

Undergraduate Commencement
May 24, 2019

How are we feeling?

So, as President, I am suppose to impart onto you some words of wisdom. So to help get me started, I've asked for some assistance from one of your classmates, Josh Ashley.

Josh is Sports Management degree student from Brooklyn and is a 2x first team All American Wide Receiver on Southern football team. Help me welcome Josh!

OK, ready.....cue the music.....

I've been grinding so long, been trying this stuff for years

(uh-huh) and I got nothing to show, just climbing this rope right here

(uh-huh) and if there's a man upstairs, he kept bringing me rain

(uh-huh) but I've been sending up prayers and something's changed

I think I finally found my hallelujah

I've been waiting for this moment

All my life now all my dreams are true, yeah

I've been waiting for this moment.....

Feels good to be alive right about now

Good, good, good

Good to be alive right about now

Good, good, good

Good to be alive right about now

Hallelujah, let that bass line move ya, say hey

Pretty good to be alive right about now!

BAM!

Hmmm, I think Bridgeport needs to know that Southern is in the house. SC-SU, SC-SU.....

I think its safe to say “It’s good to be alive right about now!”
You can be justifiably proud of what you’ve accomplished.

But don’t forget that today you are surrounded by people in your life who care about you and who love you -- many of them the same people who helped you get to this milestone today.
Let’s give all those people a round of applause!

And while we’re at it, let’s take the opportunity to thank one more group – our FACULTY.

Through their guidance, their mentorship, their teaching, they have made a tremendous contribution to helping you achieve your goals and left you well prepared to face your future.

I ask that you please stand and join in recognizing the faculty of Southern Connecticut State University.

During my years as President, I've learned that earning a degree from Southern holds a special resonance, because our students truly have to strive and sacrifice to get there.

And when they do, our Owls don't just take flight – they soar.

Here's just one example from our graduating class:

Haroon Chaudhry said that when he was a high schooler, he saw college like this: "You go to class, you graduate, you are done."

A first-generation student, he came to us to run track by way of our Southern Educational Opportunity Program, which helps ease the transition to college life.

He was nervous, he was shy, but once he got here, Haroon got busy.

He joined the Muslim Student Association and became its president, leading it to the 2018-19 campus Impact Award. He became an orientation ambassador, received a Social Justice Top Owl award, studied abroad in France and was a student ambassador for the School of Business.

Today he graduates with dual degrees - earned while working six jobs, simultaneously – and is the recipient of the Student Affairs University Leadership Award and a national honors award for excellence in leadership and academics.

“Southern provided me with everything,” Haroon said. “And I wanted to give back.”

Oh, and did I mention that while fasting during the day for Ramadan, he managed to complete the Brooklyn Half Marathon with a personal record just this past weekend.

Haroon – where are you? Well done!

Haroon, is just ONE example of the amazing students in your class who have truly seized the Southern experience and lived it to the fullest.

I also want to give a quick shout out to a couple of other members of your class that I got to know well during the last few years:

- Mariah Eykelhoff – she greeted me almost everyday working in the presidents office and was also in my leadership class.
- Drew McWeeney, drummer and education major– Drew I'm constantly reminded of you as I see your face on the Southern billboard every day when I'd driving home on the Q bridge.
- Brokk Tollefson, our versatile student videographer, camera man, and army veteran.

- Meghan McAdams – the queen of social media, who planned and guided me through my regular Friday afternoon SnapChat takeovers.
- Bryan Sapione – the founder of SCSU’s Conscious Capitolism Association – the first college chapter in the country
- Finally, lets not forget my trainer, exercise science major Matt Lockhart, who spent the year beating me up in the name of fitness and science.
- And a big shout out to all of you who ate with me in the dining hall, followed my SnapChat sessions, taught me how to salsa, threw pie in my face, tie dyed me.....

I am so proud of you!

Remember – your journey is not one you take alone...relationships matter! And I am grateful for the relationships I have formed with many of you.

One of the great things I love about this class is its exuberance and its passion -- and I hope you take all that good energy with you as you leave us today.

Some of you may remember that at Freshman Convocation I always emphasize that, as the newest members of the campus community, you take on a larger responsibility - to each other.

That responsibility doesn't end today. As you head out into the world, with its myriad challenges, biases and pitfalls, it is more important than ever that you make the effort to be – in the spirit of social justice – compassionate, generous and intentionally kind.

Lending a helping hand through volunteerism, giving words of encouragement, standing up for what you believe is right, speaking out against injustice. These things all matter in wider society.

So, take care of yourself and those you love. Remember that everyone has value, everyone counts. At the end of the day, those who love you and care about you, won't care about your title, your job, your bank account....all these are nice....but they are not what matter the most.

You see, earlier this week, I thought that I would lose my father.

I realized that the most valuable asset I had was the gift of "time." So, I encourage you to give those you love the gift of "your time."

Time fades quickly.....in the end what you will remember and

what others will remember about you, is the time you spent, what you did with that time and the relationships you built.

I'll leave you now, as I always do, with a short story –

A college president discovers on his appointment calendar a graduate back to campus for his twenty-fifth reunion. “I just wanted to take a second,” said the graduate, “to thank you for the inspirational advice you gave me at Commencement 25 years ago!”

“Why, thank you,” replied the college president, who, of course, could neither remember the graduate nor what he had said.

“But perhaps you could refresh my memory. What did I say that inspired you so much?” At that, the graduate leaned forward in his chair, looked earnestly at the President, and said, “I’ve tried to live my life by these words: As I came up to the stage to get

my degree, you shook my hand and said, 'Keep moving. Keep moving!' ”

Class of 2019 - “KEEP MOVING!”