

Heidelberg Fall 2017 Opening Convocation

President's Remarks

24 August 2017

Good morning to the Class of 2021, our transfer students, and all other students, faculty, staff and guests. I hope that everyone's summer has brought you back to school rested and rejuvenated, revved and ready.

I extend a special welcome to all of our new students. Thank you very much for making Heidelberg University your college of choice. I extend my special appreciation to our upper class students for choosing us again and returning. Thank you for your role in our awesome *H Pinning Ceremony* this morning.

To our freshmen, it was great to wave goodbye as you departed for your HYPE First Year Common Experience in Hocking Hills on Sunday afternoon. Along with other students waiting for your return, it was even better to welcome all of you back to campus on Monday night. Seven full buses out and seven full buses back ... Perfect. Congratulations!

I would also like to congratulate 360 first-year and upper class students for participating in *BergServe* last Saturday morning under the strong leadership of our Chaplain and Director of Religious Life Paul Stark and with the support of staff and faculty. You served 24 different agencies, organizations and locations voluntarily across the broader Tiffin and Seneca County community. That is Berg Pride serving! I apologize for failing to help launch your effort. Between the Graduate Programs Orientation welcome earlier that morning and the MBA Program Business Executives Networking session later that afternoon, I got lost in some other work and forgot to show up with you in the Wickham Great Hall. I blew it! You were all awesome and I was not. Please accept my apology.

As Provost Beth Schwartz said, we are beginning our 168th year of educating young women and men in the great tradition and advancement of the Liberal Arts and Sciences and in professional education. That is what we do. Our focus is on your *Education Excellence* and your *Student Success*. That is what we care about. We want you to succeed academically and in all other ways here. We want you to be ready to succeed in your internships, service roles, jobs, graduate schools, careers, and purpose-filled paths of distinctive lives.

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

Our guest speaker this morning is distinguished Heidelberg alumnus and renowned neuroscientist, Dr. Michael Weisend (class of 1987). This man's life is a resume of success! In a moment, Dr. Weisend will be formally introduced. I am grateful that you are with us to share your thoughts with our students. Welcome Mike and Stephanie!

Our **346** new students bring lots of talents, energy, diversity and accomplishments to our campus. Let me say a few words about our **322** first-year students.

One new student is from West Virginia; Also one new student from Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and Wisconsin too; 7% of the students are from Tiffin and Seneca County; 10% are from Heidelberg legacy families; 13% are in our Honors Program; 17% competed on Scholars Days; 23% are from out-of-state; 26% are underrepresented students; 41% are females; 54% are first generation college students in their families (Awesome!); 59% are males; 65% want to participate in Division III athletics; 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. One of our students completed their high school requirements with a study internship experience in Costa Rica. Another individual serves as the YMCA Youth Governor of Ohio and helped pass a state bill to stock Epi-Pens in high schools.

Our first-year and transfer students are caring and engaging individuals who show great passion for the things they do. They also demonstrate grit and determination to overcome obstacles, as some have faced life threatening illnesses and traumatic health experiences while growing up.

Interesting students meet interesting students here, and that can lead to great and wonderful opportunities in life. At least one of our students has both parents who met here as students. Another one of our students is the 5th generation member of their family to attend Heidelberg.

We have incoming students from 16 states, including 7 from California! And we are honored to welcome new students from Mexico and Germany. Outstanding!

Following my annual habit of making a pair of additional reading suggestions on this occasion, I strongly recommend two books that I finished in early summer. In light of recent events in our country, I double down on my recommendations.

The first book is *Between the World and Me* (2015) by Ta-Nehisi Coates (42). Mr. Coates is an award-winning journalist, author and educator. He received the MacArthur Foundation “Genius Grant” award in 2015. He wrote this book as a letter to his adolescent son. If you want to appreciate a father’s incredible love for a child in the face of fear about all the bad things that could happen in that child’s life, this book is a good read. If you want to appreciate one man’s best attempt to articulate the challenges, threats and courage about being black and male in this country, this book is a great read.

The second book is *Hillbilly Elegy* (2016) by James David “J.D.” Vance (33). Mr. Vance is a recently acclaimed author and venture capitalist. He enlisted in the Marine Corps after high school and served in Iraq before attending the Ohio State University and Yale Law School. He wrote this book as a memoir about growing up in his broken family in Ohio and Kentucky. If you want to appreciate a son’s view of growing up poor and white in Appalachia and rust-belt America, this book is a good read. If you want to appreciate one man’s inspiring and painful story about overcoming social, regional and class adversity, this book is a great read.

I would like to conclude my Opening Convocation Remarks by saying something about who we are in the Heidelberg community.

We are an imperfect community of students, faculty, staff, trustees, alumni and friends who strive to become a more perfect community. We are only human. Our core educational vision, philosophy and values bind us together in our shared respect for “diverse cultures, religions and lifestyles.” We embrace the democratic society core principles of freedom of thought, freedom of religion, and freedom of speech. On this noble foundation, we want to be a welcoming, open-minded, open-hearted, honest, humble, diverse, inclusive and equitable community to our best abilities and greatest extent in bringing people together on this campus respectfully and successfully. At every turn in the Heidelberg University road forward and upward, we will always choose kindness, compassion, peacefulness, understanding, inclusiveness, love, and humanity over meanness, cruelty, violence, bigotry, racism, hatred, and supremacy. Period.

And so to all new and returning students, please get engaged and be intentional. Hang out with people different than you. Take full advantage of your wonderful opportunities on this campus. We are a warm and friendly place where students and their professors, advisors and coaches can learn and grow together.

It is our privilege to have each one of you here to teach, mentor and serve in support of your academic and career aspirations. We are already a better school with all of you here. Our shared goal is that each of you graduates successfully from Heidelberg in four years or less to continue your great journey and to pursue your *life of purpose with distinction*.

Good luck to all of you and especially to the Class of 2021!

Thank you.