

Welcome, Class of 2020, transfer students, and Individualized Degree Program students who are joining the Trinity family today!

If you haven't guessed from the sight of all of our ceremonial regalia, we are very excited to officially welcome you to your home for the next four-plus years. This is the day that marks the start of your Trinity College journey. I also want to welcome parents, families, and friends. Your support and guidance throughout the years have helped these students arrive at this significant milestone in their lives. And I like to remind all parents and family members that it is OK to cry as you say goodbye to these students. The truth is that is what they are expecting, and they will be disappointed if you don't!

And let me say welcome back to our faculty, staff, and student leaders. You will play an integral role in shaping the lives of our new students now that they have joined us here 'neath the elms.

I would like to begin by sharing with new students what we envision for you as you join our campus community. As new students, we want you to be *curious*; ask questions, push back on what you are told, explore something new. You are here to expand your mind! We ask that you engage as *citizens* in this community of scholars and also as citizens of this nation and the world grappling with complex social and political issues. We expect you to *step outside of your comfort zone* and to embrace a diversity of thinking and learning. We challenge you to gain a *knowledge* of people from places, cultures, and systems of belief different from your own.

Just so you know that I walk the talk, this year our family is hosting a high school student from China who will attend the Watkinson School in Hartford with my son. With our student, we will explore a new culture, we will be pushed outside of our comfort zone at times. We are curious to know and understand him as he is to know and understand our family. We will speak the common language of sports – ultimate Frisbee and basketball – and he is interested in science. We know that this will be a rewarding and challenging experience for all.

Issues of diversity and inclusion and an ability to understand “the other” are both a moral imperative and a necessity for the future. Democracy has always been rooted in the voices of the majority, with the imperative that the voices of the minority are being heard. And we judge the strength of our democracy by how many voices are heard in a process. This is an important reason to consider diversity and inclusion on a college campus, to hear all voices, including the marginalized. But it is certainly not the only reason.

Studies confirm that a diverse team produces more innovative, creative, and better solutions to a problem than a homogenous team. Every Fortune 500 company has active efforts in diversity and inclusion. These companies are constantly trying to expand markets and bring products and services to a broader, more diverse group of customers. And an example steeped in my summer experience – the Final Five gymnastics team for the U.S. was the most racially and ethnically diverse team that the U.S. has ever brought to the Olympics. Together this diverse team demolished the competition. In the U.S., our strength comes from our diversity.

The new jobs that are being created in the U.S. and beyond are more in the small business entrepreneurial sector than in the big industry sector ... create a new product, create a new service. The broader the appeal of your product or service, the more successful you will be as an

entrepreneur. So I ask, how can you appeal and market your idea to people of backgrounds and cultures of which you have no knowledge or appreciation?

Let me tell you about a rising Trinity junior, Micah Onditi. Two years ago, Micah, who comes from Pennsylvania, was sitting exactly where you are sitting. He arrived intending to major in biology and to pursue a pre-med track. But a funny thing happened during his first year at Trinity. He had an idea – an idea sparked by the high cost of his college textbooks. Micah thought, “what if there were a way for college students – not just at Trinity, but all over – to buy and sell used textbooks among themselves?”

This idea led to Micah developing a smartphone application that creates a direct connection between college students who want to buy and sell textbooks to each other. He spent the entire summer following his first year at Trinity working on his app. He quickly became motivated to research how to build an app on a cell phone. He sought out Trinity Computer Science Professor Ralph Morelli, who happens to be an expert in the field.

As a budding entrepreneur, Micah also connected with mentors at reSET, a Hartford nonprofit whose mission is to advance social enterprise. Micah was accepted into reSET’s Impact Accelerator program, which provides entrepreneurs with access to the resources they need to grow their businesses. Also, at my request, Micah met with John Fonfara, a state senator who represents Hartford, who proposed legislation this past year to support innovation and small businesses throughout Connecticut. That bill was passed unanimously by the state legislature.

There are important lessons from Micah’s experience.

First: he chose a market sector that he understood, current college students. They all think that they pay too much for textbooks that they will never use again. And he took an idea and boldly turned it into action.

Second: he used resources available to him and indeed to all of you here at Trinity and in our home city – the capital city of Hartford. It did not matter that Micah was not taking a class from Professor Morelli – Micah simply asked if he could talk with him about an idea. Not a problem. That’s the kind of personal attention you experience with faculty and staff on our campus. And having access to mentors outside of Trinity at reSET, then sharing ideas with a state senator – Hartford’s size makes it unique in providing collaborative opportunities such as these.

The third takeaway: Micah came to Trinity intending to major in biology. But, guess what? He is now pursuing a double major in computer science and economics. That speaks to one of the most exciting aspects of college: do not hesitate to explore something *completely* new.

Here at Trinity, we value intellectual curiosity, diversity and inclusion, and social responsibility. As a small residential college, personal interaction is the heart of what we do best. And as a community, we have a vision characterized by inclusion and diversity and firmly grounded in respect for all members – students, staff, faculty, friends, alumni, and our neighbors in and around Hartford.

During the past few years, students have led our campus in creating a vision of our community. Our **Campaign for Community** is one of our most visible initiatives. Student leaders are focusing this year on “Living the Vision.” What does living the vision mean? For students involved in the Campaign for Community, it means: Value the academic life and opportunities here. Show up in

spaces that are new to you. Accept an invitation from someone with whom you think you have little in common. Reach out and get involved outside the classroom, on the athletic fields. Reach into Hartford and discover your interests. Learn to appreciate others' passions and interests. Listen with empathy. And stand up and speak out where things are not as they should be. Here at Trinity is where you practice life!

And so today, as you begin your Trinity career, I wish for all of you to take advantage of the opportunities that are available to you at Trinity. Each one of you was handpicked to be here. Respect one another and the faculty and staff members who support you. And respect this beautiful campus that we all call home. Be curious; be bold, independent thinkers; and don't forget to have some fun!

Parents and families, please know that everyone here – the faculty, the staff, and our student leaders, through our Bantam Network and our Campaign for Community, in our classrooms, on the athletics fields, and throughout our campus – all of us are waiting to support these students. We are figuratively surrounding them to serve as a safety net *as they spread their wings and take flight, taking responsibility for their own intellectual and social development*. As families and friends bid you farewell, the students should proceed to the tables around the quad that represent their particular Bantam Nest.

Welcome Class of 2020 and all the students, families, and friends who are joining the Trinity College community today. We can't wait to get to know you better!

And remember my motto, Go Boldly and Be Engaged!