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# Launching the Next Four Years Together

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# Launching the Next Four Years Together

First-Year Opening Convocation, Aug. 21, 2014

Steven C. Bahls, president

On behalf of the Augustana College Board of Trustees and faculty, it is my distinct honor to welcome you to Augustana. Like you, we have been looking forward to this day.

Students, we know you've worked hard to gain admission to a selective college like Augustana. You can rightfully be proud of your accomplishments. We thank you for choosing Augustana College. And let me add congratulations to the parents of our new students. As a parent of three children who graduated from liberal arts colleges, including one who just graduated from Augustana 15 months ago, I know the investments time, energy and money parents make to help students get where they are now. The college sincerely appreciates your commitment to your students.

Students, your class has already set several records. There were nearly 6600 applications, which is a record number for us. Your class is the most selective in memory, meaning each of you admitted has earned the right to be here. In addition to the 734 first-year students, there are about 60 transfer students joining us and several visiting students. And I am proud to announce that nearly 25 percent of our new students are multicultural or international students, making this one of the most diverse classes in our history!

Students, over the last two years you most likely visited quite a number of colleges and universities. You've considered the advantages and disadvantages of each. In picking Augustana, you have made a deliberate determination to select a small, residential college that will help you grow in mind, spirit and body.

What does it mean for you that you have chosen to attend a liberal arts college? Consider this: Though only 3 percent of America's college graduates were educated at small, residential colleges, they represent 8 percent of Forbes magazine's listing of the nations' most successful CEOs and 8 percent of Peace Corps volunteers. I like this statistic, since it shows that a small residential college degree is wonderfully flexible. Why is it that you are nearly three times as likely to be a successful CEO and three times as likely to be a Peace Corp volunteers? It's because small college graduates don't get lost. They are fully engaged in their education and fully engaged in the work world.

We know you aimed high in selecting a college like Augustana. We want you to continue to aim high, and that's why we gave you an envelope with some pieces of paper and pens inside. We are asking parents, students and faculty to write down your aspirations for the next four years on that sheet of paper. Students, on paper with yellow markings: what do **you** hope to get out of the next four years? Parents, on the paper with blue markings: what dreams do you have for your students? And faculty, on the paper with green markings: what hopes do you hold for your students?

When you finish writing down your aspirations, follow the instructions for turning your sheet into a paper airplane - **but hold onto them!** We will launch the paper airplanes together in just a few minutes. Now, if you

are like me and have a hard time with detailed instructions, you can fold your airplane anyway you like. Students, if you care to sign your name, we'll place the airplane in your file, so in four years you can refer back to it. Parents, no need to sign your names, but we will gather your airplanes too so we can learn more about your aspirations for your students.

All that said, I know what many students and parents are hoping for: a degree in four years. That's not a bad goal.

Let's talk about getting a degree in **four** years. Students, we love you, but we don't have room for you after four years. Here is what a degree from Augustana looks like: a nice degree holder, high quality paper, the Augustana seal and my signature. The cost of the actual piece of paper and degree holder is about \$18-to- \$20 with postage.

But what these tokens represent is worth so much more. You are paying tens of thousands of dollars for what's behind these tokens, so I'd ask you to think a bit deeper. What are your higher aspirations about how you might grow in mind, body and spirit in the next four years?

So, in my time with you and as you are thinking about these deeper issues, I'd like to offer several pieces of practical advice, based on my thirty years as either a professor or college president.

**First, do something new and outside your comfort zone.** Most of you were heavily involved in student activities while you were in high school. But now you are college students and I challenge you to try something outside of your comfort zone. Row crew, try out for a theater production, join a choir or dance club, start a radio show on WAUG, join debate, or get active in student government. Engage with campus ministry. Sign up for a club sport or intramurals. In most cases, not much experience is necessary. You'll meet new friends and broaden your horizons. And if we don't have a club that meets your interests, consider starting a new one. Just gather some like-minded friends and I will try to provide the seed money to get you going.

Now, I first made that promise 12 years ago when I first addressed students in an opening convocation. And since that time we have added more than 60 clubs and activities.

Too often we get stuck in our comfort zones. That is human nature. But the skill that may be most valuable to you in the years to come is the ability to embrace change. And embracing change entails getting outside of your comfort zone. Do that here at Augustana. The philosopher, Heraclitus, was indeed correct when he observed that nothing is constant but change.

**Second, don't take yourself too seriously.** You all have distinguished high school records, but for most of you there will be bumps in the road as you transition to college. You might find the courses here a bit difficult at first. You might not hit a home run on every exam. You might find this is a time of soul-searching, which is not always easy.

I recall first exam in college. It was a math course. I had a pretty easy time with math in high school, and so I was shocked to see a D-Minus next to my name. D-Minus? What is a D-Minus?

Worse yet, I recall one of my first papers being returned with only one comment, written at the very end: "At

Last!"

I share these stories with you to make one simple point. Most students have disappointments in college. I did. But it's not the end of the world. My first exam...my first paper...these were disasters - but I recovered. And the reason I did is that I asked for help. So, keep things in perspective, and if you get off to a slower start than you hope, talk to your professors and ask them for help. It will make all the difference in the world.

There will be other frustrations for many of you. You may find that the major you were planning on is not a good fit is not, but another major appears to be a better fit. That is OK. Be easy on yourself. Give it time. Very few students flunk out of Augustana College and almost all students eventually find the right major, the right group of friends and the right activities. The friendships you build here will last a lifetime. In fact, you might want to take a look around the room. Many of your lifelong friendships will start here.

