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## In Praise of Imagination

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# 2004: Welcome to the First-year Class

## "In Praise of Imagination"

It is an honor for me to be among the first to welcome you, the members of the Augustana College Class of 2008. Please allow me to congratulate you, on behalf of the Faculty and our staff, for your admission to the college. Applications to the college were at a record level for your class. We know you've worked hard to gain admission to a selective college like Augustana. You can rightfully be proud of your accomplishments. And while I'm at it, congratulations to the parents of our new students. As the parent of a son who graduated this May from a liberal arts college and a second son who starts his junior year at a liberal arts college next week, I know the investments parents make of time, energy and money to help students get where they are now.

The class of 2008 looks to be outstanding. In addition, there are 75 transfer students joining us. Students, your new classmates are fine students, proven leaders, accomplished athletes and talented musicians. You have distinguished records in your high schools, churches and community organizations. You are committed to public service and volunteerism. In short, you are a group of people who will make a difference.

How will you make a difference at Augustana College? How will Augustana College make a difference for you? I'd like to spend a few minutes reflecting on these questions. I'd like to do so by talking about two books on my summer reading list - the Report of the 9/11 Commission and a book you are familiar with, *The Tipping Point*, by Malcolm Gladwell.

Earlier this summer, the 9/11 Commission released its report on the terrorist attacks on the United States. These horrible attacks were a defining moment in our history and, if you are like me, a defining point in your lives. The 9/11 Commission examined the facts and circumstances of the 9/11 attacks and identified lessons that could be learned. (It is interesting to note that the president turned to the head of a liberal arts college to chair the commission). Most of the Commission's members believed that the attacks might have been prevented. What were the problems that precluded us from stopping the attacks, when there was significant evidence that attacks might be in the offing?

According to the Commission it wasn't so much faulty intelligence or gross incompetence by government officials. What was it? It was a failure of imagination. How did those in positions of responsibility fail to imagine? According to the Commission, we failed to learn the lessons of history. (The attack on Pearl Harbor was carried out with just few men and a small budget). We failed to understand the larger danger by not digging into the facts and going beyond routine briefing papers. We failed to make connections between seemingly unrelated events. We failed to draw from history, from our knowledge of religion and psychology, and from our understanding of political systems. We failed to do analytical assessments of the many clues that an attack like 9/11 could happen. We failed to think integratively, critically and creatively. In short, we failed, according to the Commission, to have imagination. The Commission, in a somewhat understated way, concluded: "Imagination is not a gift usually associated with bureaucracies." It challenged our government to find ways to better imagine -

making imagination routine.

As you live the life you have ahead of you, will you have imagination? Will you make imagination routine? If you work in our intelligence community, will you have the imagination to identify and stop another 9/11? In other arenas, will you have the imagination to think of new ways to cure disease, to resolve local, national and world conflicts, to help the next generation learn in more effective ways, or to compose a sympathy, create a piece of art or write a story that challenges others to think? Will you have the imagination to help bridge the divides that separate us?

Will you have the imagination to make connections, to look at problems from different angles, and to develop different and new ways of learning? Will you accept things as they appear to be, or will you probe beneath the surface and ask how things really are? Will you follow the unimaginative masses, taking the path of least resistance, or will you have the imagination to be an opinion leader?

Will you have the skills to be one of those exceptional people, referred to by Malcolm Gladwell in his book *The Tipping Point*, who can drive a "social epidemic" so as to make this world a better place? Gladwell says that the theory of "tipping points" requires us to reframe the way we think about the world. Do you have the imagination to do so?

I believe you, like generations of Augustana College graduates, will have the imagination to do so. Please allow me to reflect on how we hope to help you develop a passion for imagination.

