

Good Afternoon Students,

You will continue to hear throughout your time at Alfred that university is a time of opportunity. This opportunity began well before today with your acceptance to Alfred. You responded to this opportunity by choosing this community and enrolling for classes this summer. Congratulations on taking those first important steps! I am sure your faculty will agree with me that you earned an A+ for picking the right university. Like you, I am new to the Alfred community, just finishing week

seven on this new journey as your new Vice President for Student Experience. Hopefully in just a few years when you cross the stage at graduation, you will give me an A+ for helping create a world class student experience during your time here.

Your presence here today with me marks your acceptance of another opportunity - to be inducted into a community of learners. You have chosen to invest in your education by participating in this important welcome weekend, another wise

decision. There are so many more opportunities that await you, some small, some big, and some more obvious than others.

Many of these opportunities will require a growth mindset. Each of you sitting here today has the power to succeed. You would not have been accepted to our University otherwise. What some of you may be lacking is the motivation to work hard and dedication that are required to succeed but each of you hold that potential to develop that motivation and dedication.

Let me share with you that a long time ago (yes I am old), 30 years ago, I sat in a similar seat that all of you are sitting in today. I was a first-generation college student, like so many of you. I hope this is not your case, but my parents had no real appreciation for higher education. But what I knew was I wanted something better for myself and I didn't want to live at home any longer. I am sure at least the latter applies to many of you.

There is no doubt that I was provided an opportunity. I came to college as a student who struggled with standardized testing. At a young age, I was involved in a serious accident. I would suffer a brain injury that had lasting effects on thought process and speech. But throughout my life, I have surrounded myself with a web of supporters. They have encouraged me to dig in, face the obstacles, work hard, get involved. I failed at some of those obstacles, but what was important is that I learned from them and continued to work hard and succeed. I would later

graduate magna cum laude. For those of you that don't know, this means with honors. So I challenge you to own your story, think about what you bring to this opportunity and do not be afraid to fail, but realize you always have the power within you to create your story. I would assert that in creating your story here, one of the most important ingredients is creating that web of support and finding your voice. I would quickly encourage you to find your cheerleaders – those can be team coaches, professors, staff, work supervisors, or even me. So let's get your first

contact for your web of support in your cell phones. Take out your phones. Open your texting. You are going to text my cell number with your first and last name and something like this, “Hi, this is”.

Wael Salem, HEOP student from NY, NY graduated from the Kent School majoring in Mechanical Engineering

Yuliia Koreiba, International Student from Ukraine majoring in Business Analytics

Delaney Simms, women’s volleyball player from Bogart, GA majoring in Art & Design

Brayden Bush, from Newcomb, NY graduated from Newcomb Central majoring in Physics

Allyson Campbell, Transfer Student from Alfred Station, NY majoring in Material Science Engineering

Here is my number 7167130535. (Take a group selfie) So now all of you have my cell number, I trust you will use it wisely and call/text me when you need support or have a question about AU. I'll respond with the selfie photo so you all have a photo of yourselves at the Convocation to send your families. See no one is too big or small to be

your web of support but call on them regularly and don't be afraid to ask for help.

Many of the opportunities you will be presented with here at Alfred are rooted in AU's commitment of being welcoming, inclusive, and a supportive community that challenges all students to grow, become socially responsible, and be committed to becoming a global citizen and civically engaged.

But what is civic engagement? Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address

issues of public concern. Citizens working together to make a change or difference in the community.

There is power in community and citizens working together for the larger good.

Think about this...

Since March 2020, COVID has transformed our world, and I am not just talking about that lack of finding toilet paper. We were initially contained in our homes—for months— many of you were forced to learn virtually prior to coming here. The virus has in many cases reoriented our relationship

to government, to the outside world, and even to each other. But moments like we are experiencing also present opportunity. Some of us have become more sophisticated with using technology and many have found a revived appreciation for the outdoors and life's other simple pleasures.

You finally enter a school year with few COVID restrictions as we have entered the endemic stage.

Here in New York State, we have seen the effects of civic engagement, a state where the vast majority of citizens have acted unselfishly – worn masks, been vaccinated, and followed health

department protocols and guidelines, and thus we are able to return to a campus full with all the student activities that students deserve while they pursue their education.

While during this pandemic we have seen some of the best in humanity, we have also witnessed xenophobia, racism, and violence directed at people of color. I come to Alfred from a small private university in Buffalo NY, 1.5 miles from Tops on Jefferson where our students shopped and lost love ones on May 14th. 10 innocent people (human beings) would lose their lives and 3 others

were wounded for no other reason than the color of their skin. While it sparked civic engagement it also brought, smack in our faces, the continued issue of racism and pure hate.

But like so many of these incidents it also brought people from all different walks of life together and showed that there can be strength in our differences and love is stronger than hate. This is evidence that even in the darkest of times, we can see the best of humanity; evidence that we all possess in our character, courage and compassion.

You will be faced with many opportunities here but the real question is, will you have the courage and compassion to link arms with a stranger? To help someone who may be different than you? To listen to others? To be respectful of different points of view? To help those around you who are suffering ...oppressed ...endangered in dark times?

I know it seems impossible to envision now, at the beginning of your journey as an adult, that you will be presented with such enormous opportunity and

responsibility soon. But it is true.

**You are this country's and the broader world's
future. You will be participating in the social
structures that steer our direction. You will build
the world. Your story/voice constructs society's
story/voice.**

**You will have a role in the decision as to whether it
is compassionate to help young children living in
war zones, surrounded by falling bombs and
crumbling buildings.**

Will our country offer them a new life and hope for their future? Will they someday sit in the same seat that you will occupy next week, with all the hopes and dreams that you currently have? Will they have those same dreams for their future?

Gun violence is also one of the many challenges of your generation. You will have a role in the ongoing debate of gun control. Will we enact common sense measures to fight a deadly problem?

You will have a role in the decision as to whether LGBTQ individuals should have the same rights as other human beings? Do we identify people who may be different from us and say their service and contributions to the health and well being of this country and the broader works are not necessary/equal? Or do we support the rights of all individuals to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?

We all have a role in the decisions regarding civil rights for all. This includes reproductive justice for women, and women's civil and equal rights when it comes to health care. It also includes the right to be safe in our streets and homes regardless of the color of our skin, our gender, our ethnicity, our nationality, our choice of who we love. We have the choice to be silent or challenge discriminatory practices. We have a choice to care whether our neighbors have the same rights as we have.

Over the course of the past few weeks, I was able to witness several of our students walk out on an outside performer that was part of a summer orientation program who made inappropriate comments in support of upward social mobility based on skin color. Your message was clear. I applaud you as new students for your courage and stance on these discriminatory remarks. Your departure ended the program and brought the matter to my attention.

Your challenge, and our challenge in working with you as faculty and staff, over the next four years is to probe, question, debate - find out who you really are. Develop your character. But in order to take advantage of the opportunities that await you, you have to be courageous and I implore you to be compassionate. Help one another. Be ready for those decisions ahead and engage in peaceful and purposeful dialogue, listening to one another.

Please become our leaders in the future who embrace opportunities that leave a legacy of

**character, and a legacy of courage, and a legacy of
compassion.**

We are counting on you and you can count on us.

Welcome to Alfred.