

Opening Convocation 2017
President's Remarks
President Steven M Corey, PhD
August 23, 2017

A Challenge for Success

Let me welcome you again to the official opening of the 2017-18 academic year!

To our seniors who will graduate this fall, great work, keep it up. I subscribe to a work hard, play hard philosophy. This is the time to work harder than ever at developing yourself into the successful citizen and young professional you're about to become. Work with intensity and with intent. Also, have fun and enjoy your final year as an Olivet College student.

To our new incoming students, particularly our freshmen, you're the graduating class of 2021. It's great to have you here; you're now members of a special community. Four years will go by fast, just ask the seniors. Take advantage of the opportunity before you; fully commit yourself, you won't regret it.

Now, for the past several years, I've been issuing a challenge to students at new student orientation. This challenge has 5 components and I want to revisit them with you today. For our freshmen, I wonder if you remember them from earlier this summer. For our upperclassmen, I wonder if you remember, but more importantly, I wonder if these resonate with you. Do they seem true to you based on your several years of experience here as an Olivet College student. Do you think this is good advice for optimizing your experience and success?

So, my first challenge is...

Become comfortable being uncomfortable. Research tells us that growth and development happens on the boundaries of our comfort level. All the athletes in the audience can attest to the "no pain, no gain" dictum where we know that we have to push our physical limits to elicit a training effect, to get stronger, faster, more powerful, and better at our sport. The same is true across the other dimensions of our growth and development, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and in all the other ways that we grow and evolve as people. So I challenge you to push yourselves beyond your comfort zone; say, "yes" when you're challenged to try something different. Seek out those things that are hard and you're not good at. Become comfortable being uncomfortable.

Become self-directed. Your college years are a time of transition. For many of you, you've left the comfort and shelter of your parents' home and now you're on your own. You're in charge of you. You get to decide if you'll get up and go to class. You get to decide if you study or play. You get to decide your commitment to your own success. Use this transition time wisely. Learn how to become self-directed, taking individual responsibility for your own education, learning,

and development into the person you'd like to become. Think about it with intent and then make it happen.

Seek difference. Congratulations, you're at one of the most diverse colleges in Michigan. We know that human nature causes us to seek out sameness. It makes us feel safe. Unfortunately most of us come from schools of sameness, neighborhoods of sameness, communities of sameness, churches of sameness and we don't have a wide array of experiences engaging with people who are not like us. Here's your chance. Seek out others who are not like you. They've had different life experiences than you and likely see the world differently because of it. Now, be careful. One of the tendencies when we engage with someone who sees things differently is to try and bend them to our will. I encourage you to discuss and explore your differences, but the goal is not necessarily to compel them to agree with you. Set a goal of common understanding and agreement may also happen. At least, however, you'll learn a lot about others, what their experiences are, and how they see the world in a way that's different from yours.

Get involved. Now, I want you to think back in time to who you were as a high school freshman. Now, think about who you were as a high school senior or who you are today. I can tell by your responses that you agree, these are two very different people. Your transformation during your high school years was tremendous. Well, let me assure you, your transformation during your college years will be ten-times greater. You are in one of the most transformational periods in your life. Along with this transformation will come changing interests. I encourage you to get involved and try as many different things as possible during your time here. This will not only help introduce you to new things and people, but it will also ensure that you have a wide array of opportunities as your interests change and evolve with you. So, get involved.

And finally, with success comes responsibility. By being here today, you're already successful. As you complete your college education, you'll reach new levels of success and have opportunities for additional levels of success that most others simply will likely not achieve. However, as we know, with individual success, comes responsibility, responsibility to use our success for the betterment of others. I challenge you to make a conscious effort to explore your passions and your skills to determine how you want to use your success to make a difference for others.

I believe these keys to success are critical if you're going to take full advantage of your opportunity here at Olivet College. By the nodding heads I've seen from our upperclassmen, it looks like many of our experienced students agree.

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. 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.

Now, as we begin to move into the final phase of our convocation program, let me ask you a quick question, Who has participated in Stand Up before today? Raise your hands... Thank you.

Stand Up is one of the oldest continuous college traditions in the country. Beginning in the 1870's and taking on the name Stand Up shortly after the turn of the century, Stand Up recognizes and reinforces that relationships are at the very core of our community and the Olivet College experience. In the slideshow playing as you came into the Upton Center you saw that Stand Up has taken a variety of forms over the years. It's been held in a variety of venues. At times it's been a highly formal affair with tuxes, ties, and evening dresses while in other eras it's taken on a more casual tone as a picnic with shorts and flip-flops. Regardless, it's remained a central mechanism for reminding us of a central defining quality of this great college, that we find ourselves in the middle of a community and experience which is defined by and finds its value in the people who comprise it and the relationships that we are able to form through our learning and living experiences.

Today, as we leave the Upton Center my wife Traci and I will begin Stand Up, followed by the faculty and staff, and then each of you in turn. When you get to the end of the line... don't leave! You need to get in line to welcome those behind you. We'll form an ever growing greeting-line of our college community, giving greetings to one another along the way, reinforcing and symbolizing the importance of the relationships that are at the core of the Olivet College experience.

This will take a little time, but not too long. Stay tuned and listen carefully at the end of today's program. Dr Davis will provide each of us with more detailed instructions and then our college marshals will guide us through the process. Those who've done Stand Up before can also provide support and guidance along the way.

In conclusion, let me say welcome once again. There's great anticipation for the year ahead. I'm glad you're here and thank you for being a member of this great college community.

God bless each one of you and God bless Olivet College.