A powerful symbol for me in thinking about how to develop imagination is a crystal or prism, with many facets, that reflects light in different ways. When you hold a crystal or prism up to the light, it captures the light and breaks it down into its component parts. The nation's most creative leaders and thinkers know how to turn the crystal. Those who turn the crystal know how to shed light on problems from different angles. "Turning the crystal" is what an education in the liberal arts and sciences is all about. Turning the crystal allows us to imagine.

Imaginative leaders have mastered looking at problems from different angles. For example, in my own discipline, law, the great lawyers know how to look at a problem not only from the client's angle, but from the angle of the opposing party, from the angle of the judge and jury, and from the angle of what is right and just for society. The same can be said of doctors, Peace Corps volunteers, political leaders, pastors, artists, business executives and people in virtually every other career.

This is an exciting year for us at Augustana because we have enhanced our general education program to help you develop the trait of imagination. Those with imagination understand the intellectual connections among different areas of study. The classes you're about to begin will help you understand different areas of knowledge and how they connect. Your faculty members will challenge you, again and again, to develop integrative thinking, critical thinking and creative thinking, all of which will help you develop imagination. We challenge you to turn the crystal by looking at problems from a variety of angles. I think you'll not only be challenged by our new curriculum, but that you will enjoy the more active learning opportunities that we

contemplate.

I received a call from a reporter this summer. She asked if a liberal arts education is relevant any more. "Absolutely," I said. Our country needs a generation of leaders with imagination. The best way to learn the skills and dispositions associated with imagination is through a liberal arts education. A liberal arts education, with its emphasis on integrative, critical and creative thinking skills, prepares young people not only for their first job, but for their second, third, fourth and final jobs. The skills learned at liberal arts colleges are those most valued by business leaders today. One recent survey of business leaders identified the following skills as among those most sought after:

- Critical and analytical thinking
- Problem-solving ability
- Interpersonal skills
- Written and oral communication
- The ability to adapt to change
- A commitment to ethical behavior.

These are the skills associated with imagination. These are among the critical skills you'll master at Augustana College.

I urge you to think about the process of focusing your imagination in the same way that Mozart did. Consider Mozart's most important operas. How does one have the imagination to compose massive works like *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *The Magic Flute*? Here is what Mozart said about imagination and the creative process:

First bits and crumbs of the piece come and gradually join together in my mind; then, the soul getting warmed to the work, the thing grows more and more, and I spread it out broader and clearer, and at last it gets almost finished in my head, even when it is a long piece, so that I can see the whole of it at a single glance in my mind, as if it were a beautiful painting or a handsome human being; in which way I do not hear it in my imagination at all as a succession. . . but all at once as it were. It is a rare feast.

We hope that Augustana will be a rare feast for you. In your first year you'll discover the bits and crumbs of different disciplines and different ways of knowing. You will start to join them together. As you become involved in our Learning Communities and as you take courses in your second and third years, you'll see knowledge and reasoning spread out more clearly. You'll learn to separate the authentic from the inauthentic. And as a senior, in many departments, you'll have the opportunity to use your imagination while working on a project that draws all your learning together, like the blending the parts of Mozart's masterful operas.

But learning at Augustana is about more than the classroom. Much happens outside of the classroom. You'll have many opportunities to get involved in campus life, choosing from nearly two hundred clubs and organized activities. Many of you will organize service projects. Still others will travel abroad or do externships with businesses, non-profit or government organizations. But, beware; no one will force you to get to know your professors or to take advantage of our clubs, our sports teams or our service projects. You must take the initiative.

And let me be clear about that. There will be no one to force you to take advantage of the many opportunities you have here. You must take the initiative. That being said, Augustana is a community of doers, not observers. Resolve now to be a doer at the college. Resolve to be fully invested in the Augustana experience, but in a way that is unique to who you are.

Please allow me to suggest six ways to invest yourself at the College to make the most of your experience.

First, we like to have fun at Augustana College. It isn't only academics here. So have some fun here. This is a seven-day-a-week, 16-hour-a-day campus. The friendships you build here will last a lifetime. When most of you reach age 50, you will count your college years among the most important, and most enjoyable, years of your life. I know. Take advantage of it.

