

First Year Convocation

2016

I am incredibly grateful to have the chance to speak with you today, and I am grateful to those who 10 years ago—in the Fall of 2006—created the conditions for an annual first year convocation.

Since I was asked to serve as a keynote speaker, it seemed reasonable to ask what a keynote speaker is supposed to do. One good way to start is to indicate what a keynote speaker is not: The author Mike Hourigan observes that “...your Keynoter can mold the presentation into a unique and distinctive moment just for your audience. Your Keynote Speaker may use humor, audience participation, show funny clips, or even sing. No matter, what shtick your speaker employs, their job is to weave your keynote message into their program in a memorable and fun way.” Sounds like a lot of pressure to me. Mr. Hourigan concludes that “A Keynote Speaker should be able to capture the essence of your meeting and be able to highlight it to your audience in a short period of time...”

And so in the brief period of time that we have this morning, I wish to do two things: 1) to congratulate you on your choice of Clayton State as a place to begin and end your undergraduate experience; 2) to offer suggestions to improve your chances for success.

Payscale.com is one way to find the projected 20 year return for your degree—please go there: <http://www.payscale.com/college-salary-report/bachelors> and search Clayton State University. We are listed as 684 out of 1000's listed—more importantly, use the tool to compare with other places in the state to determine that you will receive a great return on your investment here IF YOU GRADUATE. From here, your salary potential is above most if not all state universities in the University System. **James Magazine** last week and for the second year in a row, named Clayton State as the best value for 4 year institutions in the state of Georgia. And these are all returns prior to our new strategic plan's emphasis on your academic advising and your connecting those academic programs to the career services program and internship activities that we hope will move the last graduating class' record of 72% to over 90% before you graduate.

Nationally, graduating from College is of value over high school graduates. According to the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce and, depending on major, you are likely to earn 1 to 3.4 million over a life time. And your children are more likely to succeed—and you are less likely to have health problems, more likely to own a home, more likely to live longer!! As a first generation college graduate, I am proof that a university degree can be transformational. But coming here is more about just coming and recognizing accomplishments—it's about finishing, or as the great American philosopher Pitbull wrote, don't start what you can't finish. And thus my second point—your entrance should be framed as part of the road to completion. Many of you have heard during orientation sessions the data presented by the Complete College Georgia project—that to maintain a productive economy in Georgia from 2020 on, some 60% of the workforce must possess some post secondary certificate...

We currently have only some 42% of the Georgia population with such a credential. It is our commitment to create the conditions in which you are among those contributing to that 60% need. But to do that, both our institution and you must work together to accomplish that goal. You will be hearing more about our university efforts to help you get work experience, to work with academic advisers and

career advisors who will help you seek academic programs that will give you a path toward completion, and faculty who will provide you every opportunity to learn things to know, ways of knowing, and the many perspectives from which that learning can take place. Together, we can help make the path smoother and successful—but you need to help us help you. That would be my third general point— suggestions to improve your chances for completion.

And I know that at this point in your emerging academic career, lots of people have been giving you advice—some of it likely good, some of it, from your perspective, a bit lame, some of it things which seem reasonable but, darn, might be hard to accomplish, and, what the hey, I have 16 weeks to get this work done. For those of you who have ever seen the movie Rocky III, you may recall the conversation on the beach between Apollo Creed and Rocky, where Rocky says that he will work hard tomorrow—to which Apollo says indignantly, there is no tomorrow. And that’s the way it often is with delays—we often wake up to find, there is no tomorrow. This might turn into a top ten list—certainly somewhat of a cliché, but hey, gives you the confidence that this will not go on forever—So,

Number 10 –Avoid or resist procrastination—no one ever wakes up and says, damn, I started this project too early!! Make lists, match the list with a calendar, read carefully the syllabus you will receive in every course, and use those as the means of creating an appropriate calendar, and then figure out the time that it will take to get each task accomplished—remembering that most projects take longer than you anticipated. Again, don’t procrastinate. The real world has deadlines, and so should you.

Number 9—Find the places where you can receive help for achieving what you need to succeed. ASK QUESTIONS!! Ask the professor—office hours are posted and, I can attest, are sometimes lonely until the very end of the semester. If you have a bad grade early, or are not sure of what is happening in class, run and don’t walk to see your instructor. Find your advisor today or at very least by the end of next week. Work to set some appointments later in the semester so you are ready to make plans for next steps toward completion, including the chances of using summer courses to accelerate your progress. Go to career services before mid-September—start thinking now about how you can reflect of what you are learning, and thus what you are able to do. Seek out your RAs—they can help and support you finding places for advice. You have already paid for counseling services—don’t be afraid to seek them out if you suspect that you need some safe place to check on how you are doing. Go to the tutoring center. Go to the writing center. Go ask for help. Go to Spivey Hall or an athletic event with friends or to meet new friends. Or, in the words of the great philosopher Tupac, “even the genius asks his question.”

