

◆Someone here will change your life,◆ alumna tells Alfred University students at opening convocation  
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Christine Heckle '92 welcomes  
new students to Alfred  
University

“Someone here is going to change your life,” Christine Heckle, a 1992 alumna and a recently elected member of the Alfred University Board of Trustees, told new students as they gathered in McLane Center this morning for opening convocation.

The former Christine Lord, who 30 years ago sat where today’s new students sat, told the students that at Alfred University “you will experience life-changing events.” For her, it started with her introduction to ceramic engineering. A good math and science student in high school, Heckle found her courses in ceramic engineering “very energizing” and “very empowering.”

But she singled out three professors who helped changed her life.

The first was Dr. James Shelby, emeritus professor of Glass Science, who hired her as a lab assistant when she was a sophomore. Not only was he a great teacher and professional mentor, but he “taught me how to deal with customers, how to report to people who are paying for work, how to give directions, how to take directions. All these things that matter in the working world.”

The second was the late Dr. Gail Walker, professor of Psychology, whose “Death and Dying” class was one of the most popular undergraduate courses on campus. “Doc Walker was such a powerful force in the classroom and in life,” Heckle said. “She helped me to understand grieving, how to help and not help” those who are grieving a loss, lessons she unfortunately had reasons to put into practice when two of her cousins, both 17, died, one from illness and the other in an accident. “Many people don’t like to talk about death,” but Walker’s class taught her “We have to. We have to remember the people.”

The third was Dr. Vicki Eaklor, emeritus professor of History, whose class “gave me the framework to think about protesting, to think about the underdog.” Eaklor “taught me the place for peaceful protesting,” for working from within to change things. “Thirty years after starting at Alfred, I have even more privilege than when I started,” said Heckle, who is now director for inorganic materials research at Corning Incorporated. “Today I use my privilege to advocate for people of color, for those who need a hand up, for people who identify as LGBT, for those with disabilities, for women,” in part because of Eaklor’s lessons.

“But these are my stories,” she told the students. “Collect your own stories... connect your academics to your life, not just your professional life, but your whole life. Be changed. Seek out opportunities to be changed.”

She concluded by telling students “Congratulations on choosing Alfred. It&s one of your best decisions so far!”

Continuing students return to campus over the weekend, and the 182nd year of classes at Alfred University begins on Monday.