

Dr. Nunez's Charge to Seniors
Commencement
May 21, 2019

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 2015. 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 begin the next chapter of your lives as strong individuals and an even stronger, powerful group of people. That is why we call today "Commencement" — fresh new start!

Tonight's graduates are about to embark on successful careers with the confidence and skills they have earned at Eastern.

With the liberal arts education you received at Eastern, you are ready for professional lives and prepared for the changes you will encounter along the way.

Regardless of your major, employers tell us that they value and seek the broad intellectual skills you have received at Eastern. 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, critical thinking, teamwork and communication skills — the competencies available through Eastern's liberal arts education that you were exposed to through first, the Liberal Arts Core, and then your major.

So you are willing and able to help those less fortunate by giving back to your communities. So now you realize how fortunate you are.

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.

The most important lesson I hope you have learned at Eastern is the knowledge that our great American democracy is only great because of the involvement and participation of our citizens. You have a civic duty to make sure that others do not make your decisions for you.

As Willard Dix, former admissions counselor at Amherst College, wrote "A liberal arts education forces students to see multiple viewpoints and continually challenge their own."

"It removes the comfort of assuming there are "right" answers to big questions or that civilization moves in a linear fashion. In times of great division, the capacity to see others' viewpoints and the imperative to assess one's own become more and more important. We need it now more than ever."

Being a citizen of this great nation means debating the issues with your friends and in public forums — wherever you get a chance to voice your opinion. Most importantly, be willing to say no to whatever doesn't feel right. In the past few years, women in this country have risen up to say no to sexual harassment and gender bias at a level I don't believe we have seen before. Teenagers — not old enough to vote but wise enough to leverage social media — are leading the rising tide against gun violence in this country. And people are using our constitutionally

protected rights of free assembly and free speech to gather by the thousands, to march down city streets, to voice their opposition to the things they disagree with.

This willingness to disagree is at the foundation of our union. Bret Stephens, the noted New York Times columnist, calls disagreement “the most vital ingredient of any decent society. It defines our individuality, gives us our freedom, enjoins our tolerance, enlarges our perspectives, makes our democracies real, and gives hope and courage to oppressed people everywhere.”

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. The day we allow someone else to do our thinking for us, they will. And we will not like the actions they take!

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, commitment, and knowledge more than ever. Let’s begin!