

# GENESEO

## **New Student Convocation August 25, 2013**

### **Remarks by Provost Carol Long**

We are delighted to welcome you all to the New Student Convocation of 2013! Whether you are a part of the entering class of 2017, a student joining us with some college experience already behind you, an exchange student here for a briefer time, a returning student... we are pleased to see you tonight. We are joined in this year's class by 55 international students representing 19 different countries: Argentina, Belize, Canada, China, France, Germany, Ghana, India, Japan, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, South Korea, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Viet-Nam. I want to thank each of you for being here and for helping us all to understand more directly the global nature of our human community.

The New Student Convocation is intended in many ways to be the culmination of the Weekend of Welcome and the orientation sessions that occurred earlier in the summer. You have met your roommates and many new friends, you have registered for classes, and gotten to know the Geneseo campus and the village a bit. Now it is time, in this convocation, this calling together of the community, for you to be formally inducted or matriculated into our academic community of learners. This ceremony, with its ritual elements recalling the medieval ceremonies of the first European universities, welcomes you as worthy colleagues. It is a rite of passage inviting you to subscribe to the common values of this public liberal arts college: Excellence, Innovation, Community, Diversity, Integrity, Service to Society, and Tradition.

You arrive for your first week at Geneseo at an auspicious time:

Tomorrow, August 26<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate Women's Equality Day, a day proclaimed each year by the United States President to commemorate the granting of the vote to women on an equal basis with men. In 1920 the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution was ratified. Women's Equality Day has been celebrated since 1971 when establishing legislation was introduced in Congress by Representative Bella Abzug of New York. Women's Equality Day is also a result of earlier efforts by other New Yorkers like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, who gathered many to the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention for women's rights just up the road from Geneseo. (though I will say the road was a little harder to travel in 1848 than the Thruway is today)

On Wednesday, August 28<sup>th</sup>, we will celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March on Washington led by supporters of racial equality and marked by the renowned "I have a Dream" oration by Martin Luther King Jr. The 1963 march was a watershed moment in the American civil rights movement because it was attended by 250,000 people and was followed by the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. The bells of our carillon will ring out at 3:00 pm on Wednesday in harmony with bells across the nation as we re-engage King's exhortation to "Let freedom ring" from every hill and mountainside.

You come also to an auspicious place for public engagement. Western NY has long been the home of thoughtful, dignified and disciplined social action. Fine orators have led the way: Red Jacket of the Seneca peoples, who spoke of tolerance and respect for difference to the United States Congress in 1805; or Frederick Douglass, a 25 year resident of Rochester, abolitionist and supporter of women's suffrage, the only African American at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, and the

spokesperson who argued persuasively for the inclusion of the suffrage resolution in the Declaration of Sentiments that emerged from the gathering.

The values that have shaped this region are vitally present in our college today. On your programs you will find statements adopted by the College and carried forward by the Presidential Commissions on Diversity and Community and on Sustainability. I hope you will read them and reflect on them in the months ahead and incorporate their principles into your action and learning. We define diversity and sustainability broadly; we engage diversity of race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, but also diversity of world-view, religion, national origin, age, learning style, and even political philosophy. We see sustainability as environmental stewardship but also as a commitment to ecological, social and economic justice aimed at creating a culture of sustainable and responsible citizenship on campus. And we pursue both values as a means to inclusion, and equity.

The Statement on Diversity and Community includes this assertion:

“Because Geneseo also holds educational excellence among its core values, it recognizes that its progress as a community toward such excellence is predicated on its ability to embrace both the diversity of its members and the vigorous exchange of their ideas.”

It is this capacity to value difference, to learn from each other through respectful and attentive debate, that nurtures and sustains us as an educational community. You have already been engaged with student leaders in discussions focused on the values of the college. The importance of standing up for one another – as true members of a community do – was also discussed. I am confident that as new

members of the Geneseo campus you will stand up for each other throughout the coming semester and the entire academic year

Finally, let me express once again the great sense of anticipation and pleasure my colleagues and I feel at the beginning of the academic year. We are confident in you, and we are here because we want to work with bright, talented young people like yourselves. Welcome to this community, and may we all enjoy the delights of what Martin Luther King Jr. called for: “an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality.”

Thank you for your attention and best wishes for the year ahead.