

Alfred University begins 164th academic year

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Five-hundred-and-eleven freshmen, more than 100 transfer students, 26 new faculty members, a host of new administrators and staff members - and one new president - officially began Alfred University's 164th academic year today with opening convocation. The new students, freshmen and transfer alike, signed the Alfred University charter, pledging to "maintain an academic and social environment which is distinguished by honesty, integrity, understanding, and respect." The charters will hang in Powell Campus Center until Aug. 27, 2001, when they will be taken to the Special Collections Room in Herrick Library for safekeeping until commencement day 2004 - the day most of today's entering freshmen will graduate - when the charters will return to Powell Campus Center. For new faculty and staff, and for Dr. Charles M. Edmondson, who became AU president July 1, the opening-of-school activities started Tuesday with a University-wide breakfast, providing Edmondson with his first opportunity to address all University employees. "We have many reasons to be optimistic," Edmondson said. "During the past decade, Alfred University has flourished, not floundered." Fund-raising efforts have allowed the University to build several new facilities, and to renovate two existing structures. Over the past year alone, the University's endowment increased from about \$60 million to more than \$80 million. "While that sum pales in comparison to the endowments of some of the elite institutions, it is sufficient to offer us the fiscal stability we did not enjoy a decade ago," said Edmondson. Another reason for optimism is the fact that the University "achieved most of its enrollment objectives" for the fifth year in a row, he noted. There are some notable students entering Alfred University this fall, Edmondson said, noting one is fluent in Finnish, another composes rap music that emphasizes social injustice, while a third, unable to afford the tuition at the parochial high school she had been attending, negotiated to "trade labor for tuition." One member of the freshman class was the New York State Class A football "player of the year," and another, who is a published poet, grew up in a farmhouse with no indoor plumbing. When taken as whole, this year's freshmen are "overachievers," he said, with average combined SAT scores of 1,118. One-fifth of the students were among the top 10 in their high school classes, and more than 50 percent graduated in the top quartile of their classes. Eight National Merit finalists are among the freshmen. The new students come from 26 different states, and several countries, although two-thirds of them are from New York state. Twelve percent are non-white. Sixteen of them are children of alumni. All, said Edmondson, "have chosen to come to Alfred University for a complex web of reasons," but for most, the decision was made because "they believe that at Alfred University, they can become better and greater people." Returning students come back to campus on Saturday, and classes for the fall semester start Monday, Aug. 28.