

## Convocation Keynote Urges Students to Find Their ‘Unique Genius’



*Alumnus Don Murphy, '75. Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications*

When alumnus Don Murphy, '75, was asked to speak to UC San Diego’s new student Welcome Convocation, he asked his son for advice for the speech to which his son replied, “Ah well, I walked out on my last convocation. It was so boring.”

That certainly was not the case Monday evening when Murphy delivered the keynote address to thousands of new freshmen and transfer students on RIMAC Field. Though Murphy began the talk with a light-hearted quip, his message to students was clear: never stop looking for the answers to life’s questions and always search within yourself to find the truth.

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Murphy, former executive officer for the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, a museum dedicated to relating the story of the nation's struggle to overcome slavery, is a published poet who also was former deputy director of the National Park Service. While at the park service, Murphy managed 390 national park units covering approximately 84 million acres.

Convocation headlined the more than 150 Welcome Week activities, is a ceremony that marks the official entrance to the campus community for the campus's new freshmen and transfer students.

Chancellor Pradeep Khosla took the stage to welcome the new students and praise them for their academic achievements. The 4,500 incoming freshmen students have an overall grade-point average of 4.0 and their average SAT Reasoning scores are 608, 670 and 630, respectively, for Critical Reading, Math and Writing. The campus's 2,200 new transfer students bring with them a 3.50 grade-point average.



*Pradeep Khosla*

“You are here because you are the best and brightest students,” Khosla said. “Here, you will learn to use your left and right brain to think critically and to solve problems. You will learn to work with your peers and faculty members in different disciplines...That is the type of collaboration and thinking that we need to address problems facing our society—like food and water shortages, global warming and health issues.”

Murphy also talked about the path about that lies ahead of the new students and the bumps on the road they'll encounter on their journey.

“Many of you won't achieve your initial goal of becoming a doctor or an engineer; but that does not mean you have failed,” he said. “You will never fail as long as you discover and hold on to your individual genius. It is that which lies deep within that must direct your path. If it is true that life asks, “What Am I?” then use your genius to help life answer that question and the path you must follow will become clear.”

Murphy discussed how the path wasn't clear for him when he first entered college. Once intent on becoming a professional biochemist, he arrived to UC San Diego after already spending two years at the University of Southern California and another as a volunteer worker among the poor in the Central American country of Belize.

At UC San Diego, Murphy became fixated on genetics, but it wasn't until he was at UC Irvine studying for his doctorate in biochemistry that he realized he preferred the great outdoors to a laboratory bench.

“I discovered that my path to reality was not through medical research. Rather, it was in environmental conservation,” he said. “I became a state park ranger, the director of state parks in California and went on to become the deputy director of the National Park Service. The change in direction was not easy. Becoming a ranger was more difficult than getting into medical school. For every ranger position, there were over 25,000 applicants.”

Murphy said success, including his own, is only matched by curiosity and the ability to dream.

“The greatest search engine is not Google,” Murphy said. “The greatest search engine is the human mind...You must ask the question, “Who Am I?” What is my unique genius?” Use these years to gain a deeper understanding of yourself, not in terms of grades only but in terms of understanding, wisdom and knowledge.”



He added, “The most important thing I learned is that your dreams are only as good as the reality they reveal. When MLK dreamed that this country would one day rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed, that all men are created equal, it was the reality of the dream that he yearned for.”

Concluding his speech, Murphy encouraged students to fight to keep education at a world-class university such as UC San Diego affordable and accessible.

“My time spent at UC San Diego has meant more to me than I can convey in words,” he said. “It would not have been possible—as near destitute as I was—if it had not been for public education. A poor broke student like me with money I earned from work study and a few minimal grants could get the best education in the world...It must remain so today.”

Following Murphy’s keynote address, students flocked to the picnic area on RIMAC field where they were offered a dinner and opportunities to meet staff and faculty from more than 31 academic departments.

“There were so many faculty members present to answer students’ questions about their new academic lives,” said Associated Students President Meggie Le. “It was great to have so much faculty support.

Le added, “This year’s convocation was amazing. The event and Murphy’s speech provided a lot of insight into all of the opportunities students will have here both academically and socially.”



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