

## **Alumnus delivers keynote at opening convocation**

8/22/08

Dr. Gary Ostrower, a 1961 graduate of Alfred University and a professor of history at AU for the past 39 years, delivered an important message to nearly 600 freshmen and transfer students at Thursday's convocation opening the University's 172nd year: "The more things change, the more they remain the same." The world, America, and Alfred University have changed dramatically since Ostrower, who grew up in Woodbridge, NJ, first arrived on the Alfred University campus in the late 1950s. Freshmen wore beanies; men had to wear jackets and ties to dinner, and women were required to wear skirts. They had to memorize the words to the alma mater, and how to spell "Kanakadea" backwards. What happened during the 1960s and 1970s, primarily as a result of the Vietnam War, changed the country, changed politics, and changed Alfred, Ostrower explained as he recounted how and why the transformations occurred. Lest today's students think his history lesson has nothing to do with them, Ostrower reminded them: "You are products of your history. You may not realize, you may not even care, but it's the reason almost every college in this country requires you to study history." What remains the same as it was more than 50 years ago, though is, "Our continuing commitment at Alfred to teach you to think critically. That's even more important than teaching you to write well or to master math." "Don't assume that conventional wisdom equals truth," Ostrower cautioned. "You must learn to think critically, to analyze, to ask probing questions. Critical thinking involves hard work. It involves knowing your biases. It involves drawing logical conclusions." Using a catch-phrase from an earlier era, Ostrower urged "Question authority. Question what you are told by people in authority, even if authority sits on this stage (referring to AU's administrators) or conducts your classes." Which brings me back to Alfred University. With your cooperation - and we can't do this without your cooperation - we'll provide you with the tools to develop the ability to think critically. We'll do this with logic courses, and in science where you'll learn the scientific method. In almost all classes we'll urge you to remain open-minded and to think rigorously. We'll teach you to use our libraries effectively, to appreciate art, to read in foreign languages, to understand the universal language of mathematics."