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"Recalculating"

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Commencement Comments to the Class of 2007

"Recalculating"

Good afternoon. And welcome to Augustana College's 147th Annual Commencement. On behalf of the faculty, let me be the first to congratulate the 575 members of the Augustana College Class of 2007. We are so very proud of you.

Your class is a very special class for me. Both you and I started at Augustana College at the same time - in 2003. You are completing four years and I am completing four years.

During the summer of 2003, as you were getting ready to leave home and contemplating starting college, you were probably wondering about two things. Am I going to fit in and am I going to have a good time. During the summer of 2003, when I was getting ready to leave my job as a law school dean and contemplating starting at Augustana, I should have been engrossed in thinking about the great issues facing higher education, but I - I, to be honest, was thinking the same thing - am I going to fit in and am I going to have a good time?

Let me tell you that I have had a good time - maybe not in the same way you have - remember, my bedtime is 10 o'clock. But I have had a good time. Like you, I have enjoyed the relationships with the faculty at Augustana College - they are among the brightest and most caring people I have met during my 27-year professional career. They make Augustana the fine college it is. But I have also enjoyed getting to know you, and it has been a great pleasure to watch you grow over the past four years. I have had a chance to watch you excel - whether through your research or your many service activities, on stage or in athletic competition. I've greeted many of you at the Dahl President's Home, while walking around campus or at Brew by the Slough (now parents.that is not a bar, it's the coffee house in the Tredway Library). I even had the opportunity to travel overseas with some of you during the choir's 2005 tour of China. You are not only an academically-talented class; you are a group of thoughtful and caring human beings.

Parents and friends, the students know that I love to tell stories (some are even true). Let me tell one story (this one, a true one) and a message that I hope our graduates remember.

As you might suspect, the job of a college president requires a lot of travel. When I travel, I often pack in several appointments in a day, so it is important that I have good directions and a good feel for the area I am visiting, so as not to get lost.

The place I feel least comfortable traveling to is the Los Angeles area. Its tangle of congested freeways and my lack of general familiarity with it can be a recipe for disaster.

So when a colleague and I went to Los Angeles a few months ago, we decided to rent a device called a Garmin Personal Travel Assistant, for use in our rental car. It is a Global Positioning System (GPS) device that attaches to the dashboard, and helps you with directions. You program a destination into the device and it gives you verbal directions. The voice coming from the box is a most pleasant-sounding lady, with a nice, reassuring

voice. She talked to me during the many miles I was in the rental car in Los Angeles. Turn left in 2 miles, she would say. Turn left in 1000 yards, turn left in 250 feet. It was foolproof - with only one hitch.

It doesn't work if you can't follow directions. When I was graduating from college like you are today - almost all of my family and friends urged me to go to law school because they said I was better at debating directions than following them. Well, at one critical intersection, the GPS lady started her routine, turn in two miles, 1000 yards, 250 feet. Everything was perfect, until at 100 feet I decide she was wrong. I wasn't going to let her tell me that to do when I thought I knew better. I sailed past the turn. Moments after I missed the turn, I realized my mistake.

Now, let me ask you this: what happens when you miss a clearly-marked turn and a real person in the passenger seat has given you the proper directions three times. A real person is likely to say "I can't believe it, why weren't you listening?!" or worse, "you dummy, let me drive." So I wondered what the GPS lady would say. Would I be reprimanded by this mechanical device on the dashboard? The device was silent for a few moments, increasing my worry. Then the nice lady said, in the most pleasant and non-judgmental voice imaginable, "recalculating." She didn't say "you dummy," she said, calmly, "recalculating." What's more, she proceeded to give me a revised set of directions so I could get to my destination on time.

Graduates, I am confident that throughout your lives you will know many successes. But I am just as confident that you will make mistakes. And when you make mistakes, you will have opportunities for "recalculating." I certainly have in my career, even during my four short years at Augustana.

James Joyce observed in *Ulysses* that mistakes are the "portals of discovery." Too often, we fail to understand this point. When we make mistakes, when things don't go our way, or when we get off-course, we are often devastated. It might be a job that didn't work out or a relationship that's on the rocks. When we don't do everything just right, we are inclined to tell ourselves - like the real live person in the passenger seat - "I can't believe I was that stupid." Worse yet, on occasion, we feel as if we might have to give up our dreams, or forsake our calling. But remember the advice of Joyce - mistakes and disappointments are opportunities to learn - opportunities for discovery and opportunities for growth.

Each year at this time, I have the privilege of attending the celebration of Augustana's 50th reunion class. I hope you will be back for your reunion. You'll be 72 or 73. Almost to a person, when members of our 50th reunion classes describe how they have followed their calling in life, they describe a winding path. They've made mistakes, they've lived through disappointments, and they have gone down blind alleys with dead ends. But without fail they tell me that their education - specifically, their liberal arts education - has given them the tools to "recalculate" their path and continue to pursue their dreams, albeit with a slightly altered course. They have had to recalculate, but have found new portals of discovery in doing so.

Graduates, we are proud of your accomplishments. Use your Augustana education well as you navigate the winding path of life, and as you find new portals of discovery. On behalf of the faculty, it has been a pleasure to serve you. May God bless and keep the Augustana College Class of 2007.



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