

Heidelberg Fall 2019 Opening Convocation

President's Remarks

29 August 2019

Good morning to the Class of 2023 and all transfer students! Thank you very much for making Heidelberg University your college of choice.

Welcome to the start of our 170th year of educating young women and men through learning in the Liberal Arts and Sciences, in market-driven professional education, and in complementary cocurricular and extracurricular programming. That is what we do. Our focus is on your *Excellent Education*, your *Full Engagement*, your *Total Success*, your *Four-Year Graduation*, and your *Preferred Placement*. That is what we care about. We want you to succeed in everything you do and be ready for internships, service roles, jobs, graduate schools, careers, and all of your purpose-filled paths of distinctive lives.

I extend special appreciation to our upper class students for choosing us again and returning! Thank you for your supporting roles in our old and new traditions around T-Bridge, Berg Beanies, and H Pins this morning.

Our returning and new Faculty and Staff are the great individuals who bring their dedicated talent and passionate commitment to Heidelberg students every day. Thank you for everything that you do!

To all of our students, faculty, staff and guests, I hope that everyone's summer has brought you back to campus refreshed and excited.

Our keynote speaker this morning is Heidelberg alumna ('15) and rising BBC News star video journalist, Ms. Hannah Long-Higgins. I first met Hannah during her senior year in high school. She is very smart, very funny, and very fearless. In a moment, she will be formally introduced. It is a real pleasure to have you share your inspiring thoughts with our students this morning, Hannah. Thank you and welcome back!

We are welcoming 362 new students to our campus this fall. This includes 333 first-time first-year students. I know that all of you will thrive because you bring an abundance of talent, energy, diversity, and accomplishments to this community. Let me say a few words about you.

One new student is from each of the states of Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and South Carolina; 2 students are from U.S. military bases (Japan and Germany); 8 countries are represented plus the U.S.; 15 states are represented; 8% of our students are from Tiffin and Seneca County; 12% are from Heidelberg legacy families; 13% are in our Honors Program; 18% are from outside Ohio; 18% identify as underrepresented students; 20% competed on Scholars Days; 43% are first generation college students in their families; 45% identify as females; 54% identify as males; 65% are DIII student-athletes; and **100%** of our incoming students are ready to succeed at Heidelberg.

Based on their high school records, prior college work and other achievements, our entering class and transfers are smart people with wide-ranging interests. The first-year class high school average GPA is 3.48 and the average ACT is 22, both marks higher than the past two years. And 54 students (16%) had a 4.0 or higher GPA in high school!

One of our new out-of-state students attended ShowChoir Camp of America here at Heidelberg in the summer and found their college home. Two of our students and their families drove together from California to get here, and long before that, both sets of their parents went to high school together. One of our highly motivated new students has lived all over the country with her family and chose Heidelberg to pursue her career in special education. We are excited to have the fourth Al-Forgani family sibling from Libya join us this fall. We are honored to welcome new students from Canada, Ecuador, India, Japan, Libya, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and the United Kingdom. And one of our first-years had a very busy summer working at a distillery, a vacation bible school, and a professional golf tournament, while also attending the Space X launch in Florida!

Following my annual habit of making a pair of additional reading suggestions on this occasion, I recommend two books (one biography and one novel) about our country during a period of tremendous conflict, horrible suffering, and the rising of humanity.

The first book is the new biography *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (2018) by David W. Blight. Dr. Blight is Professor of American History and Director of the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale University. In 764 highly researched pages, he chronicles the phenomenal life of Frederick Douglass from unknown slave to worldwide celebrity (1818-1895). Next to Mark Twain, he was the most world-travelled American of that century and the most photographed. Behind Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. more than half a century later, Douglass is arguably the most famous African American with the greatest influence on our country's history. Through tens of thousands of speeches, thousands of letters and essays, three autobiographies, and both business ownership and government jobs over a 50-year working career, Douglass devoted his life to the end of slavery and the eventual freedom for black Americans. In our terms, that meant diversity, equity, and inclusion for all people. His life story was truly astounding. His impact was huge. Upon their first meeting in 1863, after Douglass was "ushered past" the long waiting line of white patronage seekers at the White House, President Abraham Lincoln said, "Mr. Douglass, I know you; I have read about you, and Mr. Seward has told me about you." This book won a 2019 Pulitzer Prize several months ago. It is now the definitive account of Frederick Douglass.

The second book is the old novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin; Or, Life Among the Lowly* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896). I recommend the Splendid Edition with 117 illustrations by the famous Boston engraver, Hammett Billings, because his strong visuals underscore the good and the bad in this novel. The book was written by a 41-year old white woman in Massachusetts who believed that slavery was wrong and that abolition was right nearly a decade before the Civil War. It became an instant best-seller. The North loved it. The South hated it. Upon meeting Stowe at the start of the Civil War, President Lincoln acknowledged the strong antislavery impact of this 560-page work. It is a sad, painful, and yet inspiring account of "Life Among the Lowly" in slavery America. That is the good part. The bad part includes the

patronizing tone and harsh language that popularized many negative and unfair stereotypes about black people at that time. A century later, the famous author James Baldwin described the book as a “very bad novel” and “self-righteous.” Fifty years after Baldwin, Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr., the famous Harvard professor, described the book as a “central document in American race relations” and part of the canon on racism. When Douglass visited Stowe at her home a year after the book was published in 1853, he described her as someone with an “exalted sense of justice.” He called her book “the universal soul of humanity.” Their lives overlapped for all of his 77 years and they shared a common cause for freedom, equality, and justice. In our terms, that meant diversity, equity, and inclusion for all people. Stowe’s book is worth a new read. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was the highest-selling novel and the second most sold book behind the Bible worldwide in the 19th century.

To all new and returning students, get engaged and be intentional. Hang out with people different than you. Grab the *Big Opportunities* to gain your *Life Advantages* here. We are a friendly place where students and their professors, advisors, and coaches can learn and grow together.

It is our privilege to teach, mentor, and serve each one of you in support of your academic and career aspirations. We are a better school with you here. Our shared goal is that all of you graduate successfully from Heidelberg on April 30, 2023 or sooner to continue your journey and pursue your *Life of Purpose with Distinction*.

Good luck to all of you and especially to the Class of 2023.

We go forward together!

Thank you.