

Heidelberg Fall 2021 Opening Convocation

President's Remarks

19 August 2021

Good morning to the Class of 2025 and to all transfer and graduate students! The COVID-19 global pandemic has made us a stronger community. It continues to challenge us. It continues to threaten our health and success.

All of us share the responsibility to take care of ourselves and others, our teams and organizations, our classrooms and activity spaces, and this campus community. We will succeed together!

Thank you very much for making Heidelberg University your college of choice. In these times especially, I am grateful that we gather here.

Welcome to our 172nd year of educating young women and men through integrated *Professional Liberal Arts* curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular programming. We take our commitment to your education, engagement, success, graduation, and placement seriously. That is what we care about. In four years, we will be standing in front of your Class of 2025 Graduation banner ... as we stand before the great Class of 2021 banner here today.

I extend appreciation to our upper-class students for continuing their Berg journey and participating in the *H Pin Ceremony* on the way in.

Our Faculty and Staff have continued to work diligently to prepare our campus for the start of fall semester. We want a safe and successful experience for all students and their families. Thank you to everyone!

Our keynote speaker this morning is Heidelberg alumna, Ms. Melissa Harrison ('02), and she will be formally introduced. I met Melissa when we gave her the Heidelberg Young Alumni Achievement Award in 2018. This woman has built an incredible career in only 19 years! I have appreciated Melissa's leadership voice on the Alumni Council. She embodies the educational Vision for our graduates to be "global citizens who think critically, communicate effectively, and serve thoughtfully." Thank you, Melissa, for your strong message today!

We are welcoming **299** new students to our school this fall, including first-time first-year and transfer students. You are an impressive and interesting group with many talents and interests!

One freshman comes here solo from Georgia, Kentucky, and Virginia; 10 states are represented altogether; New students from Brazil, Gambia, Ghana, and Zambia have joined us; 8% of our students are from Tiffin and Seneca County; 11% are in our Honors Program; 14% are Heidelberg legacy families; 15% had a 4.0 or higher GPA in high school (3.52 average freshman GPA!); 19% are from outside Ohio; 19% identify as underrepresented students; 23% competed on Scholars Days; 40% are first generation college students in their families; 45% identify as females; 55% identify as males; 69% are DIII student-athletes; and **100%** of our new students want to engage and succeed at Heidelberg.

Some interesting background stories too. One of our new students has already been admitted to a medical school through an early acceptance program. Several new students chose Heidelberg to have the same great professor that their parents had way back when!?! Nearly 40% of our first years have CCP/AP/dual enrollment credits toward their degree here. This group is packed with leaders ... lots of class presidents, school officers, and elected leaders of state organizations, theatre clubs, teams, and LGBTQ societies. Many new students have been working multiple jobs through the pandemic to help support their families during health and financial challenges. Finally, one student started their own basketball podcast to provide their views on all things hoop related.

Following my annual habit of making some reading suggestions on this occasion, I recommend two excellent books about being Black in America written by two outstanding writers nearly a century apart.

The first book is *The Weary Blues* (1926) by the American poet and lecturer Langston Hughes (1901-1967). Hughes was born in Missouri and graduated from high school in Cleveland. This collection of his poems was a stunning start to a remarkable career of heralded work. His opening poem called “Proem” begins “I am a Negro: Black as the night is black, Black like the depths of my Africa.” His closing poem called “Epilogue” finishes “I, too, am America.” We all are.

The second book is *I’m Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* (2018) by the American speaker, writer and media producer Austin Channing Brown (1984 -). Brown was born and raised in Ohio. She learned at age 7 that her parents named her Austin to honor her grandmother’s maiden name and to make future employers think she was a white man. Through her work, Brown has become a strong voice for racial justice in our country. Near the end of this book’s last chapter “Standing in the Shadow of Hope,” she writes, “It is working in the dark, not knowing if anything I do will ever make a difference. It is speaking anyway, writing anyway, loving anyway. It is enduring disappointment and then getting back to work.” We are too.

To all new and returning students, please get engaged, be intentional about everything, and get vaccinated if you have not done so. Do not limit your *Big Opportunities* and *Life Advantages* at this University!

It is our privilege to teach, mentor, and serve each one of you in support of your academic and career aspirations. We want all of you to graduate successfully from Heidelberg in four years 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 2025. Thank you!