

**Southern Vermont College Opening Day/Orientation**  
**“Reaching President Obama’s 2020 Goal”**  
**Remarks of Martha J. Kanter, Under Secretary**  
**U.S. Department of Education**

Thank you, President Gross, for your generous introduction and inspiring remarks, and thank you especially for inviting me to speak about the subject that is my life’s passion. But, first let me welcome SVC’s students, families, faculty, staff, trustees and honorable guests and bring greetings on behalf of President Obama, Secretary Duncan and the Obama administration. It is a great privilege to join you today.

I have served in my role as Under Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education for 14 months, and I have been working nonstop to identify and leverage the best ideas and recommendations from across the nation to meet President Obama’s goal for America, once again, to have “the best educated, most competitive workforce in the world.”

This is the goal that drives me and all of us in the Department of Education.

As we all are aware, the American workforce has changed dramatically over the past few generations. Today, students, like most of you who enter our colleges, are more diverse and have a very different mind-set about the world than many of your parents or those of us who are addressing you today.

Every year, Beloit College publishes a report that profiles the freshman class. This year, they said that your class - the entering

class of 2010, many of whom were born around 1990 or so, probably don't know how to write in cursive. To you, Clint Eastwood is a famous film director, not Dirty Harry; colorful lapel ribbons have always been worn to indicate support for a cause; and "venti half-caf vanilla latte" has always been a logical series of words.

It's no wonder your school has named a drink to honor the President's goal – "the Mocha Java 2020 Blast" – now that is innovation at its core – and something I hope I get the chance to sample and tell the White House about.

It makes me wonder if we could bottle and distribute "the 2020 Blast for short" to symbolize your commitment to excel at SVC and complete your undergraduate education and share your personal success formula with every campus in the country.

A few years ago, the author Daniel Pink coined the term "free-agent nation." He described the meaning of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as "work that has been undergoing perhaps its most significant transformation since Americans left the farm for the factory a century ago." He said that legions of Americans, and increasingly citizens of other countries, are abandoning one of the Industrial Revolution's most enduring legacies -- the "job" -- and forging new ways to work.

As we forge new ways of work, we also need new approaches in education. We understand that students in today's

world will no longer spend the next thirty years in a single job or even work for a single employer.

Today's students will pursue their passions and follow their dreams through several jobs, a variety of employers and, for many, several career changes. That is a big part of the drive to come to college, to earn a first or second degree and, in doing so, to become a lifelong learner as you will move through the various careers and educational opportunities throughout your lives.

Forty years ago when I was finishing my bachelor's degree, I followed my passion, too. It's probably obvious that my passion was for education. My philosophy of education was formed years ago in Massachusetts where I started my career as a high school teacher, became a college professor, a dean, a college president and then chancellor of the Foothill- De Anza Community College District in California before moving to Washington last year to become an Under Secretary to oversee higher education policies and programs at the federal level. But no matter what position I held in education, it was my passion that drove everything I did and do today. It is the reason I earned a degree. And not just one! I kept going and still devour educational opportunities as much as I can.

I knew then, as I know now, that what I taught and how I taught, if I did it to the best of my ability, had the power to change the lives of my students for the better. The more I expected of my students, the more they accomplished. The more I drew them into

the love of learning, the more they wanted to know, and the more they explored their own ideas. I knew that education was the pathway to America's social and economic prosperity. Education will enable the best ideas of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to drive us forward in all fields, from agriculture, to climate science, to business, to healthcare, to information technology and so many more.

We hope and expect that every SVC student here today will benefit from the same passion for education that your professors bring to each of their classes and that President Gross and the SVC Trustees bring to this institution.

Whether we are one of your professors, or a parent here today, or a college trustee or a friend, our country needs each and every student who has entered Southern Vermont College today to graduate – and our common goal – whether we're in Washington or Bennington - is to help all of you graduate in four years, and far exceed the national average of only half of America's undergraduates finishing in six years!

To reach the 2020 goal, President Obama has asked all of our 6000 colleges and universities in America to increase by 50% the proportion of college graduates over the next ten years. He has asked this of our students and our institutions of higher education because, as I said, he wants the United States, once again, "to have the best educated, most competitive workforce in the world."

He said that “in a single generation, we’ve fallen from first place to 12th place in college graduation rates for young adults.

