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## An Extraordinary Day

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# An Extraordinary Day

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Saturday August 20, 2016

By Eric Spina

Good afternoon and welcome to the University of Dayton! *Your* University of Dayton.

Class of 2020, this is such an extraordinary day for you, a day that marks the first step on your college journey and essentially the first day of your life as a young, independent professional. I also understand that it is a day in which you have experienced a wide range of emotions.

And speaking of emotions, I offer a special hello to all the parents. Thank you for doing more than your share of “heavy lifting” this morning as you moved your students into their new home away from home.

As a father of two current college students — one a senior and one also a part of a Class of 2020 — I know so well the mixture of emotions you’re feeling today — pride, happiness and, yes, a little nervousness about letting go. Trust me, it *does* get easier.

Now, to our newest students...all of our UD students are special to me, but I want to let you in on a little secret, our little secret: the Class of 2020 will always have an extra special place in my heart because we are starting our journey together. We are taking this first step together: you as the brand-new students and me as the brand-new president. We will learn about UD and our time-honored traditions together, we will get to know the best shortcuts across campus together, we will both learn where to go to get the best sandwiches and the best cookies, and together we will become veteran members of — and contributors to — the UD community.

Today marks a grand beginning on a journey that will challenge and stretch you in ways you can't even imagine.

You will quickly learn that “community” is not a word used lightly here. It's a way of life. It's a shared vision.

You'll discover a community that supports and challenges one another in our Catholic, Marianist tradition. We value collaboration, prize diversity, treasure the gifts of all, and expect positive contributions from each person to the community.

This is, above all else, a community striving to make a difference in the world.

This is **your** community...

...and being part of the University of Dayton community holds a special responsibility. It's a responsibility to make good, safe, healthy choices, and to develop habits of the body, mind and spirit that will serve you well the rest of your lives.

Which is not to say you shouldn't have fun. College should be a joyful time, a time to cultivate friendships, to explore your passions, to learn as much outside the classroom as inside. With the love of your families and the support of this campus community, you will grow in both knowledge *and* character to achieve your potential.

You are on your own for the first time in your lives on a journey of self-discovery and self-awareness. That's exhilarating — and, admittedly, a little frightening.

As you take the first step on your academic journey, I challenge you to stretch yourself farther than you think you can be stretched, ask big questions, leave your comfort zone — and have the courage to risk failure.

Yes, failure.

Sorry, parents, I know that's not a word you like hearing. But we all know that one of the greatest lessons in life is learning to overcome hardship and rebound from failure. It's a learning moment, a time to reach out for help and bounce back stronger, wiser and more resilient. We heard each of you when you told us in the admissions process how you wanted

to make an impact in the world. Your responses were ambitious and inspiring to us as a faculty and staff. The quest you are starting this week toward those aspirational goals and careers will have ups and downs, triumphs and challenges, but ask yourself every day whether you are becoming the person you want to be. And ask yourself what you will do that day to take another step — even a small step — toward that goal you have set for yourself.

As a University of Dayton student, you are called to treat others — and yourself — with respect. You are called to accept the consequences of your behavior, knowing that the everyday decisions you make will influence the rest of your lives.

When faced with peer pressure around alcohol use or risky behavior, think beyond the legal ramifications to your personal values — to the impact your decisions will have on yourself and others.

When faced with conflicts, learn to forgive and accept forgiveness. Handle conflicts with respect, dialogue and understanding.

Perhaps most importantly, I ask you to respect differences, to respect the dignity of each person on this campus. Some of you come from small farming communities in Ohio. Others were brought up in big cities like Chicago and New York. Still others have left their home countries to study here.

You will meet people of various races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, religions and political thought. Reach out and develop relationships with people who are different from you. You will make new kinds of friends and learn more from those relationships than you thought possible about the world beyond your home street: nothing will prepare you better for the world you'll enter after graduation.

We are living in complex and difficult times in our nation and in our world. While we strive to make the University of Dayton a safe, inclusive campus for all students, faculty and staff, we are a microcosm of the larger society and face many of the same challenges.

Over the course of the next year, we will hold a number of campus forums around race, human dignity, difference and trust. We will engage in respectful dialogue about the issues that divide people and what we can do as a Catholic, Marianist university to confront injustice, value diversity and bring people together in unity around the common good.

To the Class of 2020, look around at the people in your lives joining you today. Through their love and support, they have helped develop you for this moment — the moment when you take that first step on a life-changing journey. Let's give them a round of applause and a big hug.

Thank you — and Go Flyers!