**Third, get to know your faculty and your advisors.** The faculty and staff at Augustana are here for you. One of the advantages of a small liberal arts college is that you will have the chance to get to know your faculty members and advisors. They want to get to know you. They want to help you if you are struggling in class. They want to help you make wise course selections and internship connections.

For many of you, a faculty member in this very room will become more than a professor, more than an advisor, more than a source for an outstanding recommendation letter to help you follow your dreams. For many of you, a professor seated here today will become a mentor, who will continue to guide you long after you have left Augustana, and even long after your last conversation with her or him.

**Fourth, understand that you make your own luck at Augustana and in life.** The Roman philosopher Seneca said the "luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." Now, students, I am the luckiest person in the world. I have the great privilege of serving as president of Augustana College, with the extraordinary opportunity of working with our talented faculty and staff, but also the opportunity to get to know our wonderful students and their families. How did I get this job - luck? Being in the right place at the right time? Sure, that was part of it. But let's also remember what Seneca had to say. Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity. In a sense you make your own luck. You make your luck by being well prepared. You make your luck by being active and visible. You make your luck by creating a record of success in a different field, that someone notices you when you least expect it. It's not just about the right place and the right time, it's about making sure that when you, and the place and the time meet...you are right for each other.

**Fifth, enjoy the journey.** Your college years are not to be rushed through. It is not simply about doing well on exams. Don't regard Augustana as little more than a punch-card to pass exams and get a degree and then a job. Enjoy the journey. We say that Augustana students are doers, not spectators. Engage yourself in all that Augustana has to offer. Classes and exams are important, but other things are too.

Speaking of exams, on the count of three I want you to say: "Professor is it on the exam?" Ready? 1-2-3... "Professor, is it on the exam?" There...you have said it once and that's the last time I want you to say it! Augustana is about more than exams. Regard it as a place of growth in mind, spirit and body. Regard Augustana as a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." Invest yourselves fully in the Augustana experience, because

you will never have an opportunity like this again.

Before we launch our planes, let me tell you why this is a very special time at Augustana. The college has invested nearly \$40 million to improve its facilities. Our award-winning renovation of Old Main is sure to impress, as virtually all of you will take classes there. Last year we opened the Austin Knowlton Athletic Complex, housing our football field, our track and the new Ken Anderson Academic All-America Club, a great venue for gathering at football games and throughout the year. And we are very proud of our new Center for Student Life, which is surely one of the nicest in the nation. Next month, we are schedule to open a new fitness center in the Westerlin Residence Hall.

But more important even than our investment in buildings is our investment in programs. This year we are unveiling our new CORE program. CORE, C-O-R-E, stands for Careers, Opportunities, Research and Exploration. The Center is located in the heart of campus, in the Olin Center.

Students, Augustana's faculty, working with the professionals in the Augustana CORE office, will ask you to be deliberate as you consider four critical questions over the next four years.

Here are the questions we will ask you to fully consider:

1. What are the core talents, skills and passions that make you who you are?
2. Once you assess who you are, what do you want to do with your Augustana degree, to best leverage your talents, skills and passions in a world hungry for leadership?
3. As you discern what you want to do, how do you plan a path for getting there?
4. And once you get there, will you have developed the skills to be successful and to lead a satisfying life of leadership and service?

So the first two questions we encourage you to think about are Who Am I and What Do I Want to Be. The process of connecting these two is what we refer to as vocational reflection. It is described by the American writer and theologian, Frederick Buechner, this way: "The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done....The place God calls you to," Buechner writes, "is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

That is our aspiration for you: that you will develop a career path and a life-plan that enables you to align your deep gladness with the world's deep hunger.

But starting this year and through the efforts of Augie CORE, this college is becoming more intentional than at any time in its 154-year history about helping you address the third and fourth questions I mentioned. Once you determine what you want to do, how do you get there? The college commits to working with you to answer that question. We've increased from 4 career counselors to 13 professions available to you help you determine your calling in life and a plan to get there. We will work with you to develop the internships and other experiences you need to hit the ground running as you prepare to pursue the first steps in your career. In fact, we will provide you with a Viking Scorecard, a practical way to track your progress toward career or grad school readiness.

Finally, we will work with you in developing the skills you need to be successful in the job market. We will work

with you in creating a portfolio of your extra-curricular activities your service work and your most amazing adventures. Why? Because we know that employers and graduate schools have come to understand that what happens outside the classroom can be as important as what happens in the classroom. Just as your faculty members have developed majors that emphasize critical and creative thinking, so has the entire campus community worked to help you hone those skills that employers and grad schools tell us are the most important skills?

So, now is the big moment. You have only one minute to write on the form what your aspirations are and fold it into an airplane - either following the folding instructions on the plan or doing it your own way. And check back for the YouTube video, where I will reveal my dreams and aspirations for the Augustana Class of 2018.

I'm going to count down from three to one so we can launch our planes as one. May the launching of these paper airplanes and the dreams they convey symbolize the beginning of our college years together. Students, parents, loved ones, faculty and staff: May we align our efforts to make the next four years among the best and most formative of our students' lives. May our students have the wings to soar!

Here we go. THREE...TWO...ONE.....**LAUNCH!**

Let's give ourselves a round of applause for our commitment to launch the next four years together!

Well, my time is up. Let me conclude by saying I look forward to getting to know each of you a bit better. Parents, we invite you back for Family Weekend. My wife and I will have reception at our home and we hope you can join us. Students, stop by to visit me during my open hours in the coffeehouse in the Center for Student Life. And we also hope to see each student at events across campus and at the Dahl President's Home.

Best wishes to the Class of 2018. I strongly suspect the next four years may be the best four years of your lives. Thank you!



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