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Convocation Remarks – Outdoor Ceremony
August 25, 2019

Good evening.

A University experience is rich in traditions, symbols, and ceremonies.

This ceremony, Convocation, marks the beginning of your college career, and is your formal welcome to our community.

You are joining our community not only as a student and a scholar, but as a learner whose thoughts, words, ideas, and actions will be nurtured and transformed through interactions with staff, your peers, faculty, and our entire university community.

Challenge yourself to be engaged and stay engaged as you can, and will, have an impact on every aspect of this campus life that we *all* share.

Our ceremony tonight will conclude on the University's historic green.

The land our green occupies was donated by Ira Allen in 1791. The green was once covered in stately pines. Later, it became a field where sheep grazed. It was a military encampment during the War of 1812, and has been home to festivals, rallies, and celebrations for more than 228 years.

Tonight, *you* will become part of the green's history as you participate in the Twilight Induction.

This Induction acknowledges our collective responsibility for the academic and personal success of *every* member of our community.

To help ensure that success, we are guided by the values expressed in Our Common Ground: respect, integrity, innovation, openness, justice, and responsibility.

As the University's Chief Academic Officer, I want to share some thoughts on these principles from an academic perspective.

RESPECT. You demonstrate respect for our academic community by coming to class prepared, by seeking support when you need it, and by helping to create a positive learning environment for both your professors and your fellow students. I want and expect our students to have a mindful presence both inside and outside the classroom. Be wary of those distractions (texts, snapchat, Instagram, emails) that compromise your ability to be truly present as you listen to a lecture, engage in a classroom discussion, or talk with a friend.

INTEGRITY. We expect you to bring the very best of yourself to your studies and to our campus. Approach all that you do here with a sense of decency, fairness, honesty, and sincerity.

Don't be a bystander. Tell the truth, take responsibility for your actions, and forgive yourself and others when mistakes are made.

INNOVATION. There is no doubt that this is a time of grand challenges. We are counting on you to explore, think, discover, and solve problems in new ways – ways that have not yet been imagined or invented. College is your opportunity to develop your curiosity, creativity, and commitment to always asking that next question. Push yourself to think in different ways and challenge yourself to consider the capacity you have to make a difference.

OPENNESS. Listen with empathy and openness. Oliver Wendell Holmes tells us, *“It is the province of knowledge to speak, and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen.”* I challenge you to create opportunities and space for others to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences with you—learn from the advice and reflections of others. Seek out perspectives that differ from yours. Select courses that will expand your world view or stretch that part of your brain that's happier at rest. Resist the urge to confirm what you think you know, and be open to all that you have to learn. Give yourself a chance to grow and learn to listen.

JUSTICE. For too long, our books, maps, histories, policies, and systems have excluded too many. As a society, we are beginning to recognize this, but you must still bring a healthy dose of skepticism to your studies. Think critically, recognize your own bias, and consider the needs and perspectives of others in all that you do. Be true to yourself. This will not always be an easy task. It may require you to disagree with ‘expected’ thinking. It may require you to assert yourself in a way that is frowned upon by others. But if you remain authentic and genuine in your thinking, and engage with mutual respect and positive regard, you will experience true fulfillment.

Finally, **RESPONSIBILITY.** Only about 6% of the world's population has a college degree. The academic opportunity that lies before you is both a privilege and a responsibility. Do not squander your time here, and do not detract from the experience and efforts of others. Challenge yourself to make full use of the resources available to you and challenge your classmates to do the same. Your faculty, the administration and our incredible staff recognize our responsibility to create an environment in which you will thrive.

In a few moments, amid the rhythms of the Taiko drummers, we will walk to the green together.

Remember your mindful presence while walking down Main Street.

Take pride in the work and accomplishments that led you to the University of Vermont, and to this special moment.

Legends say that hummingbirds float free of time, carrying our hopes for love, joy, and celebration. The hummingbird's delicate grace reminds us that life is rich, beauty is everywhere, every personal connection has meaning, and that laughter is life's sweetest creation—or maybe it is a little magic.

I thought I would end my message with a little magic as your transformation as a learner and difference-maker begins.

You have some thoughts I am sure about what you expect to learn in your first year of college. I would like you to consider, however, how your ideas might actually be transformed...

[magic trick: green scarf turns gold]

...if you allow yourself to think differently.

My hope for each of you is that you leave our University better than you found it, and even better than it found you.

Let's make a difference Catamounts!