



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

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QuickTakes!

U.S. Senator Cory Booker Tells Kean University's Class of 2018 to Find Power in Kindness

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In a commencement ceremony filled with emotion and personal stories, U.S. Senator Cory Booker, a self-proclaimed "Jersey boy," called on the graduating class of Kean University to lead with love.

The university conferred 2,940 bachelor's degrees to a diverse group of students on Thursday, May 17 at Prudential Center in Newark.

"You are powerful," Senator Booker said. "Make that choice to show up and tell your truth with your actions and your deeds. Don't speak to your kindness, show it. Don't preach your religion, show it. Don't just sing songs about your love, live that love every day."

Senator Booker told the graduates that small acts of kindness and courage have a ripple effect, noting that a lawyer who helped his family overcome housing discrimination in Bergen County in the 1960s was motivated by the individuals on the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama.

"If you love, love, love in small acts every day, I promise that you will change this world," Senator Booker said. "It is not just a calling. It is not just a slogan. It is your destiny. Class of 2018, I am in awe of you. May you live your power and your truth and your love every day."

Kean President Dawood Farahi, PhD, awarded Booker the Kean Medal, the University's highest honor.

The graduates – from 20 to 65 years old – hail from across New Jersey, 18 states and 38 countries, including Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Belarus, Ghana and Turkey. Their degrees are in health care, business, education, science, computer science, and the visual, performing arts and liberal arts. The Class of 2018 was the University's first to include graduates who completed their studies through Kean Online.

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President Farahi urged the graduates to embrace the “five C’s” as they go through life – change, courage, commitment, confidence and charity.

“Dream big, and go after those dreams with an energy and strength that cannot be matched,” Dr. Farahi said.

Valedictorian Naomi Horowitz of Staten Island, who maintained a perfect 4.0 grade-point average as she pursued bachelor’s degrees in biology and sustainability, referenced popular culture from the television show *Friends* to Harry Potter and encouraged the graduates to take this victory and build on it.

“No matter what your future plans may be, no matter how scary it may seem to now enter into the workforce, graduate school, or something else, just know if you completed your undergraduate degree, you can achieve and excel at anything you put your mind to,” Ms. Horowitz said.

Senior Class President Tahjane Whitsett of Colonia, who received a bachelor’s degree in management, thanked her fellow graduates for helping her overcome her fear of public speaking.

“The best things in life are placed on the other side of fear. To combat fear, you must use your courage, talents, unique qualities, experiences and most importantly, your voice,” Ms. Whitsett said. “When it comes to Kean students, a few words come to mind: change-drivers and ceiling breakers, passionate and powerful.”

President of Student Organization Damion Wilson of Fort Worth, Texas, never thought he would go to college, but the words, “I believe in you” from his teachers changed his course.

“Where I’m from, students were fortunate to graduate high school,” said Wilson, who earned a Bachelor of Arts in communication studies. “So, Class of 2018, I for one, believe in you. But it is up to you to believe in yourself as well.”

Receiving an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters was Diane G. Miron ’61. The University’s Miron Student Center was named in honor of Miron and her husband Bob in recognition of their significant gift to Kean.

She talked about the growth of the University from its earliest days in Union, with a “few buildings, lots of mud and wood planks,” to today’s modern campus.

“We have changed from a small state college to a growing university with universal ties,” said Ms. Miron. “I think I love Kean more today than I did 60 years ago. I don’t think I realized what I had and how well prepared I was for what was ahead.”

On Tuesday, May 16, Kean's Nathan Weiss Graduate College conferred 699 doctoral and master's degrees as well as professional diplomas at its commencement ceremony. Tony Award-winner Leslie Odom, Jr. gave the commencement address. Read more: news.kean.edu/NWGC2018Commencement.

Wenzhou-Kean University in Wehnzou, China will hold its third commencement ceremony on Saturday, June 2.