

Heidelberg Fall 2026 Opening Convocation

President's Remarks

20 August 2026

Thank you, Dr. Chris Abrams for leading our freshmen from T-Bridge with their H-Pins and Beanies! Thank you to the Heidelberg University Marching Band for the upbeat Prelude and Processional! Thank you, Dr. Courtney DeMayo Pugno for your Welcome! Thank you, Simon Fletcher '29 for the *National Anthem* and Chaplain Noah McCarn for the *Invocation*!

Good morning to the incoming Class of 2030 and to all undergraduate transfer, UG returning, and graduate students. Wow, 2030! My name is Rob Huntington. For my 18th time, I love this convocation moment.

Welcome to our **177th** year of educating young women and men with our *Professional Ready Liberal Arts* curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular integrated programming. Since 1850, we are your *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 **1,120** UG/G FT/PT and CCP HS students for choosing Heidelberg University this year. About the same total enrollment as last year. And 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. Outstanding job by everyone!

Our keynote speaker is Heidelberg alumna, Ms. Ashlie Gowitzka '06, a very successful, dedicated, and award-winning high school science educator. Ashlie will be introduced formally in a moment. It is a pleasure to meet you. Thank you for being here for our new students.

We are welcoming **317** new students to our school this fall, including 292 first-years. Lots of talent and aspiration! Let me share some facts about the freshman class.

One new student is from each of these four states Alabama, Kentucky, North Carolina, North Dakota; 1% of students identify as non-binary; Two countries represented besides the U.S.; 9% come from Tiffin and Seneca County; 11% are in our Honors Program; 11% are Heidelberg legacy families; 16 U.S. states are represented; 18% of students had a 4.0 or higher GPA in high school (3.49 average incoming GPA); 21% are from outside Ohio; 24% are underrepresented students; 28% of this class attended Scholars Day; 42% identify as females; 44% are first generation college students in their families (Congrats!); 57% identify as males; 61% are starting with CCP/AP/T credit hours; 74% 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 are Business, Education, Sport Management, and Nursing (1st time!).

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. Lots of interesting stories! One of you completed mission trips to the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica. Another student raised tens of thousands of dollars for a local Children's Hospital Dance Marathon. A talented art student has showcased their work all across their home state. And some of you are already business owners, including one who started their own cologne business. All of you are amazing people!

As I always do at this event, I am happy to recommend two books for reading. Actual books! My selections were inspired by Bill Maher winning the 2026 Mark Twain Prize for American Humor.

The first book is Ron Chernow's new biography, *Mark Twain* (2025). Chernow is the preeminent American biographer today. He has won Pulitzer and other prizes for his books on George Washington, John D. Rockefeller, Alexander Hamilton, and Ulysses S. Grant. I have recommended several of these works previously. His biography of Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910) is a beauty and a beast!

In 1,033 pages of story, plus 135 pages of notes, bibliography and index, Chernow covers everything about Clemens. Having read only four of his 50 published books (including *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*), and none of his hundreds of published essays or speeches, I knew virtually nothing about this person other than that he was raised in Hannibal, Missouri on the Mississippi River. I learned a lot.

Clemens was born a racist in the South, befriended Frederick Douglass professionally (other great orator of that century), lived next to Harriet Beecher Stowe (author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), and died an abolitionist in the North. He became a strong supporter of Women's Suffrage. He earned millions of dollars during his lifetime but lost everything due to a big ego, silly investment schemes, and terrible money management. His family lived abroad for many years to regain their wealth. Sadly, Twain outlived his wife, Olivia, and three of their four children. In the last two years of his life, he dictated a 736-page autobiography from his bed, which was published 100 years after his death intentionally to extend copyright royalties for his surviving family members. But his only surviving daughter and granddaughter had already passed away in the 1960s when that autobiography was published in 2010.

Mark Twain was a prolific writer and speaker! Arrogant and eccentric, he used sarcasm, hyperbole, and humor to address serious issues. He loved to advocate, pontificate, and argue anything.

The second book is *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, Mark Twain's first book published in 1867 at age 32. This book is only 118 pages! It is packed with funny short stories, witty anecdotes, and ridiculous advice to readers and correspondents:

- To the Moral Statistician: "I don't want any of your statistics. I took the whole batch and lit my pipe with it. I hate your kind of people."
- To the Professional Beggar: "No; you are not obliged to take greenbacks at par."
- To the Good Little Girls: "Good little girls should always show marked deference for the aged. You ought never to 'sass' old people – unless they 'sass' you first."

To all new and returning students, show grace and care for each other. Be intentional and accountable for your Heidelberg education. Build relationships, get involved on campus, and prepare for your lives after college. Please use AI appropriately and ethically, or not at all.

Life is full of unexpected surprises. Sometimes life takes a turn. We all trip on things, get knocked down, or simply fall short of goals. 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. You are with your Heidelberg Family!

It is our privilege as *Opportunity Makers* to give you doorways to enter and to support your success walking through. Let us all lift ourselves up and pull forward together ... and read some Twain!

Good luck to all of you and especially to the Class of 2030!

Thank you.