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# Commencement 2012: Your Education Will Sustain You

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# Commencement 2012: Your education will sustain you

## Commencement Address

May 20, 2012

Steven C. Bahls, President

On behalf of our board of trustees, our faculty and staff let me be the first to congratulate the Augustana College Class of 2012. We are so very proud of you. And it has been our privilege to serve you.

The class of 2012 is distinguished in so many ways. You have excelled not only in the classroom, but on stages and athletic fields, in concert halls and at academic conferences. Augustana sports, theater, music, student organizations and clubs just keep on getting better. I am impressed with your determination, your commitment to service and the many ways you support your friends. And my wife and I have enjoyed getting to know you at student events or at discussions and fireside chats at the president's house on campus.



And there are many firsts — the first candidates for graduation from our new programs in neuroscience and music performance composition. The first two members of Augustana's first ever Division III lacrosse teams and competitive club hockey are graduating. For the first time ever, the flag of Vietnam flies among the world banners here today, celebrating our first candidate for graduation from Vietnam.

The majority of this class, for only the second time in our history, had internships organized through the college. And most impressive to me, for the first time in the 152-year history of the college, more than 50% of you had an Augustana study abroad experience. One hundred and fifty-two years ago, this college was founded by Swedish pioneers to prepare young immigrants to be America's next generation of leaders. Today, we seek to prepare you to be the next generation of world leaders!

And parents. Most of your students put down their deposits to attend Augustana College during the spring of

2008. And within months, the economy melted down into the most severe recession since the Great Depression. You watched your home values tank, the value of your retirement funds nosedive, and you were worried about keeping your jobs. I am very proud of Augustana's decision to enhance the financial aid of any student whose parent lost his or her job. But parents, I am particularly proud of you for sticking with this vitally important endeavor, and continuing your investment in your student's education at Augustana.

Members of the Class of 2012, when you graduate today, you join the 3 percent of American college graduates who have graduated from small, selective liberal arts colleges. Let's take just a few minutes to reflect on what that means.

The first time I spoke to most of you was probably during a high school visit day. You were most likely either a junior or senior. I mentioned to you that a liberal arts college degree prepared you for your first job and your last job. I reminded you that in this rapidly changing world you could expect to have many more different jobs, and perhaps more careers than your parents have had. I informed you that what employers want in recent college graduates is problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills and employees who have a strong sense of ethics.

The second time most of us met was at opening convocation. You all remember what I said.. *"didn't* you!? Do you remember that I talked about turning the crystal? What does a child do if given a crystal — the child puts it up to his or her eyes and turns it, viewing the room from different angles. I challenged you to do that at Augustana. Learn to look at problems from different vantage points. View the vexing national and world problems we face not only from your own vantage point, but from the perspective of an economist, a scientist, a philosopher, an ethicist, a psychologist. To do so, I urged you to take a variety of courses in addition to your major and to read widely, including great literature. Doing so helps us find creative "win-win" solutions to real-world problems. Just imagine if more of our elected officials could do that — we might have less gridlock.

This is my last time to talk with you as students. There is one other advantage of a broad, values-based education like Augustana's that we don't talk enough about. That is that your education will sustain you when you find yourself in the inevitable dead ends of life. Most of you will experience a dark alley or two in the course of your journeys. I know that I have. Just when things are going well, there comes the unexpected. It might be the death of a loved one, the loss of a job or relationship, health issues, or some other unwelcome development in life. Such dead-ends are inevitable, and — understandably — these events "knock us off our horse." A liberal arts education can help you brush yourself off and get back on your horse.

It is at times like these that your critical thinking skills can help you view your problems not only from the moment, but from a longer range and more thoughtful standpoint. The traditional liberal arts provide insight into the human condition through a variety of lenses — history, religion, literature, music. This builds a vast context in which to place our limited humanity, and reminds us that we are not alone in this venture of life. This becomes the surest cure for despair, replacing the narrow parochialism of a self-obsessed existence with the solace and consolation that comes from knowing we are not, in the end, either alone or unique. As life-long learners, you will come to view hard times as an opportunity to grow, even when such growth is painful. At times, when we are at a dead end, we need to view the need to redirect as an opportunity. Your faith and your moral code can provide strength during difficult times. And for many of you, the special friendships you've made at a small college like Augustana will sustain you in unexpected ways.

So use your liberal arts education well. Use it not only for your first job, but also for your last job. When dealing with difficult issues, turn the crystal to view the issue from different viewpoints and come to the best decision. And, when you are at a dead-end and the world is seemingly coming down around you, rise above the problem by viewing it as an opportunity for growth.

Students, it has been an honor for all of us to part of your lives. We are very proud of you! May God bless and keep the Augustana College Class of 2012!



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