

Wisdom From the Sages

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(August 27, 2007)

President Kepple, Provost Lakso, Faculty Marshall Siems, members of the platform party, colleagues, parents and family members, please join me in welcoming the class of 2011 to Juniata.

The faculty look forward to sharing the next four years with you. We wish you well as you make new friends, expand your intellectual horizons, and prepare yourselves for your life after graduation.

It is an honor to address you. I must begin by telling you that I should not be on the platform today. Professor Richard Hark should be here as last year's recipient of the Henry and Joan Gibbel Award for Distinguished Teaching. However, he and his family are in England, so I am serving as his pinch-hitter.

We seldom come together to reflect upon our mission as a college. One of these times is at Opening Convocation, when we welcome incoming students. Addresses at these gatherings typically include thought-provoking quotes, humor, and a message intended to stay in your minds after the ceremony is over. My intention is to offer you "wisdom from the sages" that might help you in the next four years. The sages are members of the faculty and administration at the College. I asked many of my colleagues for advice that they would offer you, a strategy that made my task easier. They did the work; it was my pleasure to put their ideas together to share with you.

President Kepple offers you two bits of advice. First, take classes from the best teachers that we have; do not limit yourself to those in your field of study. You might seek out award winners such as Professor Hark. Second, never underestimate what people know about you. Your lives are public in ways that you might not imagine. While MySpace and YouTube are

great places to have fun, potential employers now use these sites to find out about people who apply to them for jobs.

Do not post photos from Saturday night's party on the web.

By the way, when talking with the President, you might want to complement his tie; men who wear ties like that kind of attention.

You will become familiar with various administrators at the College. Foremost perhaps is the Registrar, Athena Frederick. The folks in the Registrar's Office are wonderful people. They will keep you on track toward graduation. Pay attention to their deadlines. *Do not* wait until your final semester to complete your POE. Registrar Frederick offers you important advice: learn your surroundings; learn who can help you; make connections with a wide diversity of people, perhaps by rotating with whom you eat at Baker.

One of the great tools at your disposal is the Office of Academic Support Services. It will help you to acquire tutors and other resources. Sarah May Clarkson, whom you might know as "that crazy lady," has already given you her advice. If you have not yet taken it, now is the time to break up with your high school sweetheart. Look about you; there are plenty of new people to spend time with. Be free to do so.

The office of the Dean of Students helps to create a supportive environment in which you can learn and grow. As you adjust to college, many of you will go through periods when you feel quite stressed and alone and in need of a bit of assistance. Call this office. They can help. Dean Kris Clarkson offers you advice that students across the nation hear quite frequently: make it a point to become friends with at least one member of the faculty. You should go to the office of each of your professors early in every semester. Let us get to know you. Not only do we teach you, we write letters of recommendation for you, often invite you into our homes for meals, and might even ask you to babysit our children.

Historians and students share the fact that their success is dependent upon librarians. You will find that we have an excellent staff at the library. Andy Dudash, one of the reference librarians, commented that never before have students had greater access to information through the library than now. The library offers librarians, books, databases, and comfortable chairs. Dudash reflected on a comment by Frank Zappa, "if you want to get laid, go to college, if you want to learn something, go to the library."

The last administrator I spoke with, Jarmila Polte, serves as the Director of Study Abroad at the Center for International Education. She tells you to "pay attention." Seek out people who will help you, listen to what they tell you, and then *do it*. Go to the Study Abroad

Fair. It is the first step to studying abroad, what many graduates have referred to as their single most important experience at Juniata.

Among gorillas, the great silverbacks are the mature adult males who lead the troop. We have similar creatures among the faculty, though we call them senior professors, and not all of them are male. We ask that they lead the procession at ceremonies such as this. This might be a way of honoring them for their service and sagacity. It might also be a way to make sure that we older folks get a bit of exercise—or, as Dean Clarkson suggests, to make sure that we can see and hear what is happening on the platform.

I asked several of Juniata's silverbacks their advice. Professor of Social Work Bob Reilly, who has a generous touch of grey, was slow to respond to my questions. After serious thought, he suggested that you should develop the ability to take risks—in your relationships, in your intellectual development, and in physical activities. Risk taking can be the key to growth. Professor of German Klaus Jaeger echoed this sentiment. You should recognize and understand the boundaries of your lives, and do your best to move beyond them. Seek out the unfamiliar; those daunting, uncomfortable experiences that enable you to shed your old skins. Professor of English Mark Hochberg, whom you will recognize by his Merlinesque beard, offers you the reassurance that you have the capacity to succeed, or you would not be here. You must work, however, to do so. Nothing good comes easy. To this Professor Pat Weaver added that brains and education matter. Grab all that you can while you are here. Fill yourself with education. This is likely the only time in your lives when you will have unlimited access to education of every type. Kim Richardson, in the Education Department, urges that you not waste opportunities. Develop your intellectual skills. Read a lot. Write a lot. Think a lot. These skills will stay with you for life.

Finally, advice from a couple of junior faculty. My colleague in history, Jim Tuten, remembers his first semester as a music major. He and two friends listened to their professor tell them not to worry about the future, because ninety per cent of students do not know what they are going to do. Sure enough, these three students did not know what they were going to do. They ended up as an IT professional, a ship captain, and an historian. All of them love music, even if it is not their profession. Amy Mathur, who teaches English and is a graduate of Juniata, reminds you that until this point of your lives, your family, relatives and friends have largely determined who you were. This is a chance for change. Examine yourself. You do not have to go to church because someone tells you to, but you go because you want to. The choices are yours.

Many of the people to whom I spoke offered similar advice, though I do not have time to mention them by name. The last bit of advice for me was to offer a summation of the wisdom from Juniata sages.

1. Connections are vital to your success at Juniata and in the broader world. Get to know the faculty. Make connections with diverse, challenging, and interesting people.
2. Use the resources at your disposal. No one knows enough to succeed on their own.
3. Challenge your comfort zones. Go beyond what you have heretofore considered your social, relational, cultural, intellectual and experiential boundaries. Grow through experience.

We are happy that you are here. We look forward to getting to know you and watching you grow. Welcome to Juniata!