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## "Turning the Crystal"

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# 2003: Welcome to the First-year Class

## "Turning the Crystal"

I'm honored to be among the first to welcome the Augustana College Class of 2007. First, I'd like to congratulate you for your admission to the college. Applications were at a near-record level. We turned away hundreds of strong candidates for admission. The entering credentials of this class are as high as at any point in the college's history. We know you've worked hard to build the academic record to gain admission to a selective college like Augustana. You and your parents can rightfully be proud of your accomplishments.

I have something in common with the Class of 2007. Each of us is in our first year at the college. Each of us will be learning more about the college over the next weeks and months. Just as I'll be asking how I can make a positive impact on Augustana, I hope you'll ask how you can make a positive impact here over the next four years. Our admissions office selected you out of the belief that you will make a difference wherever you are. I share their faith in you.

A powerful symbol for me in thinking about how to make a difference is a crystal, with many facets that reflect 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 finest 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 helps us fulfill the Apostle Paul's injunction: "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by renewing your mind." ROMANS 12:2

Those who are in the best position to be creative 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 Corp volunteers, political leaders, pastors, artists, business executives and virtually every other career.

Learning to "turn the crystal" is one way of describing how to engage in critical thinking, which is the bedrock of a liberal arts education. Looking at problems from different angles gives us the ability to solve problems more creatively and in a way that contributes to the common good.

An integral part of critical and creative thinking is learning to ask the appropriate, probing questions. Equally important is having the courage to do so. A striking example of the consequences of not asking the proper question can be found in the NASA transcripts of the debate between flight controllers for the space shuttle Columbia.

Flight engineer Don McCormack, a member of the team, started to engage in critical analysis of the consequences of a piece of foam hitting the wing. Transcripts show he said "we're talking about looking at what

you can do in the event we really have some damage there." The team leader cut off critical analysis by interrupting to say "I hope we had good flight rationale" for letting the shuttle take off if there was such a risk. McCormack tried again. He said that on a previous flight there was a similar foam strike and "we saw some fairly significant damage." The supervisor again refused to engage in critical thinking and creative problem solving. Incredibly, she said that the foam strike is "really not a factor during the flight 'cause there isn't much we can do about it." That was a fatal and tragic error.

Despite the urging of engineer Don McCormack, NASA's management refused to turn the crystal. Plans to assess damage (through spy satellite photos) and explore plans to manage the risk were sidetracked.

A second story of interest this summer involved the widening of the Enron scandal. Two prestigious banks, J.P. Morgan-Chase and Citigroup paid \$300 million in fines and penalties because they aided Enron in its widespread fraud. Officials of these banks conspired with Enron to hide loans the banks had made. One of the banks, J.P. Morgan, unloaded its bad loans to pension funds that suffered huge losses. When a J.P. Morgan executive brought the problem to the attention of other executives, he was told to "shut up and delete the e-mail." What is incredible about the Enron fraud is the sheer number of people involved in the fraud - Enron executives, accountants, and bankers - hundreds of people in all. Not one was able to engage in a critical analysis of the consequences of the fraud and develop a creative plan of action to stop it. Too few were able to "turn the crystal" to put themselves in the shoes of investors, many of whom lost large portions of their life savings. Too few were able to use the high standards of care that they would hold for their family and friends and apply them to their business dealings. They looked at these fraudulent transactions through only one facet of the crystal: how to maximize profit.

Given these prominent lapses, it is no wonder that the skills most valued by business leaders today are skills related to critical thinking and the ability to advocate for creative solutions and implement them. 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

These are among the critical skills you'll master at Augustana College. In addition, we'll work with you in helping to strengthen your ethical convictions and act on them.

Oliver Wendell Holmes made two observations that we take seriously here at the college. First, "a mind stretched by a new idea never returns it to its original form." Your professors will expose you to new ideas and new ways of viewing problems - ways that will change you. I urge you to be open to these challenges. Permit yourself to leave your comfort zone. But having your horizons stretched by new ideas is not enough. Holmes also observed that "many new ideas grow better when transplanted into another mind than in one where they sprang up." Each of you has the capability to develop a better idea. I agree with those who say that to create a new idea is to touch God. Within your fields of study, we'll not only ask you to master an area, but we'll also ask

you to advance the area with new ideas by learning to turn the crystal.

How do we work with our students to master critical thinking skills? How will you learn to ask the proper probing questions? How will you learn to strengthen your ethical convictions and act on them? I'd urge you to do so in two ways - first by learning through the eyes and experience of others, and then through developing your own experiences and ideas to test what you've learned here.

At Augustana you will gain an appreciation of the human condition by studying the creative expressions of others whether it be the written word or the arts. You'll learn critical thinking skills by delving into the sciences and asking why things are the way they are. Many of you will study a foreign language to gain a better understanding of our own language and a better understanding of a changing world. With every class, every book, every artistic or scientific inquiry, you'll develop new perspectives to help you turn the crystal.

I've long remembered observation from Thomas Aquinas about our journey in life: "The road that stretches before the feet of man is a challenge to the heart long before it tests the strength of the legs." I was reminded of the words of Aquinas this summer as I read Adrian House's biography of another man of deep faith, Francis of Assisi. St. Francis was a man who understood that a meaningful life is as much a journey of the heart, as of the strength of the legs. Francis was a man of modest means, with a vow to absolute poverty. Yet, he was able to influence Popes, influence Renaissance art, and found three religious orders that 800 years later encompassed with over a million members? What's more, he laid the foundation for the ecological movement by helping us understand that man is not the master of the universe, but is a creature of the universe along with many others. St. Francis was more than a naïve pacifist. He had a brilliant mind, a mind open to learning from his experiences. He was strongly committed to his faith and had exceptional leadership ability. I believe that when St. Francis said that our life's vocation will test our heart before our legs, he meant that most of us have the stamina and strength to lead an enlightened and examined life, but many of us lack the heart. By heart, I believe he meant having self discipline, focus, vision, confidence and faith.

What does it mean to have heart? Aquinas said those with heart will "run to the end of the work and beyond, off into the darkness, certain despite all our blindness, secure despite all our helplessness, strong despite all our weakness, happily in love despite all the pressure of our hearts." That is our hope and prayer for you. By studying St. Francis and his life, I was able to "turn the crystal" and look at life's journey through the eyes of St. Francis and his biographer, Adrian House.

Looking at the human condition, the natural world and spirituality through the eyes and endeavors of others (such as St. Francis) or by exploration of the arts and sciences will stretch your mind, but it's not enough. As a student at Augustana College, you also have opportunities to apply the knowledge you gain. While it is critical to learn to look at the world through the eyes of others, it is not sufficient to look at the world only through the eyes of others. You must develop your own world view, expressed through your own voice. In so doing, you have the opportunity not only to "turn the crystal" in understanding problems; you have the opportunity to hold the crystal to the light and redirect the light in new angles and with different colors. In short, we aim to give you the opportunity to take the "truths" you'll learn here and apply those truths to your world in ways that create new ideas or in ways that make a difference.

You'll have many opportunities to get involved in campus life, choosing from over a hundred clubs. Many of you will organize service projects. Still others will engage in research projects with professors, 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.

A final few words about your education. Only about 3% of college graduates are educated at residential liberal arts colleges like Augustana. Entering 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. And nearly one third of you will pursue graduate or professional education.

In closing, let me invite you to consider your years here as a "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. Invest yourselves well.



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