

Students—the Class of 2028—I am thrilled to welcome you to The University of Akron and to have the opportunity to share this convocation with all of you!

What a great day—the first of what will be many milestones—a great day to be in Akron, to be at the University, and to be a Zip! Thank you to Dr. Fedearia Nicholson-Sweval and Dr. John Messina, and their teams, for the work it required to bring us such an incredible event.

I also want to thank the UA Board of Trustees members who are joining us today. Vice Chair Christine Mayer and Trustee Trina Carter, along with Student Trustees Max Pastoria and Nicholas Campana. I'm also grateful to have USG President Grace DeWitt and City of Akron Mayor Shammias Malik with us for this special day.

And what about the Ohio's Pride marching band?! The sound of our incredible band will become the backing track to your time at UA.

Convocation is the traditional start of an educational journey—a meaningful time marked by professional development and personal growth. The gold pin you received when you entered the stadium is a symbolic UA tradition that represents the shared commitment we make to one another.

We commit to a strong community, to lifting one another up, to supporting each of you as you pursue your academic goals, and to building on our strong foundation.

As an alumna of our outstanding undergraduate programs, I was once in your position as a new UA student—an apprehensive business major. I probably had the same feelings on this day that each of you may be having now ... a little bit of uncertainty, but a whole lot of excitement for what is to come.

I look fondly back on my undergraduate years at UA. In fact, I stayed at this great University after my graduation and continued my education in our fantastic School of Law.

Not many alumni get to experience their own Convocation, graduate twice, and then years later attend this event as the president of their alma mater. For me, today represents a special moment, as I hope it does for you. You are my first Convocation on this side of the stage.

Because of that, this class—The University of Akron Class of 2028—will always be special to me. I commit to keeping an eye on all the amazing things you do while you're here at UA – learning in our classrooms, making a difference on campus and engaging with our wonderful surrounding community.

Both Mayor Malik and I grew up here, so we may be just a bit biased, but I know he will agree that Akron is a unique, vibrant place—one of the greatest cities in the Midwest and far beyond.

Just minutes away from where we are now, there is world-class art, culture, venues for professional and amateur sport, green space, shopping, small business and innovation, volunteer opportunities, internships ... everything you could want in a place to accompany your university education.

I know many of you also grew up in Akron. For those of you who are local, I really encourage you to take your classmates and friends downtown, and to all the areas of this great city you love. Show them what this amazing place is all about.

There are so many opportunities for you here. Think about how you can challenge yourself to try new things and grow into the best version of yourself, both on our campus and everywhere else you will thrive during your educational journey.

I want to add something very important: don't try to do it all alone. I said earlier that we make a commitment to each other. The University of Akron is a community, and our community was built to support you. Speak up and reach out when you need help, and please be willing to accept it. Our faculty and staff truly care and are invested in your success.

The next time I stand in front of your UA class as a whole will likely be at another tradition-filled ceremony: your Commencement. By then, UA will have become a very special place to you and will stand as your educational home for the rest of your lives. During the years in between, soak up all you can. Let's reaffirm our commitment to each other, to support each other and to grow together.

I wish you good luck and a terrific first year. I'll end now with another cherished UA tradition ... a phrase that you will hear often while you are here, but one that never seems to get old.

Go Zips!