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Convocation Speaker Tells Students to Value Diversity

Winthrop University

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Convocation Speaker Tells Students to Value Diversity

Quick Facts

- Montrio Belton, principle of Monroe Middle School, spoke at Winthrop's convocation Aug. 21.
- Convocation is traditionally held the day before classes begin.

ROCK HILL, S.C. - Students can count on Winthrop to expose them to a diversity of people and experiences that will prepare them for life's responsibilities, said Convocation speaker **Montrio Belton**.

"Today you are the student," Belton told the more than 1,000 freshmen gathered today at **Byrnes Auditorium**. "Tomorrow, you will be the model and mentor."

Convocation, traditionally held the day before classes begin, serves as an official welcome to new freshmen and their induction into the Winthrop community of learners.

Belton urged students to take advantage of the lessons and opportunities provided during the next four years. "You will find Winthrop rich with history and tradition, yet contemporary in its thoughts – recognizing and encouraging unabated thoughts, ideas and discourse. This university realizes that these characteristics are the bedrock of this great democracy."

The principal of Monroe Middle School in Monroe, N.C., Belton noted that the competitors for ideal jobs for this generation are not sitting at other U.S. colleges, but in other countries. "Push yourselves to take the advance level courses, especially in mathematics and science," he said. "Develop a work ethic that will be unsurpassed and...make every effort to and take every opportunity to learn a second language."

Winthrop students are taught to value diversity so they can accept others' differences. "At Winthrop, I met and developed life long friendships with people of different races, religions and sexual orientations because I was willing to challenge the prejudices and all of the negative '-isms' that I brought with me from my small Southern town," said Belton, who graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1996 and a master's degree in 1999, both from Winthrop.

He currently is seeking a doctorate degree from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Belton found that as he learned to value others that he became an advocate for those unable to receive an education. He predicted Winthrop students would feel the same way. "You will feel compelled to advance this civilization, by participating in electoral politics and challenging the achievement gap, earnings gap, healthcare gap and homeownership gap that still exists in America and throughout the world," he said.

As the leaders of tomorrow, students have the moral imperative not to forget the least of these. "Now, is the time for you to learn to value other people and stake your place in this civilization. Will you rise to the mandate that is before you?" he asked.

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