and stories – it’s people – classmates and the experiences you will share with them.

And indeed, you are a group with many diverse experiences. Here are just a few:

- One of the three valedictorians enrolling in our freshman class, from Bullard-Havens Technical High School in Bridgeport, is Youth President at his church, a BMW Tech Intern, a musician, and a library volunteer – a real renaissance man! He wants to be a high school teacher to influence students growing up in urban settings like he did.
- Another young man from Connecticut was diagnosed with a rare heart condition and had open heart surgery in 7th grade. A recipient of the Make-A-Wish Foundation, he has found his passion in music and played a piano solo at the Fairfield Theatre Company’s “Swingin’ in the Season” concert last December.
- One of our Honors College students, all the way from Modesto, California, will be on our Volleyball team. In high school, she was an athlete, a national AP scholar, an avid writer, a peer mediator, a member of the speech and debate team, and interned in a congressional campaign.
- Another incoming freshman, who’ll be playing women’s lacrosse, was a three-sport star at her high school and a top-rated student – all the time dealing with hereditary type 1 diabetes on a daily basis. She was named one of New Hampshire’s “Hometown Heroes” this past year.
- And finally, there’s the young woman from Shelton High School who overcame a significant speech impediment, directing her interest into our communication disorders major and a potential career in speech therapy. She has traveled to all 50 states and five continents with her

parents -- two public school teachers -- and her encounters on some of these trips led her to found a high school chapter of Operation Smile, which provides life-changing surgery for children born with cleft lips and palates.

Along with these students, each of you will also bring your unique experiences and viewpoints that, together, will enrich our academic community.

Because you have already been shaped by the world around you, and this will continue throughout your college years.

You have grown up with technology – it has helped you learn and communicate, and has made the world a much smaller place than it was when I was a college freshman.

Those are all good things!

Technology is a big part of your life – of all our lives, really -- and obviously you will continue to text and tweet and Snapchat and Instagram and Facebook – as you should – however, not during this convocation! In fact please visit my sites on Twitter and Facebook – just look for the handle SCSUTopOwl.

But if I have one piece of advice for you today, it is this:

Over the next few years, take full advantage of the rich array of intellectual, social, cultural, and service opportunities available to you both on our campus, and in the wider community.

But don't just go places and do things.

Very simply . . . pay attention.

Listen -- and really hear.

Look -- and really see.

You'll notice details and make connections that you'd miss if you didn't open yourself up to the world around you.

And if you pay attention, you'll learn how to interact with people whose ideas and values may be completely opposite to yours, and to see the world from their point of view.

Indeed, as a member of this community, you have a larger responsibility – to each other. When you participate in this community, when you walk around this campus, when you interact with others, you must be “intentionally kind.”

It could be as simple as helping a person carry a package or their books. It could be a bit more challenging: confronting inappropriate behavior or bigoted and hurtful remarks.

Helping a fellow student with their classwork, saying a kind word, giving someone words of encouragement, standing up for an injustice, fighting for what you believe is right. These things matter in our community.

There is a great story about the snowflake in which a field mouse asked a wise owl – what is the weight of a snowflake? “Why nothing more than nothing!” answered the owl.

The mouse went on to tell the owl about the time he sat on a branch and counted each snowflake until the number was exactly 3 million, 471 thousand, 952. Then with the settling of the very next flake – CRACK. The branch suddenly snapped, tumbling the mouse and the snow to the ground. “Humph...such was the weight of nothing,” said the mouse.

So, the next time you think your contributions, your acts of charity, your works of justice, your gifts of love, and your “intentional kindness” are nothing, think again! They all add up, allowing great things to happen.

So my final thought for you today is: You too, can make a difference.

Enjoy your time here at Southern.

Make new friends, try new experiences.

Open your eyes, enlarge your mind...

... question what you hear, absorb all the knowledge that you can.

And when you leave us with degree in hand – a degree that I want to personally hand to each and every one of you in four years' time – use your newly acquired knowledge fully – and use it well.

Thank you, and good luck!

Welcome to Southern!