



Nancy Cantor  
Speaker and Honorary Degree Recipient Bio

Nancy Cantor is the 11th Chancellor and President of Syracuse University, as well as Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Women's Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences.

A native New Yorker, Dr. Cantor came to Syracuse from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, where she was chancellor. She has held a variety of administrative positions encompassing all aspects of a research university, from chair of the department of psychology at Princeton to dean of the graduate school and then provost and executive vice president for academic affairs at the University of Michigan. She received her A.B. in 1974 from Sarah Lawrence College and her Ph.D. in psychology in 1978 from Stanford University.

Dr. Cantor is recognized for her scholarly contributions to the understanding of how individuals perceive and think about their social worlds, pursue personal goals, and how they regulate their behavior to adapt to life's most challenging social environments. She is the author or coeditor of three books and author or coauthor of numerous book chapters and scientific journal articles.

She has been an advocate for racial justice and for diversity in higher education, and she has written and lectured widely on these subjects. At the University of Michigan she was closely involved in the university's defense of affirmative action in the Grutter and Gratz cases decided by the Supreme Court in 2003. Cantor has also lectured and written extensively on li

She is the past chair of the board of directors of the American Association for Higher Education and former chair of the board of the American Council on Education. She serves on the board of the American Institutes for Research and the advisory board of Future of Minority Studies, Paul Taylor Dance Foundation Board of Directors, and as an Honorary Trustee of the American Psychological Foundation. She has served on the board of trustees of Sarah Lawrence College and the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, as a member of the National Advisory Board of the National Survey of Student Engagement and on various advisory boards and study sections of the National Science Foundation and the National Research Council, and a Congressional Commission on Military Training and Gender-Related Issues.

She is married to Steven R. Brechin, an environmental biologist and a professor in the Maxwell School and the College of Arts and Sciences. They have two children, Maddy and Archie.

## Speech

University of Toledo Commencement  
Nancy Cantor  
1 p.m. May 3, 2008  
University of Toledo Glass Bowl

Congratulations to the Class of 2008! It's wonderful to celebrate with you and good to be here – in a place my family and I visited frequently during our 15 years in Ann Arbor.

Indeed, I have many ties here, ties to people – my former colleague Lloyd Jacobs, now President of your fine university, Provost Haggett, whom I knew at the National Science Foundation, and my dear friend and mentee – if I might claim a bit of influence on her – Carol Bresnahan, a distinguished faculty member here and soon to be at the College of New Jersey.

My connections at Toledo are to both people and places critical in my life, and remembered with great joy and warmth – numerous trips with my children to watch the Toledo Mud Hens (when they played in what I gather is now described as the “quaint old stadium”) the zoo and the museum, to restaurants (better, I might add than in Ann Arbor)!

And that is part of my theme today. Cherish the people and places that constitute who you are as you leave this home, this place that you have made your own.

Graduation is a two-pronged celebration – on one hand, we are celebrating your accomplishments to date, that is, your “place” now, but of course, we are also anticipating new place that you will be making for yourself in the world.

Indeed, so much of our lives resemble this dialectic between our current state – the place we have – and our future possibilities – the place we will make. And the path we take between having a place and making a place is built so importantly around the people teachers,



The parallels between Toledo's history and that of Syracuse – my home – are plentiful. Both are places that grew quickly through the hard work of pioneers. My favorite description of early Syracuse comes from a visitor in 1820, who said "it was so desolate it would make an owl weep to fly over it." Then, at a time when America had no trained civil engineers, a group of amateurs – some of them former judges and surveyors – set to work with "unwearied zeal" and built the Erie Canal that Thomas Jefferson had called "nothing short of madness." The rest is history.

Today both cities stand on the shoulders of risk takers who banded together to make things happen and create opportunity while defying great odds and the conventional wisdom of their day. Now, once again, Toledo and Syracuse face great obstacles in a landscape of global competition as harsh and foreboding in its own way as it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

So what do we do to drain the next Black Swamp, to build the equivalent of the next Erie Canal? There is good news and a caution here.

