

UNE Convocation Remarks August 29, 2017

Welcome to this ritual, this ceremony that marks the beginning of the academic year. Convocation provides occasion for all of us – as educators and students – to rededicate ourselves to the pursuit of knowledge. For UNE, it comes, typically, at a time of year when the glorious Maine summer continues to provide one sun-splashed day after another... and also at a time when the first chill of autumn has begun to invade the evening air. It serves as a time for us to reaffirm the discipline, commitment, and values that guide us in our pursuit of excellence in higher education... wherever that pursuit may lead us... whatever challenges it may present... whatever sacrifices it may entail.

Convocation also affords the opportunity for us to welcome the newest members of our academic community to UNE. I'm talking about you, our first-year students, our Class of 2021.

Freshmen, through your presence, I know you will make the rich and diverse tapestry that is our student body so much more colorful and bright. You will make important contributions to our classrooms, labs, athletic teams, clubs, student organizations, and local community. You will grace our campus here in Biddeford, and many of you, too, will bring your talents to our Portland Campus and to our campus in Tangier, Morocco. You will infuse our community with your curiosity, intelligence, and passion.

On behalf of the entire UNE family, I thank you for choosing to spend the next four years with us. I thank you for enriching our community as I know you will.

You belong, now, to an extended family of fellow students, educators, professionals, and others, who have chosen to make this special place their home. I would like to acknowledge, at this time, some of the women and men joining us today. On the platform with me are UNE's Provost Mike Sheldon; the Dean of our College of Arts and Sciences, Jeanne Hey; the Dean of our College of Health Professions, Karen Pardue; the Dean of our College of Pharmacy, Karen Houseknect; the Dean of our Online College of Graduate and Professional Studies, Martha Wilson; the Dean of our College of Osteopathic Medicine, Jane Carreiro; the Dean of our College of Dental

Medicine, John Ryder; the Chair of our Faculty Assembly, Frank Daly; and the President of our Undergraduate Student Government, Melissa Rosa. Please join me in giving these UNE leaders a round of applause.

Also with us today are faculty representing UNE's six distinct colleges. Freshmen, over the coming months and years, these women and men will open new worlds to you, infusing you with the curiosity and passion they possess for their disciplines, and indeed with the love of learning more broadly. They will serve as your instructors in the classroom. They will work beside you in the lab. They will lead you into the field. They will guide you as you learn and grow. Faculty members, please rise so that we may acknowledge you.

[To Faculty] Thank you for your service to UNE and for all I know you'll do to make our newest community members feel at home.

We are also joined by members of UNE's professional staff -- dedicated women and men from UNE's offices of Admissions and Student Affairs, and other departments, who have worked hard over the past weeks to prepare for your arrival and assist in your orientation. Would those individuals please rise. Thank you for all you've done to welcome our new students.

I would also like to acknowledge the returning students joining us today. Orientation leaders, resident assistants, and all other returning students, please rise.

Returning students, I know many of you have worked long hours already to help welcome our newest students and will continue to ease their transition in the weeks ahead. Thank you.

Freshmen, I hope you will lean on these sophomores, juniors, seniors, and graduate students. Let them show you the ropes here at UNE. They have experienced -- and not too long ago -- the adjustment you will be experiencing as you wrestle with your first class assignments, find your way around our campuses, and learn more about the UNE services and facilities available to you. They are the best resources of information and support you will find during your transition to college life. And the role they play in helping you to assimilate into our community, now, **you** will play next year for a new class of Nor'easters.

Indeed, by next fall you will be old-hands at managing the responsibilities and rigors of college life. But that must seem far off. Right now, I suspect, you are full of questions and uncertainties. You are, quite likely, anxious, eager, and excited all at once. I want you to know that that mixture of emotions you may be feeling is completely normal, and in fact, quite healthy.

The fact is, I feel a special connection to you, our first-year students. As you may know, my term as UNE president began on July 1. So, in a sense, today's ceremony serves as my Convocation, too. I have enjoyed a two-month head-start on you, but – like you -- I'm still figuring out all that it means to be a part of this amazing university. I'm still waking up each day to discover yet another little surprise about our community or campuses that reaffirms my decision to come here.

With that said, I thought I would spend my few minutes addressing you today sharing five things I've realized, or been reminded of, during my own orientation here at UNE. These lessons apply as much to a new college president, I think, as they do to a college freshman...

First, I've been struck by the sheer beauty of this place we all now call "home," and I've been reminded of the importance of finding a proper balance between work and play. During my campus tours and visits to UNE prior to assuming the presidency, I saw the shimmering ocean and marveled at the lush green grounds, just as I'm sure you did. But until you've woken up here for a few days in a row and begun to really immerse yourself in this incredible natural setting – until you've kayaked out onto the river, or laced up your sneakers and run down to the beach at sunrise, or hiked through the surrounding woods, or just marveled at the breathtaking sunsets, you can't quite appreciate it as it deserves to be appreciated. I've realized over the past two months how lucky I am to live in this beautiful place. And yet, there is much work to be done. I think it is important that I make time to explore these inspiring surroundings, but I also know I must have the discipline to remain focused on my work. The good news is, I have room in my life for both... if I manage my time wisely... and you do too. You should make time for both. Find a proper balance... and you will be rewarded in the classroom as well as in your leisure time.

