

Stan Altman, Baruch College President  
Welcoming remarks, Freshman Convocation 2009  
August 27, 2009

Thank you Provost McCarthy.

Welcome to Baruch College freshman class of 2013. I am delighted to address you on your first official day of college. It is a special day for me as well as I am the freshman President of Baruch College. Sharing this moment with you has caused me to reflect on the start of my freshman year at the City College of New York in 1958. Looking back to that moment 51 years ago, I realize how little preparation I had for the life that would unfold before me. As I personally reflect on my past experiences, I fondly remember my undergraduate years and how I grew as an individual during my time at City College.

This is a special moment in your life. First and foremost, it is a time that you can get to know yourself, who you are and what your purpose in life is. Your life, as I have learned, is ultimately driven by who you are and what you value and not by who other people think you are. The next few years are special because you can begin to explore the richness of life's possibilities through your course work, interaction with other students and the very talented Baruch faculty. Second, society has a stake in your development because in the future it will be your generation that will take up positions of leadership – Nia Brown could be President of Baruch College; Jolene Gurevich Mayor of the City of New York; Allen Li a Pulitzer Prize winning author or Laura Abreu the CEO of a fortune 500 company.

You might think what I have just said is far fetched and not possible. Well, I would have said the same thing had you told me I would be standing before you as President of Baruch College. You need to believe in the impossible and be open to the unexpected opportunities presented to you.

The story of Baruch College is an example of what can be achieved when one believes the impossible is possible.

Each generation must be prepared to take up the torch and lead us to a better place. We have seen this with the election of Barack Obama as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. This transition from one generation to another is what fuels change in society. This process is illustrated by the history of Baruch College. The College was born as a result of the dream and vision of our City fathers who in the 1840s realized that for New York City and its population of 650,000 people to continue to be a vibrant and dynamic city it must develop the talent of its people and to accomplish this goal all of its citizens must have access to a quality higher education based on academic ability and not on ability to pay.

“Open the doors to all—Let the children of the rich and the poor take their seats together and know of no distinction save that of industry, good conduct and intellect.”

--Townsend Harris

This revolutionary idea gave birth to the Free Academy. The site for the Free Academy was the corner of 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and Lexington Avenue where we sit today. Classes began in 1849. Then in 1866, the name of the Free Academy was changed to The College of the City of New York, later to be known as City College.

By the end of the century City College had outgrown the 23rd Street campus and plans were approved to build a new campus at St. Nicholas Avenue in Hamilton Heights, Harlem that opened in 1907. Evening programs remained at the original 23<sup>rd</sup> Street Campus. In 1919 – a mere 70 years after the opening of the Free Academy, the School of Business and Civic

Administration was established at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street. By 1929, the original building had been demolished and a new building, affectionately known as “17 Lex” had been built. At the time, it was the largest building in the United States dedicated to the education of people for careers in commerce.

In 1953, the School of Business and Civic Administration was renamed after one of its famous alumni – Bernard Baruch. Bernard Baruch had graduated in the Class of 1889. Bernard Baruch lived on the Upper East Side and, to save trolley fare, he walked here every day as a student. His first job was as an office boy earning \$3.00 per week. He studied hard, graduated, got a job on Wall Street, made money, lost money, and before the age of 30 Baruch was one of the wealthiest persons in the United States. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century he became the advisor to presidents and senators in Washington. Bernard Baruch became famous for sitting in the parks of Washington D.C (Lafayette Park) and in New York City (Central Park) discussing government affairs with other people. It was said that his office was a park bench near the White House. You will see a statue of him on a park bench on the ground floor of the Newman Vertical Campus building.

Bernard Baruch told the story of the day he proudly told his father that he was worth 1 million dollars. His father communicated his opinion that money making was a secondary matter... “Of what use to a man are millions of dollars unless he does something worthwhile with them.”

Service to others is an important quality and purpose that we can all achieve with simple acts of kindness to ourselves and to others.

In 1968, the Trustees of the City University of New York voted to make Baruch a separate College.

To prepare for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and continue to meet the needs of our students and the larger world we are a part of, Baruch will embark on a modernization program of this building that will produce, when completed an educational facility that provides a quality learning environment and employs state of the art educational technology.

Baruch College has retained its founding philosophy in its mission: to meet the needs of thousands of students who depend on publicly supported higher education to satisfy their desire for knowledge and their drive to succeed. It is this drive and passion to succeed that has made New York City the greatest city in the world and that has led you to Baruch College today.

As you find your way around Baruch, you will encounter all the wonderful professors and meet the many staff of the College who are here to help you receive the best education possible. Your success will depend upon your effort and the time you put into the experience of being a college student.

Finally, think of your campus, not as just a collection of handsome buildings along Lexington Avenue, but as all of New York City. Whether you are interested in business, public policy or poetry, this city has more programs and people who can help you get started than just about anyplace in the world. Use the City's resources to enrich your own college experience, and you'll find that your learning is more relevant and engaging.

Have a wonderful first year at Baruch College. Study hard, meet new friends, and talk to your professors who will guide you in the years ahead. Remember these next years are an

important investment in the rest of your life so enjoy them and look forward to the life in front of you.

On behalf of the administration, faculty, staff and alumni of the College I wish you a successful year and a successful time at Baruch. Congratulations on your acceptance to Baruch College and I look forward to your graduation.

Best of luck.