**Dr. Katherine Sinsabaugh**

**2019 Commencement Remarks**

Good afternoon, everyone!

Thank you, Dr. Young, Board of Trustees, fellow faculty members, families, friends, and most importantly, STUDENTS, for coming to this celebration of learning. I am so proud and humbled to be sharing my thoughts with you today.

When I was first invited to deliver this address, like any normal person, I panicked. After my initial panic subsided, I got down to thinking, and I think what made me most nervous was the idea of delivering “wisdom” to a group of people. To be honest, I felt it was a bit presumptuous to stand up here and pretend I somehow know all the answers. Don’t get me wrong--I’ve been around a while, but let’s not forget-- I am one person, of a certain age, with a certain social and cultural background, and a unique set of life experiences. I’m a teacher by trade, my students can tell you that I *like* to talk, but today, I wanted to present you, the graduates, with somewhat of a well-rounded version of “wisdom”. So... I started asking around. A little bit of research, if you will. And so, I’d like you to hear a bit of what I learned though this research. I promised those with whom I spoke that I wouldn’t disclose their identities (only their ages), so, my education students, believe it or not, I’M NOT GOING TO CITE MY SOURCES! :) I set out with the same question for a variety of people at a variety of ages-- and that question was:

**“What do you think college graduates need to know?”**

To my surprise, each person I asked, regardless of age, had a nearly immediate answer. They knew, without hesitation, exactly what they thought today’s college graduates need to know. So, I’m here today to share the knowledge I gained through this experience.

87: I began my research by speaking with a nearly 88 year old woman. I asked her what she thought college graduates should know, and without hesitation, she said to **value your education**. She explained that she felt we are moving from a time when education was cherished to a time when it’s being devalued. She wanted you all to know that you’re here, you made it, and you should VALUE that experience.

I worked my way backwards to:

A couple of 83 year olds, and, also without hesitation, they mentioned that college students today need to use common sense and need a bit of practice with using manners. They are tired of seeing people looking down at their phones, rather than down at their children.

59: A 59 year old wanted you to understand that we are living in an ever-changing time, a time in history when your ultimate job, career, or passion may not have even been invented yet!

42: A 42 year old said, pursue your passion, do what you love; and a 39 year old advised you all to focus on what you love, because life is short and it only makes sense to do what makes you happy. Never let anyone tell you otherwise. If you have enough determination and are willing to work hard, you can be successful at whatever you want to achieve in life.

23: A 23 year old wanted you to know that you don’t need to have your whole career figured out right now, your interests and skills will change and adapt. She also wanted you to know that you should be gentle with yourselves and try not to force yourself into a mold that isn’t right for you.

I’ll skip the teenage years, because, well...you know...

9: The 9 year old I asked was very definite about his advice. He recommended that you find something that inspires you, come up with a plan, set some goals, and stick to your goals, no matter what.

7: The 7 year old I asked put it simply--she wanted you to do two things:

1. Be kind to everyone and 2) don’t litter

And so here’s what I’ve learned…

88: As for the 88 year old’s advice, regarding valuing your education--what I take from that is to simply to be proud of what you’ve done so far, and don’t forget you’ve done it. YOU have worked hard, YOU have invested in your education and yourselves, and nobody can take that from you.

83: Thinking about the 83 year olds and their advice regarding common sense, what I take from that is to remind you to trust your judgment, to approach situations logically, and to make decisions that positively impact the greatest number of people. Also, regarding manners, truly take their advice to heart--practice looking at people, particularly children, when they are speaking. Show others that they are important.

59: The 59 year old, who reminded us that your ultimate career may not yet even exist--reiterated to me the importance of being innovative, forward-thinking, and unafraid to try something new and different. Be the person who speaks out, be the person with a new idea, be the person who disagrees, sometimes. That’s how new ideas are born.

42 & 39: Our people in their late thirties and early forties felt it was important for you to pursue your passion. Upon reflecting on that advice, I am reminded of something I truly believe. If you find something that you love and that you’re good at, you’ll find a way to be successful. People will tell you “no”, people will doubt your abilities. Don’t listen to them--they aren’t your people.

23: The 23 year old reminded us that we don’t have to have it all figured out right now. I’d say she wants us to remember that as people, we grow and change, and it’s okay to listen to your mind and heart and make changes when needed. Be who YOU want to be, and allow yourself time to be flexible.

9: In a bit of contrast to the 23 year old, the 9 year old reminded us to come up with a plan, set some goals, and make sure you meet those goals, no matter what. What that means to me is: Don’t sell yourself short--set high expectations for yourself and believe in them! Push yourself, you’re stronger than you think!

7: And last, our seven year old, who reminded us to be kind and not to litter. What I take from that would be the importance of taking care of our Earth and the people who live on it--**no matter who they are, what they look like, and where they are from**. Our Earth serves as a wonderful home for us--we all have the duty to protect it.

And finally, I began the process of writing this speech by trying to think of my own advice, before I decided to reach out to others. My research has allowed me to come around to something that was told to me as a child and impacted my life tremendously. For me--it boils down to three words I hope you’ll remember. **ALWAYS** **BE YOURSELF**. You were created to be you. Surround yourself with people who care for you and support you, and I think that will help you find even more success than you’ve already found!

I left one respondent for the end here, and that is a four year old, who, as many young children do, renewed my sense of delight with the world. When I asked her, “What do you think college graduates should know”, she gave me an answer that needs no further analysis. In response to my question, she looked way up at me, cocked her head to the side, and said “I don’t know, can we play??”

On behalf of the faculty and staff at SUNY Orange... We’re so proud of who you are and who you’re becoming. Congratulations and best wishes always!

Thank you.