

To the University of Akron community—welcome to the Fall 2025 UA Convocation.

Students—the Class of 2029—today is all about you. This is YOUR convocation. This is your first opportunity to impress upon this campus your significant mark officially as University of Akron students. I want each of you to note the ownership in that phrase—*your convocation*.

This is the beginning of individual pathways that will define you personally and professionally for the rest of your lives. You are in the right place. I encourage you to own this moment and begin to define your unique pathway, one full of possibility, opportunity and promise.

I am thrilled to welcome you to The University of Akron and to share this convocation ceremony with all of you!

What a great day to be in Akron, to be at the University, and to collectively be Zips. Thank you to our student affairs and student pathways teams for the significant work and planning it required to bring us such an incredible event. I also want to thank the UA Board of Trustees members who are here today, including student trustees Jordan Miklinski and Max Pastoria who represent your student interests through their leadership positions.

Speaking of leadership, many of our student leaders, including those in Undergraduate Student Government and from many of our nearly 300 student organizations, are representing their groups here this morning. Thank you for being here to celebrate the new Akron Zips!

Finally, I am thrilled to again welcome to UA's convocation, representation from the great city of Akron's Mayor's Office.

And how lucky are we to be the home of Ohio's Pride marching band?! The sound of our incredible band will become the backing track to your time at UA.

Convocation is the traditional start of an educational journey—a milestone marked by professional development, aspiration to become leaders, and personal growth. Growth is an important word here at The University of Akron. On a campus like ours, we measure growth in numerous key ways. There is no better way to symbolize growth, however, than through welcoming a large group of first year students.

The class of 2029 symbolizes growth for the institution, and we as the University community, commit to helping you grow individually in personal and professional ways.

In fact, the blue Zippy pin you received when you entered the stadium this morning is a symbolic UA tradition that represents a shared commitment we make to each other. Please hold on to that pin, wear it with pride and let it remind you of the symbiotic relationship between university and student.

We commit to a strong community, to lifting one another up, to supporting each of you as you pursue your academic goals, and to building sturdy foundations. The community I speak of extends far beyond the borders of our campus. It includes partnerships and opportunities that will continue to supplement your educational journey.

Our exceptional community engagement is a primary reason that Mayor Malik's office and I both participate in welcoming you to campus. In just a few minutes, you'll hear from Lauren Marsh, a UA alumna and Assistant to the Mayor for Community Relations.

The University of Akron and the surrounding community are collectively a *vibe*.

As an alumnus of our outstanding undergraduate programs, I was once in your position as a new UA student. I encourage you each to let The University of Akron spark in you what it sparked in me during my generation. I look fondly back on my undergraduate years at UA. In fact, I continued my education in our fantastic School of Law. And I even returned to work here.

Because of this place, I was equipped with the professional tools and the personal confidence I needed to succeed. Not many alumni get to experience their own convocation as a first-year student, graduate twice, and then years later attend this event as the president of their alma mater.

Now, as President, my love for this institution is stronger than ever. For me, this convocation represents a special moment, as I hope it does for you.

As President, I commit to leading in thoughtful ways and keeping an eye on all the amazing things you—the UA Class of 2029—will do while you're here at The University of Akron. At this University, you will quickly understand that learning is not bound by the four walls of your classrooms. You will be making a difference in a variety of campus spaces and expanding the perimeter of your individual learning environment.

Ultimately, it's the contributions you will make off campus, to the greater community, and to the world, that will round out this moment in just a few years' time.

Both Mayor Malik and I grew up here, as did Lauren, so we may be just a bit biased, but I know the Mayor's Office will agree that Akron is a unique, vibrant place. The sense of community is powerful here. Throughout the region, you will find incredible personal and professional opportunity.

There are global, national and local corporations and industries, world-class art, culture, venues for professional and amateur sport, green spaces, shopping, and volunteer and service organizations.

Here, you will find everything you could want in a place to accompany and strengthen your university education. If you're familiar with the region, I encourage you to take your classmates

and friends downtown, and to the other exciting areas of this great city. Show them, from your perspective, what this amazing place is all about.

Here on campus, think about how you can challenge yourself to try new things and grow into the best version of yourself. There's that word again—grow.

I want to add something very important: don't try to do it all alone.

The University of Akron is a place that is constantly defined by and giving community. The community is built to support you. Our faculty and staff truly care and are invested in your success. The next time I stand in front of this entire class as a whole will likely be at another tradition-filled ceremony: your UA Commencement.

By then, The University of Akron will have become a very special place to you.

It will symbolize your educational home for the rest of your lives. During the years in between, soak up all you can. Let's reaffirm our commitment to each other, to support each other and to grow together.

I wish for each of you an exceptional first year and ask you to join me in your first official "Go Zips!" rallying cry.

On the count of three, let's say it together—[...]

Go Zips!