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2016 Honors Convocation

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2016 Honors Convocation | Augustana College

On behalf of the faculty, staff and trustees at Augustana College, it is my pleasure, and indeed, my honor, to congratulate you for your achievements at Augustana. We are so very proud of you.

And parents, congratulations to you. Honor students don't achieve their potential without considerable investment from their parents. As the parent of three honor students myself, I know first-hand how much you encourage your students. I know how many late nights you have spent helping your students stay focused on homework. And how you worked so hard when your students were young to encourage them to be curious about the world around them and creative in their approach to life. You've been your students' constructive critic, cheerleader and mentor. You've made it happen for your students.

Parents, you've seen how others made it happen for your students, as well. Just as you engaged in your students' lives, so too have others - in schools, arts and athletic programs and similar communities - been engaged in your students' lives. I am particularly proud of those at Augustana who have made a real difference for your students - particularly our faculty; who are invested in both challenging your students and opening doors for them. Students, family and friends, let's take a moment to thank our faculty.

A friend sent me an article a few weeks ago about the worst advice given to graduates. The article was written by Dick Meyer, Chief Washington correspondent for the Scripps Washington Bureau. Here is what he wrote:

"I did an informal, perhaps biased, survey of last year's college graduation speeches. The most common counsel to these educated young people was this: Follow your passion. Catch your star. Pursue your dream. You can do anything you want and so go do it."

I must confess that I have occasionally given just such advice to graduates - don't give up on your dreams. Passionately pursue your calling in life.

So over the last couple of weeks, I've been pondering this advice. Should I modify the admonition to follow your dreams? But what's the alternative - settle for how others try to limit you? Settle for the path of least resistance? That's awful advice! Never settle.

In thinking about it, I guess I agree with much of what Dick Meyer says, though not necessarily his conclusion. Meyer says "follow your passions" is bad advice for a number of reasons. First, he says that most people do not have epic passions. As such, he says that advising students to follow their passions causes unnecessary angst and pressure. He also suggests that it is absurd to think that everyone can have every level of success that they want. Success is not only determined by a passionate calling, he says. Success is also determined by the gifts we have, the drive to realize our calling and the temperament to be happy and healthy along the way. Few people, he argues have the trifecta of passion, determination, and a healthy temperament, though I suspect many of you do.

Meyer is right that a person with passion, but with a poor attitude, usually becomes frustrated and walks away from their passion. And it is also true, as he observes, that the opportunity for passionate people to make a

difference sometimes turns on luck. But I would remind Meyer that luck is not something that just drops out of the sky. As the Roman philosopher Cicero said, luck is the intersection of preparation and opportunity.

So here is my advice to you. For those of you who have found a deep passion, consider yourself fortunate. But recognize that passion alone is not enough for you to make the difference that you hope to make. It will take hard work, determination, and a positive frame of mind to make a difference.

For those of you who don't know if you have a burning passion, that's OK. I didn't know that my passion was higher education when I graduated from college forty years ago. My passion only became apparent to me later in my career. I bet many of your parents had the same experiences - passions and careers evolving with time.

For those of you who can't identify one over-arching passion today, recognized that you many never do so. Often, Augustana graduates report that they have developed many passions - all equally important. Multiple passions often include not only a career, but a calling to family and parental commitments. There might also be a passion to solve a community problem, or to pursue a hobby that gives you perspective. Not having a passion that dominates all others can lead to a more balanced live and provide you with the ability to make a real difference.

But beware - too may college graduates are derailed by what I call "passion busters." These passion busters, if not avoided, will stand in your way of making a real difference. Your passions could become lost opportunities. What are passion busters? Most will be familiar to you. The biggest passion busters I've seen include:

- Acting like you are the smartest person in the room. You may be, but you need to work with others to get anything done. Resolve to be humble most more times than not.
- Another buster is negative attitudes. Don't confuse using the power of critical thinking with being critical of others.
- A desire to have it all is a passion buster. Learn to compromise. A half loaf is better than none. Look how the failure of our elected officials to compromise in Illinois is threatening to destroy the quality of life in our state.
- And, of course, a lack of discipline interferes with effectively pursuing your passion. It is an inconvenient truth that too many are derailed from their passions by substance abuse, failing to honor relationships, dishonesty and lack of fidelity to high principles. Resolve to take care of yourselves not only mentally and physically, but also spiritually.

But let me spend the remainder of our time together talking about the final passion buster - impatience.

As one of my mentors was fond of reminding me: "Be patient! Rome was not built in a day." Students, I would give you the same advice - the fruit of your labors and your passions will probably not be realized in next year or even in five years.

Those who are impatient will be too quick to give upon on their passions. They will forget that the current train is almost never the last train to leave the station. And the next train might take you to an even better destination.

The theologian Henry J.M. Nouwen (NOUW-en) pointed out the central benefit of patience. He wrote:

Patience is not waiting passively until someone else does something. Patience asks us to live the moment to the fullest, to be completely present to the moment, to taste the here and now, to be where we are. When we are impatient, we try to get away from where we are. We behave as if the real thing will happen tomorrow, later, and somewhere else. Be patient and trust that the treasure you are looking for is hidden in the ground on which you stand.

So yes, pursue your passions, but be patient with yourself. Enjoy each day of the journey ahead. When you do, you will have healthier attitudes and are more likely to accomplish, in a grand way, what you are passionate about.

Now when I ask you to be patient, that doesn't mean you should become complacent. In fact, don't be complacent with social injustice and the mistreatment of others. When you see wrongs in our society, don't be a bystander - intervene. One of the reasons that I love your generation is that you are impatient with injustice and the wrongs in society. You've pushed my generation, the generation in power, to look at things differently and be more open to more rapid changes. So I applaud your impatience with the status quo. But I ask you to be patient with yourself in setting realistic benchmarks for your passions. Please - be impatient with injustice, but take care to be patient with yourself. Be determined, but be patient with yourself. Determination means staying focused on your goals. But be patient in understanding that pursuing your passions is an uncertain and winding road upon which you will travel. And that winding road, for many, will be the road less traveled that will give your life meaning. Resolve to do what you do well, even when you don't know where the road is taking you. That is how you will find happiness.

So let me amend the traditional graduation advice of "follow your passion" and "you can do anything you want" to this: If you've found your burning passion in life at Augustana, follow it, but be patient in doing so. If you don't have just one burning passion, but many different passions, patiently balance them all in order to lead a full, not frenetic, life. And if you haven't found your passions, be patient. You will find your passions, perhaps when you least expect it.

Students, like your parents, I believe in you and I believe you will make the most of the journey ahead. But I'm not the only one who believes in you. Take a look at the faculty members gathered here on this stage. They are very smart, very talented people who tend to invest their time and energy wisely. They have invested in you, because they believe in you.

Honors students, we believe in you. Believe in yourselves. Be patient with yourselves - you will make this world a better place.



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

