

Dr. Nunez's Charge to Seniors
Commencement
May 16, 2017

How many of you remember your first day on campus? **RAISE YOUR HANDS!** I am guessing for many of you that was back in August 2013. Since that first day on campus, each of you has been on your own personal journey to get to this day. Along the way, you have gotten to know each other, developed what I hope will be life-long relationships, and enjoyed each other's company in the process. At the same time, you now embark on the next chapter of your lives — that is why we call today “Commencement”, a fresh new start! — as strong individuals and an even stronger, powerful group of people.

As individuals and as a group of educated young adults, I expect you to have an impact in our world in three different ways. First of all, you are going to bring a highly desired set of skills to the workforce.

Regardless of your major, it turns out that employers value and seek the broad intellectual skills you have received through your liberal arts education. In five separate surveys conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities over the past decade, the vast majority of employers — over 90 percent! — say they are less interested in specialized job proficiencies, favoring instead analytical thinking, teamwork and communication skills — the broad intellectual and social competencies available through a liberal arts education.

As Edgar Bronfman, former CEO of Seagram's, said in 2013: *“My advice is simple but well-considered: Get a liberal arts degree. In my experience, a liberal arts degree is the most important factor in forming individuals into interesting and interested people who can determine their own paths through the future. The ability to think clearly and critically — to understand what people mean rather than what they say — cannot be monetized, and in life should not be undervalued.”*

Secondly, I know that each of you will find ways to “give back” to your local community. Whether you have worked at the local soup kitchen through your student club, participated in after-school tutoring programs run by our Center for Community Engagement, or volunteered at a senior center through your residence hall, I know that the majority of our seniors have found ways to donate their time and good will to making our community a better place to live. Wherever you end up — in Connecticut or beyond — make sure you continue to take a portion of your time to make a difference in your community. As Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund has noted, *“Service is the rent we pay for being. It is the very purpose of life, and not something you do in your spare time.”*

And while volunteers are the foot soldiers in the war on poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy and many other social issues in our country, we also need leaders on nonprofit boards and foundations. I see a lot of future community leaders among tonight's graduating class. Make it happen!

Finally, and it turns out this is the most important contribution you can make, I know you will exercise your duties and rights as American citizens. Our nation remains a beacon of freedom and a guiding light for other nations to follow, not because of our military might or our economic power, but because of the political, religious and personal freedoms we enjoy. Those freedoms and rights are not easily given. They have been well-earned and protected over the years by people who have come here from around the world, people who have come together as a nation under the rule of law to govern themselves.

By nature, being a citizen of this great nation means taking action. So I want you to continue to read and learn about public policy. Debate the issues with your friends and in public forums — wherever you get a chance to voice your opinion, and remember not everyone in this world has the right to free speech that we have. Use it!

Vote on those issues and on your representatives. Sit on your school board. Run for other local offices if that is your calling.

Being a citizen is clearly an investment of time, but it is the only way we can protect the freedoms we hold dear. As the French political philosopher Jean-Jacque Rousseau — whose writings heavily influenced our own Founding Fathers — passionately wrote, “*As soon as any man says of the affairs of the State — ‘What does it matter to me?’ the State may be given up for lost.*” So never abdicate your responsibilities as a citizen to someone else. Be willing to question the status quo. And stand up for the values you believe in.

You have learned how to think critically on our campus. You have learned how to ask questions, conduct research and analyze the results. Do this in your workplace, in your community, and as a citizen of our great country. I know you can do it . . . and I am counting on you to do so. We need your enthusiasm, your commitment, and your knowledge more than ever. Let’s get started!