

Convocation 2012 Script
September 13, 2012, 12:15 p.m.
Fine Arts Center, Hayes Concert Hall

Good afternoon.

I'm Mary Tanner, interim provost, and it is my honor to welcome you to the 2012 University Convocation.

The concept of convocation in higher education dates back centuries. Over time, campuses around the world have adopted the convocation as a gathering to address the state of the university and issues facing the academy.

On September 15, 1886, faculty, staff, students, and community leaders gathered for the first time in Chattanooga to celebrate Matriculation Day on this campus. In the ensuing 126 years, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends have met in convocation in various settings to discuss the work of the University and its future. We now hold convocation on or near September 15 each year to celebrate the beginning of a new academic year and

to honor the University Founders and Pioneers who came before us.

From the city's earliest days, Chattanooga supported the idea of providing more educational opportunities in the community. One leader stated the case the University quite simply, "We need more education more than we need more railroads."

A commitment to education as the pathway to opportunity for individuals and for society remains strong in Chattanooga today. This campus continues to benefit from passionate relationships with donors and supporters whose only connection to UTC is a love for this community and the recognition that everyone gains from a well-educated citizenry.

And at no time has the need for education been greater than today. In our information age—where decisions that can affect the political, military, and economic stability of the world are communicated instantly across continents to

millions of individuals—the ability to think critically, to synthesize data, and to take action based on sound evidence is crucial.

Here in Tennessee, the state legislature has championed that idea with the Complete College Act. In an effort to ensure that more Tennesseans earn a college degree and thereby better position our state in the national and global economies, the Complete College Act ties higher education funding to outcomes. The bottom line is simple: we must graduate students in order to survive as an institution of higher education in Tennessee.

This idea should not sound as foreign or unusual as it might seem. After all, educating students is why we exist. When students and their families hear our motto—“We shall achieve”—it is the promise of greater opportunity and a brighter future that they expect. And today, as it has been for more than 125 years, it remains the responsibility of The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga to fulfill that expectation.

Represented in the reserved seats are individuals who believe in the power of learning and are dedicated to preserving opportunity through access to education.

- Representing the Faculty is Faculty Senate First Vice President and Professor of Education, Dr. Kay Cowan.
- Representing the exempt employees is Exempt Staff Council chair, Jean Dake
- Representing the non-exempt employees is Employee Relations Committee chair, Kelly Griffin
- Representing the students is Student Government Association President Bradley Bell.
- And those who will have a role in today's program, are:
 - Dr. Sara Jorgensen, Chair of the First Year Reading Experience Program and an assistant professor of African and World History.
 - Our keynote speaker today, who will have a more formal introduction later, Warren St. John; and
 - Our Chancellor, Dr. Roger Brown.

And now it is my great pleasure to introduce our chancellor Roger Brown. Under his leadership, UTC continues to grow and achieve, including record enrollment, record external grant support, and record private gift support—all measures of a vibrant, healthy campus.

Please welcome, Chancellor Roger Brown....

Good afternoon and thank you for that warm welcome. I want to echo Dr. Tanner in thanking you for joining us here today as we celebrate this longstanding tradition in higher education and on our campus.

Part of the tradition of convocation at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga has been the delivery of a State of the University address, and for the past seven years, it has been my extreme pleasure to fulfill that task.

Truthfully, it has been quite simple. For all of the years that I have served as Chancellor of this campus, you have earned record enrollment. The campus physical plant has

been growing, with buildings coming up out of the ground and major renovation projects from one end of campus to the other. Generous friends and donors have kept our private fundraising efforts successful. Talented and dedicated faculty and staff have made steady increases in grant funding. Students have achieved across all disciplines and in every athletic playing venue.

Our motto is “We shall achieve.” And you certainly have.

So at this, my last Convocation as your Chancellor, I am pleased and honored to report that all of these continue to be true for this campus. You are strong. You are healthy. You are making progress toward an ever brighter future. And I have been honored for the opportunity to be a part of this blue and gold family.

For any of you who might not have heard, I have decided to retire earlier than I previously announced. My last official day on the UTC administration will be September 30. As you know, this past year has been particularly difficult for

me personally. The death of my wife Carolyn was a severe blow and I realize that for my health as well as the health of this campus, I need to take time to heal and reflect and to allow others to guide this great institution while I do so.

Your outpouring of comports and support throughout this entire year has meant more to me than I can adequately express. The friendships and the experiences that I have enjoyed here will be with me forever, and I wish each and every one of you all the best. To borrow from William Shakespeare, "I can no other answer make, but thanks, and thanks."

And so it is from the perspective of someone who loves this campus, who has witnessed its great success and who believes in its tremendous future that I stand before you today and suggest that we must look inward to address the biggest challenge and the greatest opportunity before this campus.

In her opening remarks, Provost Tanner introduced the Tennessee Complete College Act and explained that our new funding formula is based on our outcomes: the number of students who are retained here and the number of students who graduate from UTC. Although these numbers have always been of concern, our funding was tied more directly to our enrollment, and so a consistent growth trend was critical to the fiscal health of the campus.

And that remains true, even with the new requirements. We are fortunate that more students and their families continue to see the value in a UTC education. Our students graduate with an average student loan debt of just over 13 thousand dollars, below the state and national averages and the lowest in the University of Tennessee system. In fact, UTC remains such a good educational investment, that U.S. News and World Report listed our campus as among the Best University Values in the South in its most recent rankings—they just came out yesterday, so this is hot off the presses.

We have taken significant steps to improve academic advisement on this campus so students have the guidance they need to progress toward a degree. Initiatives such as the establishment of the Center for Advisement and Student Success, the creation of a First Year Studies program, and the implementation of the First Year Reading Experience, which we are going to hear more about in a few minutes—represent just a few of the steps we have taken as a campus to reach the Complete College Act goals for our campus.

Even as idea as obvious as tracking freshman absentees to encourage better class attendance has yielded fruit, as we saw our retention rate increase to nearly 70 percent.

But it appears we were reaching low hanging fruit, and perhaps we have not gotten to the core issues yet. This year, our freshman retention dropped again to 66 percent. We have done better, and we must continue to strive for more.

We are about to hear from Warren St. John, whose story *Outcasts United* chronicles the story of refugees and their struggle for survival and acceptance in a new country. Against tremendous odds and overcoming difficult obstacles, they came together to form a successful team.

Throughout this next year, groups of faculty, staff, and students will come together to discuss the obstacles that prohibit students from progressing academically at UTC and to seek solutions to these challenges. Change is not always easy, and there may well be tough decisions to be made. But this campus has a long history of success and achievement, and I have no doubt that you will reach your goals.

Thank you again for allowing me to be a part of this campus. This campus and city will always be my home and you will always be in my heart.

(After Mr. St. John speaks)

And, now I would like to invite our own J.D. Kyzer, coach of the Chattanooga Mocs Women's Soccer team, to help me present Mr. St. John with a few gifts on behalf of the students, faculty, staff, and alumni of UTC.

(Provost Tanner returns to podium to conclude.)

As we leave today, remember that this is not the end of the conversation. This is the beginning. All of us play a part in ensuring that UTC remains accessible to eligible students and then we must provide the guidance and services necessary to help them graduate and assume productive lives in our society. As much as we have accomplished, there remains much to do.

We shall achieve!

Thank you for joining us today. I look forward to engaging you in these important issues in the days ahead. Please join us for refreshments just outside the Fine Arts Center. And good afternoon.