

### **Four Goals for Success in College... and in Life.**

As we open the new year, let me give a special welcome and recognize the Class of 2018, our first year students who are joining us for the first time. And, special congratulations to the Class of 2015, who are joining us for Opening Convocation for the last time! For you and the rest of your fellow students, the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year represents your chance to set new goals and reinvigorate long-standing goals; don't let this opportunity pass you by.

So, today I want to offer you four goals that I'm asking you to commit yourself to. If you do, you'll radically improve your chances for success in college, in your chosen career, and in life. Committing to these goals doesn't guarantee success, because life provides us with few guarantees, but they most definitely put you in a position to take charge of yourself, optimize your chances of seizing opportunities as they come along, and places you well ahead of others who choose not to adopt these goals.

#### **Become Uncomfortable**

The first is one that I've been sharing with our incoming students throughout this summer's orientations. Goal number one is: Become Uncomfortable. What we know is that for growth and development to occur, whether it's intellectual, spiritual, emotional, social, or physical, we must reach beyond the boundaries of our comfort zone. This requires that we not only accept discomfort, but that we seek it out. Athletes understand the notion of "training effect" whereby they must reach the outer limits of their physical capacity in order to stress their physical limits, causing the body to physiologically respond by increasing its physical capacity. So too, are these other areas. We must be willing to put ourselves on the outer limits of our intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and social abilities to grow and develop in these areas as well. Like with the athlete when she pushes herself to the physical limits and muscle soreness or cardiovascular strain creates discomfort, so too must we strive for getting out of our comfort zone and trying new things that cause a training effect and an increase in our capacity in these other areas. That's how we grow.

Now, human behavior tends to seek comfort, sameness, and an avoidance of things that cause discomfort. And, while I'm certainly not encouraging you to seek out things that cause pain, literally or figuratively, I am asking you to make a conscious commitment to seek out opportunities to go beyond your comfort zone, to try new things, to say "yes" to opportunities for growth and development; it's why you're here. This might be volunteering for that extra class or research assignment, it might even mean approaching your faculty member and asking for an extra class or research assignment; it might mean going to that lecture or symposium that none of your friends seem to be willing to attend; it might mean approaching someone

outside of your friend group and getting to know them; in many cases it simply means saying “yes” when opportunities come along for you to try something different.

So, goal number one: Become Uncomfortable.

### **Get Involved**

The second goal I’m asking you to adopt is: Get Involved. What research tells us is that one of the single most predictive qualities for student success in college is “engagement.” Students who are actively involved in their college experience persist and graduate at dramatically higher rates than those who are not involved and are, essentially, passive students. Students who just show up and have a notion that education is something they have done to them don’t graduate at the same rates nor do they have the same levels of achievement. For you to maximize your opportunity for success, you need to commit yourself to active, involved experiences in the classroom, in the dorms, in internships, and in campus life. Take charge of yourself and get involved in active learning, living, and growth experiences.

So, Become Uncomfortable. Get Involved.

### **Expand Your Interests**

The third goal is a combination of the first two: Expand Your Interests. Expanding your interests requires both discomfort through trying new things and a commitment to involvement and active engagement. Through expanding your interests you can enhance your ability to be a more well-rounded person and to achieve higher levels of fulfillment. Also, like with involvement, students who are connected and involved across multiple aspects of their college experience are also more likely to persist and graduate, and do so with higher levels of achievement. It also allows you to remain engaged as your motivation and interests change as you grow and evolve as a person. As I mentioned at orientation, if you think back to who you were as a person in your freshman year of high school and the things that interested and motivated you back then and consider who you are today and the things that motivate and interest you today, they’re likely quite different. The same will be true in the future. So, students who actively seek to expand their interests across the college increase their chances that as they grow and evolve as a person, that they will remain connected and engaged throughout their collegiate experience. They also then have these important habits and skills for beyond college life.

So, Become Uncomfortable. Get Involved. Expand Your Interests.

### **Commit to Excellence**

Goal number four is: Commit to Excellence. Frankly, it really diminishes the positive effects of the first three goals if you don’t commit to excellence. Why do it if you’re going to do it halfway? Now maybe this simply seems obvious, but in reality the majority of people don’t

commit to excellence. They do just enough. They don't become uncomfortable. They don't get fully engaged and involved. They do it... "half-ass." Successful people commit all the way. They seek to do things as best as they can and they work to refine their ability to do so. This comes from a commitment to hard work and the establishment of high expectations for ourselves and others. When we set high expectations, we can often experience disappointment while we're working hard to achieve the successes we've set forth. Unfortunately, many people don't commit to excellence because they want to avoid the natural disappointments, discomfort, and hard work that comes with working toward and achieving excellence. If you make a commitment to excellence, you'll surpass most others and, most importantly, optimize your fullest potential and achieve fulfillment in yourself and the things you do.

So, Become Uncomfortable. Get Involved. Expand Your Interests. Commit to Excellence.

## **Conclusion**

My point here today, on this very first week of the new academic year, in asking you to Become Uncomfortable, Get Involved, Expand Your Interests, and Commit to Excellence is to ask you to grasp and take full advantage of the opportunity you have in front of you, your college experience. There are other college experiences you could have chosen that wouldn't expect you to become uncomfortable, get involved, expand your interests, or commit to excellence; you could just get by and be okay. If you're to optimize your Olivet College experience, you must do these things. Commit yourself to them today.

To the faculty and the staff, I ask you to ensure you're committed to these goals as well, both for yourself and for our students. Have expectations for excellence, articulate them clearly. Consider the rigor of your courses and the other experiences we facilitate for students; ensure they're rigorous. Don't just wait for students to get involved, invite them to get involved and expect them to get involved. Challenge them to try and to do new things; help them to expand their interests. And, most importantly, help them to become uncomfortable. Do it in a way that is safe, caring, nurturing, educationally appropriate, and helps them to gain a confidence and self-directed desire to move out of their comfort zone so that they can grow and develop into the successful and fulfilled people they're capable of being.

So, before I conclude, let's commit ourselves to these four goals. Become Uncomfortable. Get Involved, Expand Your Interests. Commit to Excellence.

Thank you... and have a great year!