

Convocation Address to Students

August 26, 2022

As our University begins its 187th academic year and as you, our new students, embark on the first year of your studies at Alfred, I ask that you keep two phrases in mind and in your hearts.

The first phrase is “seek and you shall find.” Our University’s promise to you, our new students, is to help you realize your purpose. By purpose, I mean what brings you meaning and joy while improving the well-being of others in some appreciable way. Realizing your purpose will bring you greater satisfaction, better health, and more fulsome happiness while making our world a better place.

By enrolling at Alfred University, you have joined a community that offers two great strengths when it comes to realizing your purpose. Those strengths are: 1) the bounty of potential intersections afforded to you by the broad range of curricular and co-curricular programs that we offer, our emphasis on learning by doing, and our ability to attract students as well as faculty and staff with such diverse backgrounds, outlooks, and aspirations; and 2) the abiding commitment of our faculty and staff to help our University fulfill its promise to you of realizing your purpose.

Getting the most out of our University’s strengths, however, will require one vital and active ingredient—you! It will require you—as Amy Dekay and Natalie Reynolds ’24 so eloquently put in their remarks—to engage, to seek, to explore, to try, to do, to make, and to ask. By doing so, you will ensure that, through Alfred University’s power of addition, 1+1 will equal at least 3 when it comes to realizing your purpose.

Intersections. Let me mention just a few recent prior students and how they have drawn on the power of Alfred University’s addition when it comes to our bounty of intersections.

- Aanu Adeloye ’21 joined us from Nigeria and was recognized with a Marlin Miller Outstanding Senior award at his graduation having earned majors in both mechanical engineering and physics while minoring in math. Many students at Alfred bring together diverse majors and minors to forge powerhouse intersections. Aanu is now pursuing a doctoral degree in aeronautical engineering at UT Austin.

At Alfred, Aanu was a highly regarded peer tutor—deepening his own knowledge of the relevant material while helping his fellow students—through what some call “the giver’s gain.” How will you experience the giver’s gain while at Alfred?

- Pearl Dick ’97 took advantage of a study abroad opportunity in Perugia, Italy, while a student at Alfred. She also was mesmerized by the art of glass-blowing. She now resides in the Chicago area leading Project FIRE an artistic, educational, and community-building endeavor relying on glass-blowing to promote healing among young people who have been scarred by gun violence. Among other media outlets, Project FIRE has been featured on NBC Nightly News. Where will your Alfred study abroad experience take you?
- Beryl Torthe ’18 has family roots in Monaco, Botswana, and Madagascar. She came to Alfred interested in a career in investment banking until her father passed away due to cancer. That loss motivated Beryl to study psychology and minor in communication studies so that she could help others who had gone through similarly traumatic events. Beryl was a top tour guide, resident assistant tutor, and volunteer for the local emergency medical team affiliated with the A.E. Hook and Ladder Company. At graduation, she was recognized with a Marlin Miller Outstanding Senior Award. She has gone on to earn a master’s in clinical psychology from Columbia Teacher’s College and is now pursuing a doctorate in clinical psychology at Stanford University.
- Julio Fuentes ’23 came to us from nearby Olean, New York, and was intent on chasing bad guys through criminal justice studies. He was also our football team’s star running back until an injury to his spine while returning a kickoff paralyzed him from the neck down. Julio’s doctors told him that he would never walk again. What the doctors didn’t realize was how Saxon Strong Julio truly was and his determination, through physical therapy to walk again. Aided by Team Julio—a group of dedicated faculty, staff, and alums—Julio has steadily regained his ability to walk under his own power as well as to drive and is now pursuing a degree in psychology so that he can ultimately

help others who have suffered challenges akin to his. Julio ended up finding his purpose in life by persevering through a major life challenge and is a role model to all of us in that regard.

Mentors. The second strength of Alfred University that I encourage you to tap into on your quest to realize your purpose is the faculty, staff, and prior students and their ability to provide guidance. Take an active role in building relationships within this constellation of prospective mentors so as to ensure that, through Alfred University's power of addition, 1+1 will equal at least 3 for you.

While you are ultimately the CEO of you, your ability to identify the North Star of your purpose will be profoundly enhanced by the board of advisors that you develop along the way. Take the initiative to meet with them during office hours; ask them to get together over coffee or a meal to learn more about their field and what has worked for them; and use them as a sounding board when you seek to resolve the challenges that you confront.

Let me mention just a few graduates who have drawn effectively on the constellation of prospective mentors here at Alfred University and thereby tapped into Alfred University's power of addition.

- Cheryl Blanchard '86 is a trustee of ours and the CEO of Anika Therapeutics, a publicly-traded firm headquartered in Boston operating in the medical therapeutics sector. While a student at Alfred, Cheryl studied abroad for a semester in Germany. She credits professor Bill LaCourse for guiding her, especially regarding how to combine coursework in engineering and dance. That unique intersection, one of many that you can forge here at Alfred, fostered her creativity. Among other accomplishments, Cheryl is a member of the National Academy of Engineering.
- Bryan Hill '92 is a University trustee and executive of Fairfax County, Virginia, one of our nation's wealthiest counties. His County has a budget of \$5 billion, larger than some states, and over 12,000 employees. As our Convocation speaker in 2018, Bryan recounted how he came to Alfred from England solely focused on playing

basketball and was in danger of flunking out the first three semesters because he hadn't learned to study. When an injury ended his sports career, he realized that he needed a Plan B. Bryan credits professor Bob Heineman, someone with an entirely different political philosophy, with inspiring his interest in public administration and teaching him how to study and think critically.

- Leo Pamphile '20, MBA '21 coupled an MBA with a bachelor's degree in history. Leo was first attracted to Alfred from the New York City area because of our purple and gold colors (he is a Minnesota Vikings fan). Alfred became home because of the various new friends that he made, his teammates on the football team (Leo was the co-captain of our team in his senior year), and various faculty/staff mentors ranging from defensive coordinator Lazarus Morgan, accounting faculty member Theresa Gunn, and Ade Dining Hall staff member Yvonne Squadrilli. If history is any guide, Yvonne will quickly get to know you by name and warmly greet you as you enter Ade.

As the prior examples illustrate, Alfred University has so much to offer you through our broad range of intersections and mentoring. To benefit from the bounty, it is important for you to engage. As a friend is fond of saying "when you are at a banquet, don't make yourself a bologna sandwich!" "Seek and you shall find" as goes the first phrase.

Now, how about the second phrase. "Fiat Lux!" is our University's motto. Translated into English the phrase means "let there be light!"

Think about all the different ways that we can conceive of light: its power to illuminate; the warmth it affords; and the diverse wavelengths/colors it unifies. These different conceptions make our University's motto especially apt given our promise to you, our students, to help you realize your purpose through the educational intersections and guidance that we provide.

In closing, keep these two phrases in mind as you begin your educational journey with us here at Alfred University... "seek and you shall find" and "Fiat Lux!"

Welcome to Alfred University!