Second, at least once a year, do something new and outside your comfort zone. Try out for a theater production, join the choir, join debate, or join the Model UN. Join with campus ministry. Participate in a new club sport or intramural sport. In most cases, not much experience is necessary. You'll meet new friends and broaden your horizons - not to mention the fun you will have.

Third, take advantage of an international experience. We have numerous international summer programs and international quarters. These are high-quality programs. In most of these programs, you will travel with Augustana faculty. The world is becoming a global village, and there is no better way to prepare yourself than traveling to some other part of the world.

Fourth, consider a double major or a minor. You need not make that decision now, but combining two areas of study will enhance your experience here. If you are in a preprofessional major, minor in a discipline within the liberal arts. It's not uncommon at Augustana to pair business with classics. But a word of caution here - don't become wed to a major too soon. Think about what you've enjoyed most in your first trimesters here and then pick a major accordingly.

Fifth, and perhaps most important, get to know your professors outside the classroom. Augustana College has one of the most favorable student/faculty ratios in the Midwest. Our faculty members are among the most impressive and brightest people I know. And - they are here for you. There is nothing more rewarding for a professor than to see students grow and seize opportunities. Besides, getting to know your professors will help them write good letters of reference!

A final few words about your education. Only about 3% of college graduates are educated at a residential liberal arts college like Augustana. Graduating from a liberal arts college will open doors. As a graduate of a residential liberal arts college, you will be nearly three times as likely to be on the Forbes list of the nation's most successful CEOs. But at the same time, you will be nearly three times as likely to be a Peace Corps volunteer. Graduates of liberal arts colleges are twice as likely to earn a PhD as graduates of other types of colleges and universities, and much more likely to win a Pulitzer Prize or be a leader in the scientific community. One third of you will pursue graduate or professional education upon graduation from the college and about half of you will

do so within 5 years of graduation.

In closing, let me invite you to consider your years here as an "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." Invest yourselves fully in the Augustana experience, for you'll never have an opportunity like this again. You have sacrificed, your parents have sacrificed and those who have endowed the college have sacrificed to get you here. Your years here are more than a path to get the title to a college degree. It is a journey to be savored. Develop your imagination. Imagine the possibilities. Invest yourselves well.



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|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Accounting              | Communication Studies    | Geography               | Music                    | Pre-Optometry              |
| Africana Studies        | Computer Science         | Geology                 | Music Education          | Pre-Pharmacy               |
| Anthropology            | Creative Writing         | German Studies          | Music Performance        | Pre-Physical Therapy       |
| Art                     | Economics                | Greek                   | Neuroscience             | Pre-Physician Assistant    |
| Art History             | Elementary Education     | Graphic Design          | Non-Profit Leadership    | Pre-Seminary               |
| Asian Studies           | Engineering              | History                 | Development              | Pre-Veterinary Medicine    |
| Biochemistry            | Engineering Physics      | International Business  | Philosophy               | Psychology                 |
| Biology                 | English (Literature)     | Japanese                | Physics                  | Religion                   |
| Business Administration | English (Writing)        | Landscape Architecture  | Political Science        | Scandinavian Studies       |
| Chemistry               | Environmental Management | Latin                   | Pre-Dentistry            | Secondary Education        |
| Chinese                 | & Forestry               | Library and Information | Pre-Law                  | Sociology                  |
| Classics                | Environmental Studies    | Science                 | Pre-Medicine             | Sociology (Social Welfare) |
| Communication Sciences  | Ethics                   | Mathematics             | Pre-Music Therapy        | Spanish                    |
| & Disorders             | French                   | Multimedia Journalism   | Pre-Nursing              | Theatre                    |
|                         |                          | & Mass Communication    | Pre-Occupational Therapy | Women's & Gender Studies   |