

ORIENTATION ADDRESS  
FALL 2007

**FINDING SUCCESS IN MANY PLACES AND SPACES**

A warm welcome to new Southern Vermont College students, their families and SVC returning students, faculty, staff, coaches, alums, trustees, and friends. A special thank-you to all the people who made this event possible – our deans, our wonderful staff.. You are what make SVC remarkable.

For most people (at least in the Northeast), Spring is the time of renewal – melting snow, new leaves, blooming flowers, green grass, birds chirping, warming weather, the start of the baseball season, a sense of expectation and freshness. As everyone knows, poems are written just celebrating spring.

Listen to the words of a poem by the English poet Swinburne (written in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century) – He was called the “Inventor of Harmonies” as you will hear:

....And time remembered is grief forgotten,  
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten,  
And in green underwood and cover[,]  
Blossom by blossom[,] the spring begins.

**Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909)**  
*Atalanta in Calydon* (1865)]

Listen, too, to the words from a photo essay in Vermont Life (April 2000 issue):

Spring begins in ice and mud and the unmistakable smell of melting snow....The hillsides turn green and then – amazingly – they flower...reminding us again, as they do every year, of the resilience of life and the goodness of the season.

The power of words to express feelings is articulated by Donald E. Axinn, for whom our Social Science Division is named, when he wrote:

Radiance from a poem will lead  
You out of darkness,  
Its words no different than those  
spoken by the woods.

For those in academia, the start of each academic year is OUR Spring – our time for newness and freshness, our time to see and sense opportunity, our time to regenerate and renew and revive. To be sure, not too many people memorialize this in poetry – particularly rhyming poetry – or in photographs.

As each new class enters, we see new students filled with promise, with expectation, with a sense of excitement and wonder. For those of us who work in higher education, the start of the academic year provides us with the opportunity to appreciate the promise you bring with you, the promise of your future and its many successes. You are, in essence, our Spring.

You come to us with many successes already – in academics, in athletics, in community service, in art, in creative writing, in science, in music, in business. Here is some interesting information about all of you – that describes just a fraction of your existing successes.

- One of you is a double bassist who has performed at Carnegie Hall;
- One of you volunteered to provide medical assistance to migrant workers;
- One of you received a Master’s Degree from the University of New Castle Upon Tyne in the United Kingdom;
- One of you was an operating room technician for the Air Force during desert storm.
- One of you is an accomplished dancer from Kenya; and
- One of you spent time in Guatemala working for the Safe Passages program.

Our job here at SVC is to facilitate your future successes – while you are here with us and when you graduate. We believe in your capacity to succeed – in the classroom, on the athletic field, throughout the community, in your personal life, in your professional life.

But make no mistakes about it-- the road to success is not straight. Life throws us many curves; no one is immune. An old SVC bumper sticker, based no doubt on our long and at the time only partially paved driveway, used to be “THE ROAD TO EDUCATION IS BUMPY” --- I think a better motto now is: THE ROAD TO SUCCESS IS BUMPY.

At SVC, we want to help you navigate the bumps you will encounter along life’s pathways and enable you to learn from the bumps and then share that learning with others.

In thinking about life’s bumps, I was recently privileged to see an art exhibit -- composed of collages by the artist Pamela Ader who hails from both NY and Bennington. She has created truly amazing works about pain and fear and chaos – and how to deal with these emotions. In a remarkable quote accompanying the exhibit she says:

**When we go through the trials of human existence, it is important to remember that we have the power to overcome obstacles. We can isolate and circumvent that which blocks our path. Never deny the ability of human nature to select survival.**

That quote encapsulates the SVC mission – our deep commitment to helping you succeed.

There are many people here to give you the help you may need within and outside the classroom. It is often available without asking but, if you ask for help –

from your residential hall community advisors  
to your faculty  
to the Success Center tutors  
to your coaches  
to food services

people will be there for you.

At SVC, we value the importance of connections. Carol Gilligan (a scholar who has profoundly influenced my thinking) observed in her remarkable book *MAKING CONNECTIONS* about the Emma Willard School in nearby Troy, that making connections is essential to learning and leading effectively. And, while Gilligan focuses on the education of girls in this work, I firmly believe that relational thinking matters for both women and men.

So, don't hesitate to connect. Ask for help – which is how we connect. Asking is, actually, a remarkable sign of strength, not weakness. No one can be expected to navigate all alone.

Our smallness – the intimacy of our community – explains how we can create an environment that is focused on your success. You will not get lost here. As Bill McKibben observes in the book you have now received, community helps people in all sorts of ways. People within small communities are happier, they share together more, they feel more connected, they speak to each other more. To adapt an old adage (one that I have used frequently – given my personal size), good things often come in small packages.

As you say good-bye to your families this evening, you are not leaving them (and parents, you are not losing your children): you are becoming part of a new community – a new place that wants to help you succeed.

We believe in you. We believe in your success. We look forward to sharing in your successes.

And, so, I can proudly say that, as of this evening, with all of you here on campus and moving into our residential halls and our community: The academic Spring has arrived -- and its arrival occurred at the very moment that all of you arrived on campus.

A warm welcome to each and every one of you, and I wish for you a successful experience here at SVC.

Thank-you.