

2019 President's Welcome

by Susan D. Stuebner, Ed.D.

Chairman Volanakis, and members of our Board of Trustees ... distinguished guests, faculty and staff, family and friends, and graduates, welcome to Colby-Sawyer's Commencement Ceremony for the Class of 2019.

Graduates, this is your day, and we look forward to celebrating you and all of your accomplishments.

Sadly, for many reasons, not everyone who should be here today is able to be. In your years at Colby-Sawyer, many of you have experienced the loss or decline of loved ones. This morning we think of them and wish they were here to celebrate with us. We think also of adjunct faculty member Dr. Jeanine Ruhsam, who passed away this semester. Jeanine was a dedicated, talented and caring educator who is missed dearly. Many of you wear ribbons as a tribute to her, and there is a chair where she should be sitting today.

I ask now for a moment of silence in memory and celebration of Jeanine and her many talents.

This Commencement ceremony and its rituals provide an opportunity to reflect on your journey to this point and to look forward to your next steps. Today, we celebrate Colby-Sawyer's history, we honor those whose service and leadership exemplify its values, and we anticipate the promise of your bright futures.

Today, we will also honor two women who have led extraordinary careers in healthcare and science. Dr. Susan A. Reeves, an alumna who was Colby-Sawyer's first dean of the School of Nursing and Health Professions, is now the Chief Nursing Executive and Executive Vice President for Research and Education with Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health System. And, Dr. Nancy Gray is the president and CEO of Gordon Research Conferences, which has called Colby-Sawyer one of its homes since 1947.

One of Colby-Sawyer's traditions is to ask the Jack Jensen Award recipient, the college's highest teaching honor, to offer the Commencement Address. This tradition exemplifies our core strength at Colby-Sawyer and the enormous and transformative

power of the relationships between our students, faculty and staff. We look forward to hearing from Associate Professor of Natural and Environmental Sciences Christine Bieszczad in a bit.

As your president, however, I am supposed to impart some words of wisdom as well. When I asked my family for advice about that, they smirked and said, 'Be brief.' With that in mind, as you prepare to leave New London today, I ask that you to think about the many things from Colby-Sawyer that you will carry with you.

Here in New London, we are graced by beauty every day – yes, even in a year when we have endured an especially long winter! I imagine each of you has been moved by some aspect of this beautiful landscape, whether it be the profile of Mount Kearsarge at the edge of our campus, the beautiful sunrises and sunsets, the sound of snow crunching under your boots, or the abundant stars. 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 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 share your perspectives and knowledge just as you have done throughout your time here.

Today, we send you off into a 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 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.

Four summers ago, I attended a week-long conference for new presidents at which I met some amazing people. I want to borrow a thought from one of my colleagues, Dr. Paula A. Johnson, president of Wellesley College. In her first commencement speech, she implored her students to do the following: “Always err in favor of human connection. It’s in relationships – in those connections – that magic happens. It is often where we find the inspiration, where we connect most deeply with the best parts of ourselves.”

Here at Colby-Sawyer, your education has been fostered through the power of relationships – the friends you have made, the faculty who have invested time and support in your success, the staff members who served as your job supervisor or friendly face in the dining hall. You undoubtedly have also learned a great deal from those individuals with whom you do not agree and who see the world differently than you do. What I have come to learn during my years at Colby-Sawyer is that the relationships built here endure and they serve as a great foundation upon which you can build and pursue your dreams. As you head off to new adventures, find strength in the relationships you have built here and draw upon one another as you face your new adventures and next challenges.

Believe and trust in who you have grown to be and will continue to become. I know each of you is ready for what comes next.

Finally, each of you has had someone who supported you along the way ... a parent, a family member, a best friend, a faculty mentor or staff member ... The fortunate among you had more than one champion who celebrated your successes and supported you through your challenges. Many of them are here today. Graduates, I invite you to recognize all of them with a round of applause.

Thank you.