

# President's Charge to the Class of 2017

*by Susan D. Stuebner, Ed.D.*

In a few minutes, we will hear from the two individuals selected to speak to this year's class. As your president, however, I am supposed to impart my words of wisdom as well. When I asked two family members who are soon-to-be graduates what they wanted to hear from their president, they smirked and said, 'Be brief.'

The Class of 2017 will always hold a special place for me as you are the first graduates to which I will have the honor of awarding degrees on behalf of Colby-Sawyer. We have only spent one year together, but you have inspired me with your talents; you have shared your laughter and energy; and you have lifted my spirits thanks to the incredible promise and potential you represent. Thank you so very much.

This Commencement ceremony and the rituals contained within it provide you an opportunity to reflect on your journey to this point and to look forward and celebrate your futures. Although most of you will leave New London later today, I encourage you to remember that there are many aspects of Colby-Sawyer that you may carry with you.

Here in New London, we are graced by beauty every day. I imagine each of you has been moved by some aspect of this beautiful landscape, whether it be Mount Kearsarge holding steady in the distance, the beautiful sunrises and sunsets, the sound of snow crunching under your boots, or the abundant stars in the night sky. As you move on from this special place, finding that beauty on a daily basis may be more difficult. Remember, though, what Henry David Thoreau said: 'It is not what you look at that matters, it is what you see.' I implore you not only to look for beauty every day, but to *see* it – and help others to see it, as well.

There is a proliferation of information in our world that all too often is applied in more simplistic and inaccurate ways than ever. At Colby-Sawyer, you learned how to think critically, to reason, to see connections between disciplines, to question on what basis an argument was made, and to imagine and develop your own contributions to knowledge. Albert Einstein said, 'We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.' In a world that bombards us with information and

data often used incompletely or incorrectly to make arguments that support freighted points of view, we need you to add your voices to the conversation – we need you to question, to seek answers, to have the courage to speak up and not accept the status quo.

Today, we send you off into a diverse world that is, quite frankly, polarized. During your time at Colby-Sawyer, you have confronted differences. Think about how many times you realized that not everyone sees the world the same way you do. Sometimes our instinct is to see those differences as threats, but resist that tendency. Malcolm Gladwell, author of many thought-provoking books including *Outliers*, *Blink*, and *The Tipping Point*, said, ‘The key to good decision making is not knowledge. It is understanding. We are swimming in the former. We are desperately lacking in the latter.’ At Colby-Sawyer, you not only gained considerable knowledge, you have practiced understanding. As you go forward, continue to respect other’s points of views, to seek to understand, to complement one another’s various talents and backgrounds, and to illustrate to those around you that differences do not mean we have to distrust.

Take a moment now and think back to when you arrived at Colby-Sawyer as a new student. Remember how you felt and who you were then. Fast forward to today, and reflect for a moment on how much you have grown. In his now-famous commencement address at Stanford University, Steve Jobs urged graduates, ‘Don’t be trapped by dogma – which is living with the results of other people’s thinking. Don’t let the noise of others’ opinions drown out your own inner voice. And, most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become.’ As you depart today and begin your next chapter, believe and trust in who *you* have grown to be and will continue to become. You are ready for this next step on your journey.

Finally, each of you has had help and support in reaching this day: your family, your friends, our dedicated faculty and staff, and others. Many of them are with you today. I invite you to take a moment to recognize all of them with a round of applause.

Thank you.