Number 8—On the odd chance you might miss a class, don’t ever ask the faculty member “did we do anything important?” think about that. But don’t ever be afraid to ask professors for examples of things they have shared with you to learn—or a request for an example for the application of a principle covered or a technique learned.

Number 7 –Prepare a budget and stick to it—America is not good in general as deferring gratifications—try to move away from the curve—now average life expectancy is around 80, and for you is likely to be higher later. Be frugal, spend on only those things you need, and remember that money you do not spend now will be compounded to spend on later.

Number 6—Plan on breakfast, sleep and exercise. In the same way that you schedule academic activities, schedule wellness activities. Even if the breakfast is a power bar, juice and coffee, it helps

energize your day. Sleep is often seen as a waste of time, but extensive research indicates that sufficient sleep is a necessary condition for effective learning. There is a good reason why sleep deprivation is used as a form of torture, or at least a means for compliance for enemy combatants—don't do that to yourself—number 10 will help avoid that—and get some exercise—it helps with keeping you in shape, it helps keep you focused—and whether it is a regime of power lifting, cross training or serious running, or a morning or evening walk with friends, exercise helps your ability to learn.

Number 5—Be careful with social media—these things can remain on line for a long time—don't let Chris Brown or Donald Trump be your model for the use of twitter—don't send messages to friends or others that you would not send to your mother. Tweets and other posts have a life of their own—and you don't want their life to interfere with your life.

Number 4—Register to vote and then vote—there is a link on the SWAN—remember that there is a good reason why politicians pay more attention to old guys like me and not you—because in general, I always vote and you more often than not don't. Regardless of your politics, if people believe you will be part of a group of voters, they will pay attention—some have argued that people paid attention to the tea party and not the occupy movement, because voting beats demonstrating—and when the occupants of Laker Hall and Laker Village have enough votes to change the outcome of an election, you will be heard—so register to vote, and then vote.

Number 3—This from an old film Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure "always be excellent to one another." Don't ever attempt to coerce someone to do something against their will. It is on all of us to protect each other from acts of violence and unwanted aggression. No means no, and the influence of substances, especially alcohol, means that you cannot be judged to freely say yes. If we are to live successfully in a learning community, we must always work to respect the dignity of others, and to protect others' dignity when we believe they are in a condition in which they cannot freely protect themselves.

Number 2—Choose friends who will support your academic success—if your friends are constantly chillin' and suggesting you need to chill rather than study or go to class, you may have to think about friendship. In one of the near million things Kanye West has said: "Reach for the stars so if you fall you land on clouds." It is best to end up as a cool adult than a cool college student, in my experience. Bill Gates was widely viewed as a dweeb as a college student. Mark Zuckerberg vigorously worked to get the Harvard Facebook on-line because he wanted to get dates—the cool kids then are not always the cool adults. To be cool now gets you to Buckhead the night before an exam—to be cool with a degree may get your loan paid off early and to Paris on vacation—and I can assure you, Buckhead will still be there—and interact deliberately with people who you don't know. Introduce yourself to people in your classes. Try to introduce yourself to people you may be of a different age than you, or a different sex than you or a different race than you. The way we get to succeed over a long period of time is to prepare to be in a world in which your success comes from knowing and being with people different from you—and then discovering they share a great deal of things with you.

Number 1—Go to class—go to class—go to class—you paid 400 or so to take the class—you might as well go or log on regularly if taking a class on-line—and, it will be one of the few times you will be freely allowed to learn of new things—and establish for a lifetime a habit of learning.

It is the habit of learning that will be most important to your chances for success. I took my first accounting course around age 40—something I had to do to understand how to manage a budget for my new day job. The internet came to life only a couple of years before you were born—and yet has transformed learning forever. Take every chance you can to learn now when that is your main job—you will thank your professors later!!

So, if I could join you in starting school again, I would do that. But if I can't, do take this chance to take advantage of learning every day. Together, we can learn, and you can succeed—and congratulations in advance as I look forward to greeting you 4 years from now as a graduate of Clayton State University, and in that way have dreams, made real.