

Inauguration

Thank you.

This is a wonderful day for me, and for my family.

Along with my husband, daughter and son, I want to express how honored we are to be part of the UConn community.

I take on these new responsibilities knowing that I stand on the sturdy shoulders of dedicated faculty and staff, and of my predecessors, including President Jorgensen, for whom this theater is named. He was a man who envisioned the future of UConn as a truly great research university; he was UConn's master builder.

My thanks to the entire UConn community: Faculty, staff, students, alumni, elected officials, and friends of the university have made my

transition seamless. A very special word of appreciation to President Phil Austin, for his guidance, but also for his enduring and selfless service to the University of Connecticut. Thank you Phil.

I would also like to express my appreciation to friends here today, who we met on our path to Storrs, from Chicago, Atlanta, Philadelphia, and New York. I'd like to recognize, in particular, my intellectual inspiration, and one of the most distinguished scholars in the world, Elihu Katz, who made the trip from the University of Pennsylvania with his wife, Ruth. Elihu – you exemplify the life of the mind and the magical power of teaching.

My special thanks to Governor Malloy, for his recognition of higher education's value to the future of our state. He possesses a keen understanding of what this University means to

our citizens. As a political scientist, I pay close attention to the political landscape in general. And I am grateful, that in Connecticut, we have one of the most forward thinking governors in the United States, as well as an extremely supportive state legislature.

And to Larry McHugh, the chairman of the UConn Board of Trustees: I would not be here without you, and I could not be more grateful for your wisdom, and your steady, visionary leadership.

Finally: To my mother and my family, thanks for everything you have done to support and encourage me. I was joking to a colleague that the pressure is on today: I have to match up to the speech my brother Jeff made last year, upon his inauguration as the 16th president of Colgate. Not that we're competitive. But I realize that few people here today heard that terrific speech, so I'm probably safe!

I have attended scores of presidential inaugurations, and heard many very fine inauguration speeches: It's pretty much impossible to be original on the big themes.

Along with the other prestigious public flagship universities, at UConn we believe in excellence, in the value of the liberal arts, research, and service to our citizens. UConn today is a growing, comprehensive research university, and we want precisely what institutions like ours always seek: high achievement, discovery, and relevance in the lives of our students. and in the economic development of our state.

These are the most difficult of times for one of western society's oldest institutions. Higher education still cherishes and nourishes learning, as we were meant to do. But we are also our society's most viable means to change lives and

make the American dream possible, both for the high achieving student who needs to be continuously challenged, and the student who has raw talent, but needs the opportunity to refine and focus.

At UConn, we successfully serve students from all geographic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, including a large influx of courageous veterans coming back home to college, men and women who have seen the kind of trauma and suffering I hope most students never will.

Thanks to this very fine faculty, we are an outstanding representative of American public higher education, a place to get a break and get a chance, even when you come from modest means, with no family wealth as your safety net.

Both of my parents were from modest means, and

public higher education was their way to success; education was that enchanted, transformational force we know it to be. My father fled the Nazis, went back to Europe to fight them, and then attended college on the GI bill, like so many UConn students did in the past, and do today. It was a dream come true, as it was for my mother, daughter of a struggling single mom, who was able to go to Brooklyn College only because it cost a few bucks a semester.

It's no wonder that they, and others of their great generation, love this country. Where else in the world was there a massive system of public higher education *designed* to be open to poor ambitious immigrants?

Despite the current financial struggles we are experiencing in education today, it remains true that no other nation has built an infrastructure to enable the grand ambitions of so many of its

citizens. It is why public universities like UConn matter so immensely, and why leaders like our Governor and our trustees advocate so strenuously for us, and fight to protect us.

At its core, public higher education is about inspiring our students. And at UConn, we give them freedom, support, and options. Every member of this faculty and staff knows that we are here to enable young people to become successful. Their parents trust us with their sons and daughters, and we know our students are precious.

And in return for our good efforts, we benefit from the positive life force that our students exude. It's one of the reasons I love university life. Students are an antidote to the down economy, our two wars, and the incivility so prevalent in today's public discourse. They help create a dynamic environment with their positive attitude,

inquisitiveness, their energy, and their sparkle. They do have the optimism and potential to change the world.

At this moment, in 2011, the future seems particularly ambiguous. What can we do, at UCONN, to help students navigate through the complexity and uncertainty?

My answer is what you might expect from a political scientist: In addition to helping students achieve academic success, we need to teach students to be *engaged citizens*, in the best sense of our most hopeful democratic theorists. Active citizenship empowers people to *create* the future rather than being helpless victims of events and social forces.

Universities are places where faculty responsibility is more than forcing information and skills into students' heads, readying them for

the job market. Most faculty have a far loftier idea of what universities do for students. We believe that learning how to be a contributing citizen is both glorious and possible, and that it happens at a university.

Not all political theorists, even the ones who loved democracy, thought people were capable of being citizens. Far from it. The ancient Greeks were hopeful, and the enlightenment philosophers were electrified by the possibilities for true democratic citizenship. But more recently there has been a turn toward worry and fear. In the late nineteenth century, the great sociologists – Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Tonnies -- predicted that modern men and women would become mindless cogs in the machinery of an inhumane and frivolous capitalism.

Alexis de Tocqueville admired America, as he traveled our country in the mid-19th century. But

he was skeptical of superficial democratic ways, seeing conformity and tyranny beneath the surface of even our beloved New England town meetings.

By the early 20th century, Walter Lippmann, the shrewdest analyst of public opinion of his day, warned us that the common person could never keep pace with public affairs. And by the mid-20th century, many political scientists were distraught, and threw up their hands altogether, as study after study revealed a shocking level of ignorance among American citizens, many of whom could not even name their own congressman.

The doubters are right to some extent. Too many people are uninformed and uninvolved, finding the political and social world around them to be baffling, maddening, or dull.

But that's not most people, and it is certainly not

the culture of a university. Young people possess all the right inclinations and sensibilities to be very fine citizens, and it is up to us to underscore their civic responsibilities.

So what does this mean, for a large research institution like UConn? What are we, as faculty and staff, supposed to do? And what should our students do? While not claiming to have all the answers, I do know that we can and will do better in teaching argument and encouraging even more engagement. We can support our students in becoming loving parents, reliable neighbors, keen citizens, and human beings who make a difference.

This can be accomplished through the social sciences, the sciences, the humanities, and our professional schools. In fact, the immense power of UConn is in our astounding breadth: we learn from brilliant researchers and instructors, from

our outstanding scientists, writers, historians, engineers, physicians, dentists, artists, attorneys and musicians. We learn from the leaders of our student organizations, and the excellence of our student-athletes, as well as from the coaches who inspire that incredible discipline. And we learn from the natural world around us, including our cows meandering out on horse barn hill, who, in addition to being fine veterinary specimens, make some darn good ice cream!

By appreciating the love of learning, the life of the mind, the natural history of this beautiful countryside, our students will value their university, their state, their nation, and their world. They will recognize their responsibility to preserve what is good, becoming people who lead productive lives without cynicism or despair.

My thanks again to everyone gathered today. No president leads a university alone, no matter the

strength of his or her will, and this university needs the active participation of everyone who is willing to join us and shape the future.

The Board of Trustees and our Governor have challenged me to take UConn to a new level. I am humbled by your trust in me, and inspired by the work ahead. I look forward to many years of collegiality, cooperation, and accomplishment on behalf of our students, our alumni, and the great state of Connecticut.

Thank you.