

## **New Student Convocation**

**August 21, 2015**

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Good afternoon. It is my pleasure to welcome you, the Class of 2019, to East Tennessee State University.

I want to begin by asking each of you to step back and reflect upon the past 48 hours. On Wednesday afternoon, I would imagine that the place that you called home for the past 18 years was filled with boxes that you were starting to load into the car. You were probably getting some lessons from your mom and dad about how to sort laundry as well as learning the rules of engagement for your ATM card. And you were also preparing to say goodbye – perhaps for the first time – to your family and friends.

Since then, you have spent your first night in your new home, you have watched or participated in an entertaining hypnotist show, provided more than 10,000 hours volunteering in service to our community, and you have started forming friendships with people who will be part of this new

journey. By the time classes start on Monday, I predict you will have seen a spike in the number of your Facebook friends and Instagram followers.

We are excited to have you as the newest members of the ETSU family.

- You are surrounded by individuals who will become lifelong friends, colleagues, and confidants.
- You are also surrounded by faculty and staff who are dedicated to your education and to your future
- Your experience at ETSU will be transformative. You will be exposed to ideas that will expand your horizons and will be presented with opportunities beyond description.
- Take advantage of those opportunities, particularly those that relate to study abroad. Employers are searching for well-rounded individuals, and an international experience is a growing variable that often differentiates you from other candidates in the job search

The next four years will be the most rewarding years of your life, BUT .... I firmly believe that you only get out of college what you put into it. College is more than a collection of credit hours along the path to a degree. Your college experience will be defined by the investments of your time, talents, and energy both within and outside of the classroom.

— Do not simply drive to class and then drive home. I encourage you to take time to walk this campus and interact with our faculty and staff, for those experiences will broaden your horizons and expose you to new ideas, opportunities, and possibilities. I also encourage you to become active as an undergraduate. Join one of our more than 230 clubs, pledge a sorority, volunteer time with the amazing staff at The Well, or participate in intramural sports. There are multiple options available for you to assume leadership roles on this campus and I look forward to your accomplishments

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over the next four years as you become active members of the ETSU family.

Each day that you journey onto campus, you move one step closer to realizing the dream of receiving your college degree. You will see banners all across campus that read “Graduation begins today.” These signs remind us all that the small acts that we take during the day impact your success. Your decision to go to the library and study on a [Saturday afternoon](#) rather than going home for the weekend takes you one step closer to graduation. The decision to send a faculty member an email the week before the test, rather than the night before, with a question on a topic that you did not fully grasp in class takes you one step closer to graduation.

While we are all here to help you along the journey, you must display initiative and take ownership of your future. This is not high school. You must study, you will be expected to write expository prose, you will be tested, but if you get

engaged with your faculty and advisors they will help you through the rough spots.

It seems like just yesterday that I was in your shoes and preparing to begin my college journey. In fact, my background is not that much different from many of you here today. I grew up in a household with strong parents in the suburbs of our nation's capital, an environment where everything seemed so one-sided, opinions all provided, my future pre-decided, detached and subdivided.

My parents convinced me to major in a health-related field, even though my desires resided elsewhere. I selected my undergraduate institution simply because it had the major that my parents desired for my future. Fortunately, it also had a well-rounded undergraduate curriculum, and I was given the advice from someone (much to my father's chagrin) to: "Find what it is that you love and pursue it with courage and

confidence.” That advice is the reason why I am here today pursuing my passion of service.

As I stand here today I encourage you to do likewise and find your passion. Find the things that you love, for when you find your passion you will be able to answer the question with confidence that everyone is asking, that is “what do you want to be when you grow up.”

I would like to share with you my list of the Top 10 things that I wish I had known when I started college:

- 1.) Get to know your faculty members. They are not only experts in their fields, but they have spent their careers nurturing and mentoring students such as yourself.
- 2.) Get involved early in clubs and organizations. Not only is this a great way to meet new people, it is a chance to deepen your understanding of the institution around you.
- 3.) Study at least three hours per day. No matter how much Red Bull or Diet Coke you drink the night before, cramming will not get you through college.

- 4.) Borrow only what you need, not what you want. I learned this lesson the hard way and spent decades paying off my student loans that went more for the excess of my material desires than paying for college.
- 5.) Get to know those around you, for the friends that you make today will be those that you have for the remainder of your life. Take time to enjoy college, but only after you have studied those three hours.
- 6.) Take more than 12 credit hours each semester if you plan to graduate on time. The math is relatively simple:

$$12 \times 8 = 96 \text{ and } 15 \times 8 = 120$$

If you have not registered for 15 hours please meet with an advisor next week and see what we can do to help you find another class.

- 7.) Avoid the distractions that present themselves along the way and remember that you are making an investment to be here that will yield dividends at commencement. Those distractions may be old friends who want you to

come home for a high school football game, or the boss who wants you to work an extra shift, or a fraternity brother who wants you to go out on a Thursday night rather than study. The temptations will be numerous, but I cannot stress heavily enough that those temptations will turn into patterns of action and habits that will prevent you from realizing your dreams.

- 8.) Thank those in your life who sacrificed so that you can attend ETSU. Before you go to bed tonight call home and say thank you. When my father dropped me off at college his parting words were simply “make us proud.” My first thought was freedom. I never called to say thanks and now that my father is no longer alive I wish every day that I had the chance to say that simple word.
- 9.) Never grow a mustache or part your hair in the middle. I have hidden all of the pictures of my freshman year for that reason.
- 10.) Speaking of pictures, be mindful of your social media presence. Those images, tweets, and posts never go away



and can either help, or hurt you, years later on a job interview.

In closing, I want to welcome you again to the ETSU family. If you see me on campus, please stop and say hello. If you see me in the CPA, please do not foul me or block my shot. Come visit me during open office hours which are every [Tuesday at 8:00](#).

I hope that you make the most of the next four years, for this university is ready to help you make your dreams come true.

Godspeed and Go Bucs!