

Convocation 2016 – Margaret Klawunn

“The fall quarter was just a tall order.”

My daughter quoted Chance the Rapper when I told her I was writing convocation remarks. But, I said, the incoming class at UCSB is more than up to the fall quarter. And I am going to take a few minutes now to tell you all the reasons why I know you can be successful.

Good afternoon. I am Margaret Klawunn, and I am so happy to welcome you as your Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. This is an exciting moment as you officially begin your journey as students at UCSB. Welcome to the families, friends, faculty, staff, and students.

To the incoming class, you are already making history. You have already changed this institution. You are the most academically qualified class in the history of UCSB, and you are also the most diverse class in the history of UCSB.

This incoming class has the highest number of under-represented minority students, the most Native-American, African-American students, and Latinx students, and the most students who are the first in their family to attend college. We value the diversity of life experience in this class - -the youngest member of the incoming class is 16 and the oldest is 64. We appreciate our veterans, transfer students, and international students – all populations breaking records.

You will change UCSB, and we are excited to walk the journey with you.

I have some additional good news for you today: the value of your degree from UCSB is going up even as you sit here today, and I want to talk to you about the ways it can become even more valuable with some effort from you.

Your citizenship at UCSB begins now.

As the Chancellor mentioned, UCSB was just ranked the 8th best public research university by US News and World Report. That is very exciting, and you can help maintain that ranking. It is money in your pockets.

So, how can you as brand new first-year students continue to make history and support the increased value of your degree from UCSB? You can start right now by affirming your intention to take your citizenship at this University seriously and by affirming your investment in this community. We are going to make that pledge right now, and then I want to say a couple of things about what that means.

At my convocation when I started college, the Provost told us to look to our right and look to our left and one of us would not be there in 4 years. Needless to say, that exercise did not encourage our investment in our campus community, nor did it inspire our best work. It was a scare tactic.

Here's what you are going to do right now that is illustrative of UCSB and the character of our campus. I would like you to turn to the persons on your right and left and shake their hands and say "I support your success" because your success is bound up with your fellow students. Please take a minute right now. Shake each other's hands and say "I support your success at UCSB."

Thank you. Okay. Now you said it. So how are you going to do it? And how are those of us on this stage going to help you do that, to support each other's success? Well, as your Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, I commit myself and my colleagues in Student Affairs. Your AS President, Austin Hechler, who you will hear from today, he and the AS Senate have been working to prepare themselves to assist. The Chancellor, Senior Officers, and distinguished faculty on this stage will support you.

I'm going to talk about two ways that we will support you in increasing the value of your degree and being good citizens in support of each other's success.

1. Change Your Mind. Even if you are the smartest and most rational person in the audience, there has to be at least one deeply held belief that you could benefit from changing. Commit yourself to engaging in civil discourse and open your minds to new ideas and perspectives even when those ideas are hard to listen to, even when they are very hard to listen to.

You may have noticed that, as a country, the United States and our leaders (including those who hope to be our leaders) are not doing this very well right now, but you have a chance to do it better.

The diversity of this class enriches your educational opportunities – learn from each other.

It is going to be difficult at times, but we can do better at UCSB than the uncivil and intolerant national debates we are hearing.

If you came to campus this summer, you heard us quote former UC President Clark Kerr saying, “The University is not engaged in making ideas safe for students. It is engaged in making students safe for ideas.”

What we did not have time to tell you at orientation, but I want to explain now, is that the rest of the quotation and the context for it are very important.

I will say it again including the couple of sentences that follow the part you heard:

“The University is not engaged in making ideas safe for students. It is engaged in making students safe for ideas. Thus it permits the freest expression of views before students, trusting to their good sense in passing judgment on these views. Only in this way can it best serve American democracy.”

You are very lucky, sitting here in September 2016 that Kerr took this stand in 1961. We, as university leadership, need to live up to Kerr's legacy and not make decisions about what ideas you can handle; rather we need to trust that you have the skill to make your own evaluation, and to trust that our job as educators is to help you hone your own skills for evaluating ideas. If Kerr had not taken this stand for the UC system, it is quite possible that in 2016 you would not be able to "Feel the Bern" on this campus. Bernie Sanders' socialism might have prevented him from being allowed to speak because what Kerr defended in 1961 was the opportunity to have a Communist speak at UC Berkeley. Kerr did not think ideas were dangerous, and he took this stand to the detriment of his own career by not giving in to the political pressures of the time.

We are committed to free speech and academic freedom, and we will not determine for you what can be heard on this campus. We will, however, support you in having civil dissension and in speaking up for your rights and your perspective. This will be harder in practice than it sounds now, but it will serve you well. It is one of our most important missions to support you in listening to, evaluating, challenging, and learning from new ideas.

The pledge you made to each other a few minutes ago, to support each other's success, reflects the "I heart UCSB" pledge to respect the rights and dignity of others and to understand that your actions impact your community. You will have other opportunities to reaffirm these values. You will also have opportunities on campus to practice listening to each other around controversial topics. I encourage you to look for the Resilient Love series, beginning Oct 4-5 with a spoken word performance and dialogue.

2. The second way you can increase the value of your degree and live up to the pledge you made here to your classmates is by investing in improving this community, on campus and off. Even in the few days

you have been on campus, you have met other students who are putting their time and effort into holding themselves and others to a higher standard of behavior (shout out to your residence hall assistants ). I will talk about a couple notable examples of community engagement in a minute.

All of the research about what employers look for in hiring suggests that the personal qualities that an applicant can demonstrate through experiences that prove capacity for leadership, teamwork, resourcefulness, and drive are as important, or even more important in distinguishing the candidate who is hired, than content knowledge. You have a laboratory here to develop and demonstrate your capacities for leadership. You can make a difference on this campus and in the community. Take the risk.

Last year a group of students decided that they wanted to make Isla Vista a safer community and that they wanted to improve interactions between students and the police. You will hear about this effort from Associated Students -- it is called UCIV, and it is a group of student volunteers who take shifts on weekends in Isla Vista looking out for the safety of their fellow students and making sure that students understand the laws and policies about parties, alcohol use, and noise, among others. They stepped up where they saw that improvements could happen and that a student-led peer-to-peer effort could be more effective than more police or more university management.

Another notable Associated Students' effort last spring was the Beloved Community Conference in Isla Vista that brought together families who live in Isla Vista with students, community agencies, faculty, and staff to recognize and celebrate what is unique and powerful about Isla Vista, and to strengthen the connection between the university and IV.

There are certainly many other examples and opportunities for your involvement in leading your peers as there are many wonderful peer education programs at UCSB, including many in Student Affairs.

Join the momentum by expecting more from yourself and holding your peers to a higher standard and commit yourself to engaging in one of the many opportunities for doing this work, or start a new effort if you see a need. We will support you.

Finally, for those who have the privilege to vote, watch for our voter registration drive on campus. Gauchos have the highest voter registration levels, and it's just another way to exercise your citizenship that is particularly important this fall. There are even tables here today.

Remember I said you are making history? If you engage in the rigorous, challenging conversations to be had, if you support each other's success during your time here, you – in all the glory of your achievements and the life experiences you bring here as a new student – you will change us and you will change UCSB. I can't wait to walk with you on that journey. All best wishes!