



Opening Convocation

*Welcome from President Ralph Kuncel
Memorial Chapel*

Delivered on Wednesday, August 29, 2018, as part of New Student Orientation

Good evening. I have the privilege and honor of serving you — as the 11th president of this great University and to welcome all of you — incoming first-year students, parents, family members, faculty, and special guests — to this celebratory occasion in your lives and in the life of our University.

I will talk to you today essentially about how to become a scholar and develop the real you . . . to find your place.

For most of you, this is the first day of arriving here at Redlands. For many of you, it is the first time at any college, and the first time you will be living away from home. I know you are looking around and wondering about your future here. Maybe you're sitting beside someone who will be a lifelong friend. Maybe your heart will be captured — or broken — by someone sitting in this hall right now. Some of you will create amazing works of art in our classrooms. Some of you will break athletic records on our fields. Many of you will find your passions. And odds are only a few of you will encounter failure. As you prepare to embark on the next four years of your life, it is worth reflecting on this momentous occasion, one that you have all worked so hard your whole life to get to.

Simply by being here, I see that you are prepared to live . . . to thrive . . . to learn . . . to grow. By choosing the University of Redlands, you have already demonstrated your desire to be part of a century-old community that is committed to the life of the mind *as well* as to the enrichment of your spirits, emotions, and social and physical well-being.

If Convocation is your formal welcome to the University of Redlands, Orientation Week is the time for you to navigate your new surroundings and get your bearings. It's equally important, because as you begin this new journey, there will surely be times in your college career where you'll feel out of place, unsure, and certainly uncomfortable. That's not necessarily a bad thing; in fact, college is all about being slightly uncomfortable. You've left your home and stepped out of your comfort zone to be here. By the same token, being slightly uncomfortable can challenge you, and push you to achieve goals you never thought you could pursue.

Here at Redlands, you will test yourselves by taking intellectual risks; you will grow by embracing interactions with your mentors and with other students; and you will find answers to your questions by delving into nuanced layers of understanding in your courses. Here at Redlands, you will not only discover responsibility, you will also find ways to express yourselves fully, with resilience, patience, and accountability.

And your grand adventure — your journey to find your place emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually for the next few years— doesn't start until you figure out how the University of Redlands can help place you in this world.

Now why do I spend so much time emphasizing relationships in college? You came here to study, and major in something, and get some job afterwards, right? Well, that's not quite right. You see, the best study of the connection college grads saw between how they spent their time in college and their fulfillment was recently done by Gallup and Purdue University. It was a mammoth study questioning 100,000 American graduates. Fulfillment was NOT found in attending a prestigious or selective private college, nor did a particular major matter. The game changers were these three things: (1) Establishing a deep connection with a faculty or other mentor; (2) Taking on a sustained academic project like research or some creative mentored independent work; and (3) Playing a significant part in a campus organization. I'll tell you two stories about how this works.

Giselle Martinez, still here in the class of 2020, sensed that she could find her place at the University of Redlands when she visited campus and felt our community for the first time. Now a Hunsaker Scholar and a global business major, Giselle is continuing to challenge herself by studying abroad at the London School of Economics as part of her coursework. Giselle credits our Bulldog community of friends and mentors for helping her venture outside her comfort zone — and realize her potential.

Rainier Aguilar, graduated last April in the class of 2018, found his place at Redlands as a student-athlete. He held an emphasis in justice and law at the Johnston Center for Integrative Studies, and he also found a solid spot on the U of R baseball team. Rainier had great athletic success here at Redlands, breaking athletic records as well as becoming the team's most valuable player. It wasn't a surprise when the San Diego Padres drafted him into the Major Leagues as a catcher this summer; his place here at Redlands led him directly to where he is now.

The experiences of **Giselle** and **Rainier** speak to the heart of the Redlands experience. Our job, as faculty, coaches, administrators, as your educators . . . is to help guide you to finding that place, one that you will take with you for the rest of your lives. It is incumbent on me, and all of us on this stage, and the professors who will be your mentors, to help you develop three ways: as members of a community; as engaged citizens of the entire globe; and eventually as the leaders of principle we so need. Redlands is committed to rising to this challenge and determined to achieve this goal, as it has for more than a century.

About 70% of you — plus 2nd to 4th year students — will live on campus this year. Some of you come from thousands of miles away. Others come from neighboring cities. Each of you brings to Redlands different beliefs, cultures, talents, and ideologies. Within our walls, you will encounter professors, administrators, staffers, and community members who also have very dissimilar worldviews. Our walls don't keep people or ideas out. Instead, in this University, we strive to come together to create a force — a community that nurtures an environment that's essential for learning. Exploring other people's lives and diversity — with all the elements of strangeness, discomfort, and difference — make studying at the University of Redlands an extraordinary experience. You go beyond what you learn in books to embrace a reflective understanding of our world and proceed from information to insight, from knowledge to meaning.

The University of Redlands is wholeheartedly committed to providing a positive learning, living, and work environment for everyone. By welcoming intellectually curious students of diverse backgrounds, we seek to develop responsible citizenship as part of a complete education. Here at Redlands, we're all about debating and learning to speak up, especially when the issue at hand affects our senses, our minds, and our souls. We read, learn, and discuss world events — and fully expect you to engage and participate in healthy interactions.

We can even start right here, right now! It may be only your first day here, but let's talk to each other, and share our ideas. You must have some first impressions. Anyone? I'll give a Redlands t-shirt to the

first few people in the audience to interact with me right now, so ask me a question, or share a new idea, or simply tell me how you are feeling right now in this moment.

As a member of the community of Bulldogs, you will be encouraged to engage within this powerful community. I always like to say that Redlands is a place “where everyone knows your name.” (That phrase, by the way, comes from the hit 1980s TV show Cheers, which was created by our Redlands alumni Glen and Les Charles!). Take the first steps to make sure people know your name by getting involved in something, sooner rather than later. Study hard and build relationships with your faculty. Join an organization — or better yet — build a new one with your peers! That’s what happened six years ago when first-year student entrepreneurs re-envisioned our own campus radio station, KDAWG.

When you walk out of these gates as a lifelong member of the Bulldog community, you will be part of an alumni population that is discerning and thoughtful. As you make your life choices, you will be cementing your values — the ones that are fundamental to who you are — hopefully as members of this alumni community of learners, as Americans, as part of a continuum that seeks to be the good you choose to see in this world.

Please take a moment right now to consider what finding your place and your purpose will mean here at Redlands. Our hope is that here, you will learn to balance your heart and your mind in ways that will force you to examine your moral options, open you up to new experiences, deepen your passions and find new ones.

On this momentous day, my message for you is to embrace everything this institution has to offer. Independence may be harder than it looks, but don’t worry . . . you now have a community of Bulldogs to lean on.

The nation of Israel’s first (and only) female Prime Minister **Golda Meir** had these short words of advice about exploring life’s possibilities. She said, “Trust yourself. Make the most of yourself by fanning the tiny, inner sparks of possibility into flames of achievement.”

It is here at Redlands that you will fan these inner sparks of possibility to create a place for yourself. A place where you can discover your best self.

To the Class of 2022, I’m excited to see how you are going to make the University of Redlands your place. Welcome to the community of Bulldogs!