

Heidelberg Fall 2025 Opening Convocation

President's Remarks

21 August 2025

Thank you, Dr. Chris Abrams for leading our freshmen to T-Bridge for their H-Pinning and Beanies! Thank you, Dr. Ben Herrick and the Heidelberg Marching Band for the Prelude and Processional! Thank you, Dr. Courtney DeMayo Pugno for your Welcome! Thank you, Emma Raber '26 for the *National Anthem*, Jerahmy Marshall '27 for *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, and Ainsley Manger '26 for the *Invocation*!

Good morning to the incoming Class of 2029 and to all undergraduate transfer, returning, and graduate students! My name is Rob Huntington. I hope that everyone had a fun summer of discovery and productivity.

Welcome to our **176th** year of educating young women and men in our integrated *Professional Ready Liberal Arts* curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular programming. Since 1850, we have remained steadfast *Opportunity Makers* on a student-focused mission defined by your classroom and experiential learning success, graduation, careers, and lives of *Purpose with Distinction*. Why? Because we believe in people!

Thank you very much to all **1,130** UG/G FT/PT and CCP HS students for choosing Heidelberg University this year. It is great to see so many upper-class students here at Convocation voluntarily today.

Thank you to our Faculty, Staff, Alumni and Partners who worked very hard to prepare your academic courses, teams, ensembles, activities, internships, health services, residence halls, foodservice, and campus grounds for the start of fall semester. Amazing job by everyone!

Our keynote speaker is Heidelberg alum, Mr. Scott Carpenter '17, whose successful TV news reporting career has progressed from sports anchor to news anchor in several states. Scott will be introduced soon. It is great to have you back, Mr. Siggy Awards ... just stay off the tables! We are welcoming **331** first-year, **28** transfer, and **8** readmit UGs to our school this fall. All **367** new students (+**12%**!) are talented, interesting, and motivated. Let me share some facts about the freshman class.

One new student is from each of these eight states GA, LA, MD, WI, HI, NC, NV, and NY; 1% identify as non-binary; 9% are in our Honors Program; 10% are Heidelberg legacy families; 13% come from Tiffin and Seneca County; 17 U.S. states are represented; 18% had a 4.0 or higher GPA in high school (3.5 average); 18% are underrepresented students; 23% are from outside Ohio; 26% participated in Scholars Day; 40% identify as females; 43% are first generation college students in their families (Congrats!); 59% identify as males; 61% are starting with CCP/AP/T credit hours; 79% are NCAA DIII student-athletes; and **100%** of our new students want to engage, socialize, succeed, graduate, and advance their careers at The Berg!

Your top four declared first choice majors after one day of classes are Business, Education, Exercise Science, and Health Science.

Engagement, hard work, kindness, and dreams matter for college success. Knowing how active, service-oriented, and successful our incoming first-years were in high school is uplifting! It seems that everyone played multiple sports, and/or worked jobs outside of school, and/or played in the band, and/or acted in theatre, and/or participated in 4H, and/or got involved in a variety of clubs, and/or volunteered to help others in community service. Some of you probably did all of those things ... very impressive! One of you was the Bratwurst Festival Queen 1st Runner-Up ... very cool! All truly wonderful.

But sometimes life takes a turn. We trip on something, get knocked down, or simply fall short of our goals. It happens to all of us. Challenges, difficulties, and setbacks. What happens next is what matters most. Reset, refocus, and respond. Ask for help. Get back up. Help others get up again. In our caring community, please know that you are not alone. Welcome to your Heidelberg Family!

For my 17th straight year at Opening Convocation, I am delighted to recommend two books for reading. For the first time, two books of short stories. They are connected by the life and country of a main character from the first author to the actual life and country of the second author.

The first book is ***Table for Two***, written by Amor Towles and published last year. Towles lives with his family in New York City and writes about people, events, and places anywhere across time. He became a bestselling author with *Rules of Civility* (2011), *A Gentleman in Moscow* (2016), and *The Lincoln Highway* (2021). I have mentioned his novels previously. That second book became a movie on Hulu/Amazon Prime. In this collection of six short stories and one long short story, Towles shares his craft for brilliant composition (Yale B.A., Stanford M.A. English) with sharp dialogue, compelling characters, and surprising connections that dangle the reader even across books. A secondary character with a visible scar named Evelyn Ross leaves NYC on a 1938 train to L.A. in *Rules of Civility* (2011) and the *Eve in Hollywood* long short story in this book begins “In the dining car, he was seated again with the pretty young lady with the scar.” All aboard with Towles!

The second book is ***The Greatest Short Stories by Leo Tolstoy***, written by (Surprise!) Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910). This collection of stories from 1870-1903 was published in translation in 2019. Tolstoy is generally regarded as one of the world’s greatest writers ever in any language. He is best known for two pretty decent very long novels written in the 1860s/1870s, both of which became movies about a century later. Both books are known for their famous opening lines. In this volume of 23 short stories, Tolstoy writes mainly about peasants, soldiers, God, and the challenges of living a good life in the spirit of that *Anna Karenina* opening line: “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Most of these stories are not exciting page turners. But they are extremely well-written (in translation) and reflect Tolstoy’s incredible skill at messaging the power of faith. *How Much Land Does a Man Need? A Prisoner in the Caucasus, The Story of Ivan the Fool,*” and *Two Old Men* are altogether outstanding. Try a Tolstoy!

To all new and returning students, please be intentional, committed and accountable about your Heidelberg education. Spend time building relationships, getting involved on campus, and preparing for your lives after college. Use AI appropriately and ethically. But please use your RI (real intelligence) more! And show grace and care for each other.

It is our privilege as *Opportunity Makers* to give you doorways to enter and to support your success walking through. Let us all move ourselves forward together!

Good luck to all of you and especially to the Class of 2029!

Thank you.