

New Student Convocation
August 10, 2012
Thomas J. Hynes Jr.

I am honored to have been asked to speak this morning, although in response to my question of what I should speak about, I was told that I had best speak about ten minutes.

The importance of this ceremony is reflected in the presence of this assembled faculty in academic regalia. This ceremony serves as a bookend with your graduation, where again you will be greeted and congratulated by the assembled faculty of Clayton State University garbed in academic regalia.

I also come to you as one who was first in his immediate family to graduate from College, and for whom college was an access to an American Dream of a better life for me and my family. University also became the place where I would spend my adult life, and where I would have the privilege of learning for myself, and supporting an environment in which others would also have such a chance to learn.

I want to do three things today. First, I want to congratulate you on your start along the path toward being a university graduate. Second, I want to tell you something about Clayton State University, and reasons for you to be proud that you seek to be a graduate of this university. And third, I want to provide a few hints that might aid in your success along the way to being a graduate—and find some of your dreams realized.

First, I congratulate you. In Georgia, only 67% of the students who started the 9th grade four years ago received a high school diploma this past year. And an even smaller percentage than that was admitted to four year institutions of higher education. So your presence here today is grounds for at least some congratulations—but only some. And that is because the changes in the national and international economy make your success here all the more important—to you and to our nation. A recent Georgetown University study indicates a great deal of work must be done nationally and in Georgia in order to ensure the nation's future workforce needs. In Georgia, currently 42 percent of the population holds some form of a college degree, while the Georgetown study found that by 2020, that percentage should be 60 percent for the state to remain economically competitive. . At a time when every job is precious, this shortfall will mean lost economic opportunity for millions of Americans. Being a university graduate will not guarantee you a better life—but it dramatically increases your chance to access it through determination and hard work. Or to quote the great American Philosopher Jay-Z “Remind yourself. Nobody built like you, you design yourself.”

So it is vital that you view this as the start of your progress toward graduation four years from now from Clayton State University.

There are good reasons why we wish to work with you early and often to help you share in the responsibility for your success. Nationally, higher education has shifted the

responsibility for your success over the last 25 years. It has moved from your sole responsibility for success—to the university's responsibility for success—to where responsibility ought to be—to shared responsibility for success. That we will do all we can to make support available and we will urge you to take advantage of that support—but that ultimately you must take steps to seek support from someone or someplace at the university.

And so my second point, you have come to a place long committed to helping you discover that your goals, your dreams, your ambitions and your hopes can be realized. And really, you have come to a great place, at least from the perspective of our students. Nearly 75% of current students according to recent surveys rate academics here challenging and excellent—that they work each day with faculty who are clearly committed to student success. An even larger number of faculty reports that they are here at Clayton State because they can make true differences in the lives of students. James Magazine a month ago identified Clayton State as the best buy in higher education in the state—period. We are a top 100 workplace according to the AJC, and a top tier regional university, according to US News and World Report.

Spivey Hall has been described by musicians as the best performing Hall in America—period. It is clearly a focal point for classical and jazz music in Atlanta. And you should attend!! Our nursing program has the largest number of minority nursing graduates in Georgia. Our Supply Chain Management degree is cited as reason for major business relocations to Georgia, and a key player for realizing economic development goals for the region. Our campus is regularly reported to be the most attractive campus in the University System. Our athletic program, a member of the Peach Belt Conference, is second in the number of championships—either regular season or tournaments—over the last 10 years—including a national championship in women's basketball in 2011 where rare athletic achievements were realized. We have had the second largest percentage growth in baccalaureate degrees among the 35 University System institutions since 2003. Our Archival Studies program—near the national and state archives—is one of only two such programs nationally. Our new secondary education programs are aimed at addressing shortages regionally and state-wide in science, technology and mathematics. Our Department of Social Sciences houses a USG outstanding scholar for teaching and learning—out of thousands of professors statewide. Our Americorps program sponsors tutors for Clayton County Public Schools that is but one example of our partnerships for success. As recently as two years ago we were nationally ranked as one of the 50 safest university campuses in the US for institutions over 6000. And our strategic plan commits us to find ways in which all of our students in five years will experience one or more powerful active learning experiences before they graduate—your involvement in your own learning will be realized.

My third point—now that you are here at our great place, you need to do all you can to stay and succeed here. Over the last few days you have been shown places where you can get help in finding your academic success realized. In addition, here are nine important safety tips to match your needs with your dreams, and are on the road to

graduation. I have been helped in these ideas by some observation of Dr. Randall Hanson of Quintessential Ideas.

