

Niagara University New Student Convocation Address
August 24, 2007

Good afternoon. I am truly honored to have been given the opportunity to speak to you at this convocation. First, on behalf of my wonderful colleagues here today, I would like to welcome the students and their families to the Niagara University community. I use the word “community” very intentionally, because I believe that Niagara’s is truly unique. This is what I’d like to impress upon you in my brief remarks here today.

All of you have chosen Niagara among a vast number of other colleges and universities. In recent years, I’ve become more and more interested in why our students make that choice. So I talk with them about it; when I see them around campus, in the few minutes before and after class, or when they stop into my office to chat. As you might expect, the reasons they give vary greatly. Some come because they want a smaller school, a place where they won’t feel like they are “just a number.” Some come because there is a long standing tradition in their families. Their parents, aunts, uncles, and siblings all graduated from NU. Others come because of a connection with the Catholic and Vincentian heritage, and still others because of Niagara’s strengths and opportunities in various academic specialties, sports, or extracurricular activities. I would imagine that if I took a poll of everyone here, most of you would give a combination of these reasons and others, but no two of you decided to come to Niagara for exactly the same reasons.

To me though, what is far more interesting than the different reasons that initially bring people to Niagara, are the reasons that keep people here. That is because when I ask our current students and recent graduates what they really like most about this university, I’ve found that there is a great deal more uniformity in their responses than there is in their reasons for initially coming. This is not to say that Niagara doesn’t have a comfortable small school feel, or a wonderful heritage, or excellent academics and sports. It does have all these things. But in addition to these, there is uniqueness to Niagara that is difficult to explain. Niagara has a certain kind of “feel.” It is evident in the way that students, faculty, staff, and administrators take a selfless attitude toward each other, to the institution, and to the larger community around them. I believe it is this unique feel that makes our students so confident that they’ve made the right choice in coming here for their education.

Nowhere was this selfless attitude more evident to me than this past spring when students in our philosophy club teamed with faculty and administrators to volunteer at the Rivershore picnic. Rivershore is an organization that provides programs and group homes for the developmentally challenged. When volunteers were needed to help with the picnic, our students jumped at the chance. As we worked together setting up tables and preparing food, I can’t tell you how much I enjoyed spending time outside the classroom with these students and colleagues. After the Rivershore residents arrived, the next few hours were filled with board games, sports, food, and a lot of laughter. Many of the students who were there that day were enrolled in my classes, so I continued to see them regularly throughout the semester. For weeks afterward, we reminisced not only about the

fun we had, but also about what a meaningful experience it was and how much we learned from it.

These are the kinds of experiences that make me realize how special the Niagara University community is and how lucky I am to be a part of it. Every day that I'm on this campus, I see people making sacrifices, giving their time, and cultivating their talents for education and benefit of others.

This kind of university community does not happen by accident. It can only persist if the people that make it up continue to take it upon themselves to *make* it do so. Therefore, I would like to close by issuing a challenge to each of you. Our president, Fr. Levesque, reminds us often that "We are University. We are Catholic. We are Vincentian." All these are important aspects of our community.

In the spirit of the university, I challenge you to give nothing less than your absolute best to your academic pursuits. Be diligent. Be honest. Be curious. Have the courage to ask questions and the humility to admit your mistakes. Take advantage of this opportunity to expand your mind; celebrate the gaining of knowledge.

As a catholic institution, Niagara takes seriously the notion of "educating the whole person." Your time here is not to be spent *merely* learning a trade or skill that will get you a job at the end of four years. In addition to that, you should grow intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally as a person. I challenge you to do this.

And finally, as a student at a Vincentian university, I challenge you to embrace the example of St. Vincent de Paul. Give of yourself to the community; to your classmates, to your professors, to administrators, and staff members. And more importantly, give of yourself to those most in need.

I am confident you will meet these challenges and that when you do, you will experience the unique feel of NU that I've tried to describe here today. I am confident the Niagara University community will benefit immensely from having you as a part of it. And so I end my remarks by saying once more, welcome to our community. Welcome to Niagara University.

*James J. Delaney, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor and Chair
Department of Philosophy
Niagara University*