

NEW STUDENT CONVOCATION

President Joe Bertolino

August 28, 2017

So, here we are – WELCOME CLASS of 2021!

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

Over the past couple of days I've met a lot of you – during move-in, with your athletic teams at Conn Hall. So make sure, you over the course of the semester, you stop me, reintroduce yourself and say “hello.”

There are many of you who have done that, but one stands out – he told me I should never forget him, he's important....I like that attitude....where's Daniel X from SEOP.

So before we get started....let's see if you remember what I taught you at orientation and if you are ready to start your new journey with us as a new OWL. SC.....SU.....

We have been 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.

Our campus already looks great, and in the months and years ahead we're going to be starting on a new health and human services building, a new K-4 lab school, followed by a new home for the School of Business. We're adding new academic programs and opportunities that will help you get the in-demand jobs of tomorrow, and introducing exciting new opportunities for hands-on learning, both locally and across the globe. There will be plenty of time to talk about internships, study abroad opportunities and so

much more in the months and years to come - it takes a while to get to know a new place and new people.

But for now, 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’ve been in this job for just over a year -- and I *still* have some of those feelings too – it’s a big change moving from the Northeast corner of Vermont, where I lived before coming here to urban New Haven.

But you know what helped me ...and it will help you...always remember, 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 words of advice from some of our current seniors:

“There are people here who believe in you and support you, no matter what your status in life. They are the ones who make the difference. And if you ask, they will help you discover new opportunities and believe in your ability to achieve your goals. Find them.” Jeniece Roman, a journalism major from Norwalk.

“Explore. Use everything Southern has to offer to learn about who you are and what you want to do. Be inclusive. The more stuff you try, the closer you get to figuring out what actually works.” Thomas Hoang, a biology major from East Haven.

“Don’t overthink or anticipate problems before they happen. Letting go of all that worry allows you to enjoy yourself and live in the moment. With that freedom comes the confidence to pursue your dreams.” Bahar Mohammad Musa, a psychology major from Naugatuck.

“Leave your comfort zone, open yourself up to new experiences, and say yes to opportunities. You’ll be amazed where those small changes can take you.” Juan Carlos Barranco, a nursing major from Shelton.

As a relative newbie on campus myself, I’m continuing to learn about Southern, and our host city of New Haven, and I’ll be doing that alongside you. I’ve already tried numerous pizza establishments (Pepe’s, Sally’s, Modern, BAR) – I’ll be curious to hear about your personal favorite.

A great way to start is the Southern Bucket List in the Week of Welcome guide, which you’ll find on our website.

It includes a bunch of fun and interesting activities that happen both here and in the local area. Insomnia Cookies in town – very good, but Roberta’s cookies, right here in North Campus – not too shabby!

I’m going to be taking a good look at that list and continue to 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. I promise.

So, who makes up your class?

Well, as of now, we have 1,377 registered freshmen for fall 2017, along with 764 transfer students.

In our freshman class, we have....

- 40% who are male and 60% who are female
- and 45% are students of color
- 95% of our new students are from Connecticut – 150 towns and cities
 - Those 5% from out-of-town hail from 17 states - California, , Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, and Vermont. Did I miss a state?
 - And they come from four foreign countries: Bermuda, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Spain and Sweden.
 - The top 5 majors of the entering class are Nursing, Business, Education, Psychology and Biology.
 - And this year, don't be surprised if you're seeing double as you walk around campus, as we have nine – yes, nine -- sets of twins in our entering class.
 - One of your classmates has served a companion for his friend with cerebral palsy, while another has fought to overcome a traumatic brain injury.
 - You have a classmate who is an aspiring paleontologist, interested in examining fossils to better understand the life of dinosaurs, and still another classmate who has been nanny to a child with autism.
 - You even have an actor, singer and dancer in your class – he's performed off-Broadway! Cool!

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

And each of you will also bring your unique experiences and viewpoints that, together, will enrich our academic community.

I'm guessing you will learn about one another and share through texting, tweets, Snapchat, Instagram, Vine and Facebook – as you should – and I invite you to visit my sites on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook – just look for the handle SCSUTopOwl.

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

The same advice given to our graduating class at last year's commencement by our speaker Derrick Kayongo - SHOW UP! 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 . . . SHOW UP.....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, if you show up, 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.

This point is critical, because recently, as you know, our country has been tarnished by incidents of bigotry, racial hatred and violence... epitomized by the tragic events in Charlottesville, Virginia, just a couple of weeks ago.

As we begin a new academic year, I believe it's important to emphasize that we value each and every member of our community, as part of our campus wide commitment to social justice.

However, we will not tolerate hate in this community. We will not tolerate racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, or any form of bigotry whatsoever.

At the same time, we also value the right to free speech and to airing different perspectives - even some that you might not agree with. Where better to learn about others points of view and to debate and converse with others who you differ with, than on a college campus? Where better to engage in courageous conversations than at Southern. And we will.

So you'll find that we have created a culture where people are willing to share their multiple points of view on myriad topics and participate in constructive dialogue, in a safe, welcoming environment.

And for this to continue, it's imperative that all of us treat one other with dignity, respect, kindness, compassion and civility.

Because it is by joining these two values -- social justice and free speech -- that we can best have respectful and truly productive "courageous conversations," about the pressing issues of the day.

Will you join me in ensuring that we treat each other with dignity, respect, kindness compassion and civility?

So as the newest members of our campus community, you have a larger responsibility – to each other. When you participate in events and activities, 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 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.

Way back in the 13th Century, the Persian poet Sa'di wrote the following verse, now displayed at the entrance to the United Nations Hall of Nations in New York City:

Human beings are members of a whole,
In creation of one essence and soul.
If one member is afflicted with pain,
Other members uneasy will remain.
If you have no sympathy for human pain,
The name of human you cannot retain.

Sa'di's words, gathered in a collection called the Gulistan, or Rose Garden, are still revered today as a source of wisdom. And the point of this and many of his verses is that the good or evil that we do to another, will somehow come back to us...

... in other words, remember the Golden Rule, "do unto others, as you would have done to you." Remember that "evil flourishes when good men and women do nothing."

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!

One more time....SC.....

Welcome to Southern!