Number 1—Master and meet your professors—what does that mean? It means each of us have some differences, but also some common approaches—and so read your syllabus you will have the first week of class—write down then all of the exams and assignments in the day timer or electronic calendar, and thus avoid the conversation—“I didn’t know we were having a test...” Check the class web site on Georgia View every day!!! Visit professors during office hours to ask questions about the material. Read your course materials—outline the readings and the textbook. Introduce yourself to your professors. And if you don’t understand material, ask immediately and don’t fall behind—asking questions to professor about materials or class success will make them feel good—and mastering professors means not waiting until it’s too late.

Number 2—Get and stay organized—use a planner for dates and times for tests, assignments—keep course materials organized, and not just stuffed in a drawer or the trunk of your car—these materials will help you keep track of your progress and will help you ask professor questions you need to have answered so that you may improve.

Number 3—Use time wisely—do not party during the week. Do the hard assignments early rather than later—when you are tired and tempted to just “blow it off” or say that good enough is good enough. Reverse engineer your semester—next week and using the syllabi you have, spend about a half hour with the schedule you finished for #2 and put in place times to start getting ready for a successful conclusion of the term and your courses. Do your school work first—and again, don’t party during the week!!! AND GO TO ALL YOUR CLASSES.

Number 4—Manage your money as best you can by delaying gratification. You will be able to have a great deal more money to spend if you pass on a new itunes down load daily, choose to head to the SAC to work out rather than hanging out and spending money, choosing to spend time with your friends in the residence hall rather than some entertainment center. The late George Carlin years ago said that Americans almost always have too much stuff—so begin to routinely ask yourself “do I need to spend money on this stuff now?” Make a budget, and stick to it!!

Number 5—Get to know your roommate and others in the residence hall, and class mates in your courses—these folks are a safety net, and are going through many of the same things you are. Many have similar professors. Upper class students may have had the professors before. Take the time to introduce yourself—if you know people in your classes, they can help you form study groups, which studies at Harvard and elsewhere prove as an essential means to learn more and earn higher grades.

Number 6—Strive for good grades—I know, this sounds silly—but things have changed—to receive good grades in most of our courses, you need to begin working hard from the very first day of class, and to keep it up. This is more challenging, according to even our most successful students, then they imagined. Help is here to give you a chance

to earn good grades—and if you succeed in year one, you have set the standard for the remaining work before graduation. Start today—go to the class web sites, check to see if you have already been given a reading assignment, commit yourself to not falling behind schedule any week in your studies!!

Number 7—Stay on campus or with other Clayton State students as much as possible—the more time you spend on campus, the more you will feel at home. And the more time you spend on campus, the harder we will work to make your residential experience here better. There are lots of things to do almost every day—lectures, concerts, plays and other performances, exercise in the SAC—walks with friends around the lake. Stay active and stay focused in order to realize success.

Number 8—Seek professional help when you need it—so for example, find the Career Services office early this semester—talk to them, see what you can do academically and otherwise to prepare for a career before and after graduation. If you are sick, find the health center. If you are trying to cope with feelings of isolation or depression, our Counseling Center is excellent. Ask a staff or faculty member where you can find support. It really is true that the only dumb question is the one you do not ask. Asking a question provides proof that you are an active learner—and not that you are dumb. You do not have to face such things alone—and if you seek these out early, you will quickly be back on a cleared road to graduation.

Number 9—Study, study, study. Some would say to that advice, Duh!!! But Study early. Study often. Schedule in your planners times you will study and stick to it. If you want help with your study skills, go to the center for academic success. Form study groups to supplement your own personal study. Study before you head out to socialize. But study.

With your tremendous talents, you have a great responsibility to use your talents for a greater good—whether it is the expansion of knowledge for yourself and others by a life in the academy, or a life of service in the public sector, or a life of contributions and financial creation in the private sector. In each of these pursuits, you will have obligations, responsibilities, and rewards as a citizen—of this university, of the area, of the state, and of the United State of America. You have a responsibility to continue to strive to use your talents at the highest levels—not content to get by with your present talents, but committed to using them to their highest potential. If you reach out, you will find your dreams and your ambitions realized. Hall of Fame Basketball Coach Denny Crum said that luck is preparation and opportunity. And so hard work and care and attention will help you be successful—or lucky—when opportunities appear.

I close by congratulating you on you accomplishments to date, and the chances that such accomplishments will continue. But they will require a continued striving for knowledge, as well as a humility that comes with the discovery that there is now more knowledge available than any one of us will be able to master. Giving credit to others, staying idealistic citizens, being honest, humble, and collaborative will be the route to greatness—and thus finding your dream realized. Thank you for the chance to speak today.