

Allegheny College Commencement
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Honorary Degree Introduction for Anthony Cortese
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Dr. Anthony Cortese is associated in a leadership capacity with virtually every major effort in higher education to tackle what is perhaps the most serious challenge humanity has ever faced: the prospect of catastrophic climate change. With formidable drive, expertise, and a gift for building consensus, he reminds all of us that if the intimate balance between humans and their environment is fragile, our will to protect it is not.

In 1993, Anthony Cortese co-founded Second Nature, a nationally recognized nonprofit organization that he now serves as president. His goal is ambitious but achievable: “to catalyze a worldwide effort to make healthy, just and sustainable action a foundation of all learning and practice in higher education.”

Tony has been a leading force in the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment—with 633 campuses across the nation making the commitment to become climate neutral, the first group in any sector of society to do so. He was a co-founder of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education and the Higher Education Association Sustainability Consortium. He believes – and Allegheny concurs – that higher education has a responsibility to be in the vanguard on social justice and sustainability initiatives, fulfilling our mission not only to educate in the classroom, but also by example and in practice within our communities.

He has been able to lead not only because he is an inspirational figure, a man of vision, but because that vision is backed up by the highest academic credentials. As the first dean of environmental programs at Tufts University, he founded in 1989 the award-winning Tufts Environmental Literacy Institute, a program that incorporated environmental awareness and ethics into the academic curriculum and educational experiences of all of the university’s students, both undergraduate and graduate. His interdisciplinary approach to his own education – he holds a B.S. in civil engineering and an M.S. in environmental engineering from Tufts University, and a doctorate in environmental health science from Harvard University – made him the ideal candidate to head this ground-breaking program.

This training also allowed him to envision and organize in 1990 an international conference of presidents of colleges and universities to issue a declaration of responsibilities and actions in fostering a just and sustainable future. The “Talloires Declaration” has now been signed by 388 university presidents from more than 50 countries, and its effects are far-reaching.

He founded the Consortium for Environmental Education in Medicine with the Massachusetts Medical Society to integrate into the training of physicians an

understanding of the relationship between the environment and health. His influence extends far beyond the borders of higher education, however. He also helped found The Natural Step, U.S., a nationally recognized nonprofit organization that assists industry in becoming environmentally sustainable.

His articles, essays, and speeches have helped shape the dialogue on education for sustainability and will inform the work we do for decades.

Today, Allegheny College honors a man who has been ahead of his time, and a man desperately needed by the times in which we live. Generations yet unborn will owe Anthony Cortese a profound debt of gratitude for his leadership, his vision, and his courage. In their name as well as ours, Mr. President, I have the great honor to present, for the degree Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*, Anthony Cortese.