Another thing we have in common as new students and as a new university president is that we are both at points in our lives when we are facing, or will soon face, decisions that stand to have very real bearings on our future lives and also on the lives of others. The decisions UNE's leadership team makes will affect our entire university community. The decisions you make, likewise, will have far reaching effects. Do you want to take on a second major or a minor? Should you change your major? How about studying abroad? Should you attend that campus-wide lecture your professor said wasn't mandatory but relates to what you're studying? How about the lecture or artistic exhibit that has no direct bearing on your major area of focus, but provides the opportunity to deepen your understanding of the world? And what about that paper or project that didn't quite turn out the way you'd planned? Should you go back to the drawing board and restart it? Or should you call it "good enough"? Beyond their bearing on your academic and professional future, the choices you face will affect your family members – many of whom have made sacrifices so that you can be here. More broadly, they stand to affect the lives of classmates who will be working on projects beside you... professors entrusting you to work beside them in their labs... perhaps patients you will treat one day... students you will teach... or coworkers who will depend on you. When you start to think about it, we both have accepted quite a bit of responsibility in choosing to join this incredible educational ecosystem. People close to us and people yet unknown have a lot riding on our success. For them, and for ourselves, let's give our best effort in tackling the challenges each day brings.

Another idea I'd like to remind you of – for hopefully it's one you've heard before – is the importance of being open to new ideas and new ways of learning. Just as I've learned from my UNE colleagues a deeper appreciation for the importance of crossing traditional disciplinary boundaries – whether in health care, marine science, neuroscience, or really any other area of study, as you make the adjustment from high school to university life and, especially to college level academic work, you will need to be open to new ways of thinking. You will need to question your long-held beliefs and assumptions. You will need to make new connections between seemingly disparate subjects or ideas. You will need to develop and refine new ways of thinking that serve you well not just during your time at UNE, but in your graduate studies, professional life, clinical practice, or wherever you go next. More than that, I hope you will realize, as I do, that our learning is never

complete. There always will be room to learn and grow, both in your chosen field of study, and as a thinker more generally. You may complete a specific course – English Composition or Environmental Studies, for example -- and check it off the list that is our Core Curriculum, but you must inculcate within yourself a curiosity for knowledge that has begun to burn. Let the courses you take, along with UNE's rich array of extracurricular opportunities, serve as the sparks that light the kindling...that create the embers...that feed the fire of lifelong learning.

A fourth lesson that I frequently ponder is the importance of getting up and moving on when we fall. As you embark on your college career, one thing is certain: You will sometimes fail. Sometimes you will make mistakes. At other times, life will present you with unexpected challenges or hardships. I have faced many such setbacks in my career thus far, and I am sure that there are more to come. But instead of viewing adversity as holding us back, we can embrace it as a force that presents opportunities for growth, and that can make us even stronger and more steadfast in our determination to succeed. Psychologists call the ability to pick oneself up after a setback "grit," and research has demonstrated that it is a trait that the most successful people have in abundance. It's also a trait that we can all develop further in ourselves. As the Chinese philosopher Confucius observed, "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." I encourage you to view setbacks as opportunities to learn, grow, and become even stronger.

The final concept of which I have been reminded during my introductory months here at UNE is just how essential collaboration with others is to any one of our success... be it in the classroom, lab, field, or workplace. Be open to the ideas of others. Reach out to others for help. Be supportive of others. Make meaningful connections with others who are interested in the subjects that interest you. Try to see the world as others do, even when... indeed, **especially** when... they see things differently than you do. In fact, go out of your way to seek out perspectives that differ from those you hold today. In this process, seek to find productive ways to work with others so that your goals and theirs converge, become more ambitious, and, at the same time, become more achievable. I've benefited from the support of so many generous, thoughtful people since arriving here at UNE. I hope you will benefit from others and their perspectives, too... In fact, I **know** you will, if you open yourselves to others.

So, there's my advice to you: strike a healthy balance between your work and play on this beautiful campus we are so fortunate to share; recognize the importance and reach of the work before you, and take your role as student seriously; be open to -- indeed, become passionate about -- new and lifelong learning, both within and beyond your chosen field of study; pick yourself up when you fall, embracing setbacks as opportunities for growth; and know that your work will be more meaningful and achievable when you collaborate with others, including those with different points of view.

In closing, I welcome you again to the UNE family. I hope your first few weeks at UNE are as invigorating, challenging, and rewarding as mine have been. I look forward to seeing you around campus, and to watching you learn and grow over the next four years. Now, let's enjoy the cookout!