Think about that. In one generation we went from number one to number 12. Now, that’s unacceptable, but it’s not irreversible. We can retake the lead... The single most important step we can take ... is to make sure that every one of our young people...has the best education that the world has to offer. That’s the number one thing we can do...That is a prerequisite for prosperity. It is an obligation that we have for the next generation.”

We once led the world in college completion as the President said. But for a generation now, our competitors have been passing us by.

Today, just 40% of Americans earn a college degree. Canada is at 51%. We’re behind many other countries. And we know that the path to college success is even more challenging for students who come from low-income families, for students who are first in their families to come to college, and for students who might have achievement gaps from their K-12 educations.

Right now, less than half of high school graduates from low-income families attend college. Only about one in four low-income college students, who start college full-time, graduate within six years. But despite these challenges, we are committed to reaching the President’s 2020, and this means that we will need to move ourselves to 60% of Americans with baccalaureate degrees over the next ten years.

At the U.S. Department of Education, we have ambitious plans to do everything we can to have the greatest impact at the federal level for college students to reach their capacities for academic excellence. Our job at the Department of Education is to put in place the programs, systems, reforms and resources to move us to the 2020 goal.

Our Education Secretary Arne Duncan has proposed a “cradle-to-career” vision for education reform across the board. All our work is focused in this direction, from activities we’re funding with stimulus dollars, to the higher education programs in the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act, to our K-12 Blueprint for Reform, which lays out our ideas for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Higher education is the capstone of our heightened expectations for all students. To meet President Obama's goal, moving the nation from 40% to 60% in college graduates, means that we will need 8 million more students to earn their degrees over the next decade, beyond the expected enrollment due to population growth.

This is more than a potential increase in enrollment. It is a fundamental shift in the expectations we have of our students and our systems. We want every SVC student to be a successful graduate and one of the 8 million more success stories to achieving our national goal. Students: you’ve already taken the

first step to join our national college completion initiative by being here today!

For our part at the federal level, we have three areas of focus for higher education – Access, Quality and Completion. First, we are committed to increase access to higher education for the top 100% of students in America as a critical element to reach the 2020 goal. SVC is a role model for the nation in this area. Having Pell grants available for the next decade is a big step in this direction.

In addition to increasing access, we believe that our focus on assuring a quality higher education for students will be essential to our success as a nation. The President has said that being well-educated is all about “being a good citizen, being able to think critically, evaluate the world, and process all of the information, knowledge, and technology that engulfs us.” We will do everything we can at the federal, state and local levels to support the delivery of high-quality educational programs and services to students in our colleges and universities. SVC has earned accreditation which is one standard of institutional quality. Another is how well our graduates do in society after they finish their college education. What jobs they get? Whether they pass state and national certification exams? Whether their incomes can sustain their families and a host of questions that, with our transparency and open government agendas, we believe that the

public has the right-to-know and expect from our institutions of higher education.

In addition to increasing access and quality, the third part of our agenda is focused on getting 8 million more students to complete college. Southern Vermont College has taken some very innovative steps to help its students do well and complete your studies. We don't want any student to slip through the cracks because we haven't done everything we could for you to succeed!

This three-part plan - Access, Quality and Completion - is our formula to meet the president's 2020 goal. Students, I hope you realize how important your journey at SVC will be to help us achieve the 2020 goal.

President Obama, Secretary Duncan and I all share the view that it is more important than ever that we go above and beyond to give America's students the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills to lead our country forward.

Beyond completing your SVC education and walking across the stage at commencement, please know that our nation depends on every one of you to give back to your families, to your community, and to your country. It reminds me of one other remark made by Daniel Pink, who I mentioned earlier. He said "I think people get satisfaction from living for a cause that's greater than themselves. They want to leave an imprint."

So I urge you to follow your passion and find out what that cause is for you that will allow you to leave your imprint not only here at SVC as a graduate, but an imprint that will make our community and our society better.

Doing so will help us build a better America. It will help us meet the President's 2020 goal, and be the world-class democracy that serves the top 100% of Americans with an education that prepares them to compete in the global economy and contribute to the betterment of our society and humanity.

In closing, I have one more "ask" of you. In your first year at SVC, reach out and build a friendship with someone in your classes that you didn't know before you arrived on campus. Then, make the simple but lasting commitment to help each other complete your undergraduate education. That's my request!

Thank you for enrolling at this great college and for being part of the nation's 2020 goal. I hope you will all have the opportunity to go to Jazzman's café and take advantage of the \$20.20 on your Mountain Money card -- what a great idea! Thank you again!