The good news is that precisely all the hard work you've done to prepare for today is just what you'll need to make your next place for yourself and for all of us. Universities – and their graduates – are at the very epicenter of the revitalization of America's older industrial cities. They and you will anchor the vital work to be done.

You're also at the center of the best hopes for a knowledge based economy. You have the entrepreneurial spirit – that unwearied zeal to make things happen. Over the last few years, you've lived in a diverse community of scholars, and you've experienced living and working in a global context, inundated with information, where connections are instantaneous and sharing is critical. You're capable of doing the hard social work required to open up opportunity, to make sure that a modern day band of pioneers is inclusive and creative as possible. Let's work to build a new place for us all.

That's precisely what the University of Toledo has prepared you to do. You have the flexibility to keep your balance in a world where change is the norm, where it is critical to stay nimble.

That's the good news. The caution – and there always is one -- is this: Just as it took struggle and unwearied zeal to build great canals that connected this region to the world, "connectivity" alone, even in our facile cyber world, does not guarantee communication," to paraphrase Vartan Gregorian, president of the Carnegie Corporation. Or as Henry David Thoreau once wrote, "We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas, but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate."

So, you have the tools – the wiring or infrastructure so to speak – to build the next great network of connections. Just make sure it's used to forge the best and strongest communication, the kind that carry meaning through a sea of information overload.

In fact, there's a certain irony to our world of rapid change and free flowing information – an irony that's critical for you to recognize as you prepare to venture out into it.



It is critical not to get complacent, not to get satisfied, thinking that all you need is you. Better, if you pardon a reach back to my generation, all you need is love. As Johnnetta Cole, president emerita of Bennett College for Women and Spelman College, once said, "You cannot fully understand your own life without knowing and thinking beyond your life, your own neighborhood, and even your own nation. You are standing on the shoulders of giants, and you, too, are needed as a pioneer.

The notion of being a pioneer –of forging something new – needs some updating in our brave new world. And it will mean different things to each of us

For me, being a pioneer now means understanding what it means to be the “first” in some of the positions I take on (first woman and Jewish Chancellor at Syracuse, for example). Most importantly, it means not taking that as a personal achievement, but remembering that I am standing on the shoulders of countless others who struggled for justice and fair play. It also means accepting the responsibility to look out for others and somehow open the way for them.

For me, it also means remembering exactly how I got here – the profound influence, for example, that growing up in the 60s had on me – the energy, and yes perhaps a bit of headstrong risk-taking – that came with the optimism of the women’s movement, the civil rights movement, and the peace movement – as much as the events surrounding Vietnam sadly divided the country, and led us to forget the hardships also faced by our own soldiers as they returned home scarred by war. A memory we should not forget today.

For me, even more personally, it means remembering my family, and trying not to turn every debate today into a flash back to my childhood dinner table battles to get a word in edgewise with my much smarter, louder, and older brother. At the same time it means being moved even now by the desire I had to give voice to the things in which I firmly believe.

It means feeding off of the powerful memories I have of riding the New York City subway 45 minutes each way to school. It’s an hour in a New York City subway – lots of faces, people, cultures, all coming at you, and if you are little like me, you either run for cover – where? – or you learn to join it with gusto. Just with gusto, but watch yourself and find some others to lean on as you go!!

For you, being a pioneer, building that new home, that place for the future will evoke different memories and imply different paths than mine. But it will surely involve something like a new subway ride.

In many ways, you have completed one frantic, hectic, but exhilarating ride and you deserve a great sense of completion today – you did it, you’re done, you made it home. And yet the force of today is really about all that is ahead that next ride! On the way, what’s essential is to weather change well, to profit from new opportunities, and to be-yourself--an agent of thoughtful, constructive change. You are ready, and now is your time. Congratulations!