

NEW STUDENT CONVOCATION
President Joe Bertolino
August 27, 2018

So, here we are – WELCOME CLASS of 2022!

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

I've had the chance to meet a lot of you – during move in, or 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."

Before we get started....lets 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.

It is our 125th anniversary!

We're creating new academic programs and partnerships that will prepare you to be part of a global society when you graduate.

Our campus already looks great, thanks to our hardworking facilities team. Down on Farnham Avenue, we've just commenced building a new k-4 lab school, which will offer great experiential learning opportunities for our student teachers. And in the months ahead we're going to be starting on a new health and human services building, followed by a new home for the School of Business

Want to intern with some of Connecticut's leading bioscience companies? You can do it here through our 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 partnership 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 felt that way too when I arrived here as president just over three years ago – 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 your peers and current students:

“In just three years, I’ve been abroad three times doing mission work and studying independently at our sister school, Liverpool John Moores University. As a sustainability intern, I had the opportunity to build some great project management and teamwork skills while helping to “green” Southern. Everyone wants to help you succeed. You just have to ask.”
Megan McNivens, a psychology major from Old Saybrook.

“If there’s one thing I wish more people knew about Southern, it’s how one-on-one you can get with faculty members, especially in your major. There’s nobody better to talk to you about your future than someone who does what you want to do. They really inspire me in my work.” David Robledo, a public health major from Norwalk.

“I chose to live on campus and was placed into a living-learning community with fellow communication disorders majors. We took classes together and would come back to the same common space at the end of the day. Being surrounded by people who were going through the same things as me and could help keep me on track was a game-changer. Katherine Adams, a communication disorders major from Stratford.

These students clearly know what makes this place special. And 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 round of Week of Welcome 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 1,545 registered Freshmen for Fall 2018.

In our Freshman class, we have...

- 38% who are male and 62% who are female
- and 52% are students of color
- 95% of our new students are from Connecticut – 145 towns and cities

- 5% of your class come from out of state. They hail from 12 states – Arizona, Florida, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Texas, Virginia and Vermont, as well as Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia.
- And they come from three foreign countries: Ireland, Italy and Norway.
- The top 5 majors of the entering class are Nursing, Undeclared, Business, Education and Psychology
- And this year, don't be surprised if you're seeing double, or even triple as you walk around campus. We have 12 – yes, 12! -- sets of twins and one set of triplets in our entering class.
- This year, we have 232 students who've come to us through the GearUp program - 135 from GearUp Waterbury, 72 from GearUp New Haven and 25 from Gear Up East Hartford: congratulations to all of you!
- And a big shout out to the 91 of you who are legacies - your Mom or Dad - or both! - attended Southern.
- Among your number is a student who builds computers and has gone to regional and world championship competitions in robotics!
- Another is a trained Emergency Medical Responder in her town who has saved lives working alongside paramedics.
- Another participates in an after school program to help the state Department of Children and Families support foster youth in their communities with internships and service experiences.
- And another single handedly led the effort to establish the first-ever pep squad at her high school - coordinating everything from fees to practice times, uniforms and fundraisers. We have a job for you in our business office!

As you know, our admissions staff read all of your essays, and they told me that they were struck by how much many of you have in common: students of immigrants; first-generation college students; students who struggled to find themselves during high school; students who have lost loved ones; who overcame challenges; students who wrote about their faith and their families and those who inspire them.

These are your classmates, and I encourage you to share your personal stories with them, because each of your unique experiences and viewpoints will enrich our academic community.

You have already been shaped by what's going on around you, and this will continue through your college years and beyond.

Technology is a big part of your life - all of our lives, really - I'm guessing you will learn a lot about one another and share through texting, tweets, Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook – as you should (just not during this convocation!)

In fact, I invite you to get engaged with our vibrant social media scene at Southern and also visit my sites on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook – just look for the handle SCSUTopOwl and check in when I do my Friday Snapchat takeovers.

But if I have one main 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.

Show up, get involved, meet people, connect with your faculty, staff, peers. 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.

This point is critical, because, as you know, our country has been tarnished by recent incidents of bigotry, racial hatred and violence.

As we begin a new academic year here at Southern, 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.

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? And you will.

You'll find that we have created a campus 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?

Remember, that 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 at Southern.

"A man came across three masons who were working at chipping chunks of granite from large blocks. The first seemed unhappy at his job, chipping away and frequently looking at his watch. When the man asked what it was that he was doing, the first mason responded, rather curtly, "I'm hammering this stupid rock, and I can't wait 'til 5 when I can go home."

"A second mason, seemingly more interested in his work, was hammering diligently and when asked what it was that he was doing, answered, "Well, I'm molding this block of rock so that it can be used with others to construct a wall. It's not bad work, but I'll sure be glad when it's done."

"A third mason was hammering at his block fervently, taking time to stand back and admire his work. He chipped off small pieces until he was satisfied that it was the best he could do. When he was questioned about his work he stopped, gazed skyward and proudly proclaimed, "I...am building a cathedral!"

You are part of something bigger than yourself. So, the next time you think your individual 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

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

Welcome to Southern!