

**NEW STUDENT CONVOCATION
AUGUST 23, 2008
Rev. SCOTT R. PILARZ, S.J.**

Acceptance of the Class

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, the University's faculty and administration, it is my privilege to formally accept these students and admit them to full membership in The University of Scranton Class of 2012. As a sign of your new status as members of this academic community, I ask you now to put on a centuries-old symbol of university identity, your academic gown. Four years hence, you will wear this same honorable symbol, adding to it a hood signifying the achievement of a bachelor's degree. Congratulations and welcome.

Families, parents, friends and members of the Class of 2012. It is my privilege to add a welcome on behalf of the entire University community. Today marks a milestone in the life of this institution. With the addition of the members of this class, the university community is renewed and reinvigorated. The members of this class bring with them tremendous talent and limitless potential. For months now, we have been anticipating your arrival with high hopes and great confidence.

You come to Scranton with a record of success across the full range of human endeavors. You have achieved much in your young lives and you have many reasons to be grateful – grateful first and foremost to your first, best teachers, your parents, your family. As the single greatest influence during the most immediate and formative years of your lives, your parents and families have been preparing you for today, pointing you toward the path that has led you to Scranton. I urge you before today is out to find a quiet moment to thank them for the role they have played in your lives.

Parents and families, I do not mean to suggest that your work is done. Though it will be different and performed at a distance, I hope you will continue to exercise your influence in the lives of your daughters and sons. Visit often. Ask about life here and what your children are learning. Encourage them to stretch and grow and to relish perspectives that will be afforded them during their undergraduate years. In sending them to Scranton, you are giving them a precious gift. For our part, we promise to help your daughters and sons realize their great potential. On behalf of the University community, I want to thank you for your confidence in us. Scranton will not let you down.

Members of the Class of 2012, you join The University of Scranton at a particularly important time, a time of considerable change. In the past year alone, the landscape of our campus has been altered significantly. Old and well-loved buildings have been replaced by a world class campus center and a lush inviting campus green. A new sophomore residence hall towers over the Scranton skyline waiting to welcome you next year. Soon enough we will begin the construction of a new science facility. You can also anticipate other physical changes on campus and in the surrounding neighborhood. But let me assure you: though much has changed at Scranton even more abides. Some aspects of a Scranton education are too precious ever to be altered.

You join the University community on the occasion of our 120th anniversary. In 1888 our founder Bishop O'Hara dreamt that graduates of his fledgling St. Thomas College would light up this valley with the fires of learning. Since 1942 with the arrival of the Jesuits, Scranton has been shaped by a centuries-old educational paradigm. Our vision and values inspired by Ignatius Loyola puts us at a very special point on the spectrum of American higher education. As a Catholic and Jesuit University, Scranton embraces the richness of a particular intellectual tradition. Here we hold dear the humanities and liberal arts. These disciplines form the core of our curriculum as they have at every Jesuit school since the 16th century. We couple this core with courses representing the full range of academic disciplines. In coming to Scranton you have chosen a comprehensive university clearly committed to some fundamental propositions.

Your education here will be rigorous and broad based. Such rigor is required of us because the life of the mind is one of God's greatest gifts. In the words of the great renaissance humanist, St. Thomas Moore, God made plants for their simplicity and animals for their innocence, but man he made to serve him wittily in the tangle of his mind.

Moore's insight should inspire you to relish the hard work ahead. You will not be alone in this endeavor. You have chosen to keep company with an incomparable faculty. They are second to none in their commitment to your success as scholars. They acknowledge and celebrate your uniqueness. In doing so, they exercise the Jesuit virtue of *cura personalis*. I urge you to get to know them, not only in the classroom but during office hours and on the Commons. There is something sacred about the encounter between professor and student. The arch across which their wisdom and knowledge passes is marked by grace. The Scranton faculty eagerly awaits your arrival and welcomes you fully into this community of scholars. Because Scranton is a Catholic and Jesuit university, we understand scholarship as something more than an end in itself. While the production of knowledge and the pursuit of wisdom are intrinsically worthy of our attention, they are also meant for the sake of the world's wellbeing. At Scranton, we are firmly committed to the proposition that life is best lived generously in the service of others. As a Jesuit university we aim to graduate women and men for others. In your years here, I urge you to engage in experiences that will widen your horizons and sometimes even break your heart. When this kind of learning happens, you will be sure to leave Scranton utterly changed.

Expect to change here. Four years from now, I hope you will think more deeply, act more deliberately and love more dearly. In fact, I am so confident in Scranton as a catalyst for change in your lives that if you are the same person in May 2012, with the same angle of vision, the same set of clarities, and the same easy assumptions, if you are that same person, Scranton will have failed you and I will give you your money back. That's how firmly I believe in the transformative power of this place.

The aspirations I have articulated for you may sound like a tall order on this muggy August afternoon and, in fact, these next years in your lives will be significant in ways you can't possibly anticipate or grasp here and now. That makes this moment so thrilling and all of us here at Scranton delight in sharing it with you. We are grateful beyond words that you have chosen to join us. We pledge our support as you join this community of friends in the Lord as the earliest Jesuits described themselves. We promise to model as well the first Jesuits' commitment to the *magis*, the restless desire for excellence. That desire is grounded in gratitude, the kind of gratitude that compels us always to ask the next question, to wrestle with the becoming thought, never settling for the quick fix or the easy answer, relying on grace we pledge at the start of every academic year ever to excel for the greater glory of God and the wellbeing of humankind.

Today, we hand on our Jesuit tradition to you, the Class of 2012, and hope in time that you will make it your own. That tradition is the source of our Scranton pride, the cause of our Scranton passion and the reason for our Scranton promise. Today our Pride, Passion, Promise are renewed because you join us. St. Ignatius Loyola hoped that those who embrace his tradition would go and set the world on fire. His hope is ours today for you. Go and set the world on fire. Know that you can count on the prayers and support of those who brought you here today and those who you will meet in the course of your Scranton days. God bless you, God bless Catholic and Jesuit higher education, and God bless The University of Scranton.

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