



RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY
Office of Marketing and Communications
Press Release
February 2, 2017

Contact: Angela Daidone
201-684-7477
adaidon1@ramapo.edu

Kanya Balakrishna Gives Keynote Address at Annual Diversity Convocation at Ramapo College

Co-Founder and President of The Future Project Poses Challenge for Students to 'Define Success on Their Own Terms'

MAHWAH, N.J. – Kanya Balakrishna’s youthful energy filled the room as she encouraged students to embrace passion for their own futures during her keynote address at the 11th Annual Diversity Convocation on Wednesday, February 1 at Ramapo College of New Jersey. The event was sponsored by the Diversity Action Committee, the Office of the President and the Ramapo College Board of Trustees.

Ramapo President Peter P. Mercer offered the opening remarks. “A young person with a passion and an enthusiasm for positive social change, Ms. Balakrishna reminds me of many of our student leaders,” Mercer said. Student Trustee Stephen Geerlof and Associate Professor Pinar Kayaalp, Co-Chair of the Diversity Action Committee, delivered the welcome and keynote speaker introduction, respectively.

Balakrishna, a Yale graduate, is co-founder and president of The Future Project, a national movement calling on young Americans to create the future of their dreams. Since launching in 2011 in Washington, D.C., New York City and New Haven, Connecticut, the organization has spread across seven American cities, including Newark, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Detroit. It now has nearly 100 employees and exists in more than 40 public schools.

Speaking to an audience of students, staff, faculty, trustees and guests, Balakrishna posed, “Ask this question: what would you do if you weren’t afraid? We all have ideas about the future and what we can accomplish but if fear is holding us back, what good are those ideas? The Future Project is about making schools a place where students can discover their passions and create their own opportunities and successes.”

The Future Project dispatches full-time “Dream Directors” — highly trained, world-class leaders and entrepreneurs — into high schools and charges them with mobilizing a coalition of students and staff who channel their passions to build student-led Future Projects (campaigns, organizations, products) that impact their schools and communities.

“We want people to define success on their own terms...when ideas collide and combine, they grow and that leads to innovation,” Balakrishna said, adding that “Collective genius is the only way we can change the world.”

The annual Diversity Convocation is one of the initiatives of the Diversity Action Committee at Ramapo College.

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Ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of the top in the Best Regional Public Universities North category, Ramapo College of New Jersey is sometimes viewed as a private college. This is, in part, due to its unique interdisciplinary academic structure, its size of approximately 6,000 students and its pastoral setting in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains on the New Jersey/New York border.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include nursing and social work. In addition, Ramapo College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels. The College also offers eight graduate programs as well as articulated programs with Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New York Chiropractic College, New York University College of Dentistry, SUNY State College of Optometry and New York College of Podiatric Medicine.