

Scholars Day

Saturday, January 31 & February 7, 2009

Good afternoon and again, welcome to the Berg. We are pleased that you are joining us today for what I hope has been a worthwhile experience. This is an important time for you, isn't it? This is crunch time for you. Graduation is about 4 months away for most of you. The college search, all of sudden, is nearing its conclusion.

Mom/Dad, can you believe it? Wasn't it just yesterday that you bought them their first scooter? Had play dates with your friends? My oldest daughter turned 10 this week and someone remarked that don't look now, but you'll be taking her for her driving test next week, or at least it will seem that way. Boy, I sure hope not...

Who's doing this college search thing for the first time?

Well, we are here for you and want you to know that we not only understand and embrace the anxiety that many of you are feeling, we want to help you move through that anxiety. And these visit days are an excellent opportunity to begin putting that college search puzzle together.

And it really is about finding a match or fit: academically, socially, financially. We, too, want a good fit. We want students who are going to be motivated, inspired, driven, and involved. We want students, and families, who are invested in the educational process with us because this truly is a collaborative venture. And in the end, we all want the same thing. Success. Academic success. Life success. Part of the success is graduation day and earning that diploma. That's the outcome, if you will.

But we all know that it is the process to that outcome that is so important. That process is the four or five years that is college. And college is about growth and maturity, risk and tremendous freedom (academic and social freedom). College is about developing a new identity. It's about finding one's passion and getting prepared and eventually engaged in our ever-changing world.

But how does all this happen? Well, it begins with finding the right environment where all of these things are not only available but they are nurtured. And of course, that's why you're here right now. You're asking yourself, "Is Heidelberg University the place for me?"

The answer, of course, is ABSOLUTELY! Of course we are! But seriously, some of you may already know that Heidelberg is in your future; others are checking us out, kicking the tires a bit. That kind of analysis and assessment is important, particularly when you are about to make one of the most significant (and expensive) choices of your life. College is the third most expensive investment in your life. Behind what? Child, house...

The variables involved in your college choice are many, but I want to spend a few minutes talking with you about the process of that choice rather than the many factors you'll be considering.

You have already had the Q&A's, the presentations, toured the campus, you've seen the view books, spoken to many of our outstanding students and faculty. However, my question to you is this: Have you taken the opportunity to take a step back, take stock of where you are, students and parents, and fully understand and appreciate the many opportunities that lie ahead? This moment in time, and it happens only once, is a wonderful occasion for personal reflection and thoughtful and intentional deliberation.

You know, the college search process should be fun. I know exactly what you're thinking. "College search and fun? That's an oxymoron Mr. President." Follow me for a second. I know, it's probably one of the more stressful experiences you'll both go through but this college search process is both a culmination of a job well done, as well as the beginning of a wonderful and rewarding personal journey. It should be a great relationship-building exercise between student and parent. SHOULD BE.

I'd recommend that as you spend time on the road visiting the many colleges and universities out there, that you spend time talking, yes, with each other, rather than plugging your ears with an iPod or texting about, well, nothing. Spend time sharing expectations, fears, hopes, and dreams.

Truly take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that is college, a still-unrealized dream, I should point out, for one-third of our country. While roughly 65 percent of high school graduates go on to a four-year college, there are still only 28 percent of American citizens with a bachelor's degree. Less than 7 percent with graduate degrees. By the way, relative to income, the average annual earnings for someone with a bachelor's degree is \$51,000 versus \$27,000 for a high school graduate, a difference of \$24,000 a year. Go ahead and calculate that over a lifetime....

What happens to that other 37 percent who go to college but don't finish? Why don't they finish? I don't want to over-generalize but most might say preparatopm or lack thereof, although money or ability to pay is increasingly playing an important factor with many of today's families. But college demands, among other things, maturity, self-discipline, and purposeful intellectual preparation. Without those, this environment can chew you up. And may not spit you back out! There's no easy way to say it.

Which brings me back to my point about process, self-reflection and deliberation. Are students today spending the necessary time developing their academic ambitions? Thinking about goals to be achieved? Exercising appropriately those intellectual curiosities?

This is a scholars event, which means you all possess a high degree of academic achievement. How many of you have really spent time thinking about your scholarly pursuits? Your ambitions as a student? Parents, have you asked your student? And I'm not talking about careers, although that is certainly related. Answering the question about what you want to do is easy. The tougher question is "how are you going to get there?"

Well, folks, now is the time. I hate to be the bearer of bad news but procrastination is no longer an option. While college is and should be fun and exploratory, it is also serious business and one that demands considerable intellectual awareness on behalf of our students, particularly those

students like yourself whose capacity for learning is vast. I say capacity because you know as well as I that there are plenty of straight A students who have flunked life. The potential to achieve is clear but the desire is often absent. As an educator, that scenario, my friends, is what saddens me the most. Unrealized potential.

Our committed faculty expect, and certainly deserve, all that you have to offer. They deserve, we deserve, your full academic engagement and inquiry. This is what creates that exciting culture of learning: when students' ambitions and goals align with those of the institutional learning environment.

At Heidelberg, you are a participant, not a spectator, in this culture of learning. If you'd like to hide out among a class of 400-500 students in a large lecture hall, we're probably not your cup of tea. We pride ourselves on personal relationships, on meaningful interaction, on nurturing those aspirations, however deep they may be.

For 159 years, Heidelberg has been steady in its authentic mission to provide a meaningful environment of learning. In the laboratories, music hall, on stage, athletic fields, or in your residence hall. Learning, as we know, happens all around us but students, you must be prepared, willing, and eager to absorb it. Preparation. Organization. Self-discipline.

At a time when our country is facing chaotic and uncertain economic times, I might argue that there is no greater time to reassess our values and priorities than right now. Wealth, as we have unfortunately witnessed and/or felt, is transient. Jobs, in many sectors, unpredictable. Consequently, during times like we are experiencing right now, I am reminded just how precious education really is. It cannot and will not be taken from you. It indeed shapes and pervades the very essence of your soul. Your character. Your spirit.

To conclude, let me just say this. Students, while you may have important and influential people in your lives, people who have really shaped who you are and what you hope to become, the reality, in my judgment, is that as you progress forward, the inspiration for your success will be none other than the person you see in that mirror. He or she will determine how hard you work, plan and prepare. Daunting, yes, but truly extraordinary to recognize that we indeed own our future.

I certainly hope Heidelberg University is a part of your future and wish each of you the very best as you navigate the next few months of this most exciting and rewarding time of your life.

Thank you and hope to see you back at the Berg this fall.