

President Janet Morgan Riggs '77

Good afternoon and let me join the rest of the group up here in welcoming the class of 2014 to Gettysburg College! Of course, we are also delighted to extend that welcome to parents, families, and friends - by extension you too are joining the Gettysburg community.

Before I speak to our new students, I'd like to say a few words to all of you who are parents. This is a big day, an important day - and for many of you, an emotional day. I am the parents of three recent college graduates. I recognize that this is a big moment, and I want to thank you for entrusting your students to us. I know how much you want everything to go well for your sons and daughters here at Gettysburg. And I want to assure you that we want the same thing. We share your high opinions of them, and I know that as we get to know them over the coming years our already great affection for and enthusiasm about this wonderful group of students will continue to grow...

So while it might be hard for you as parents to let go a bit, please know that your daughters and sons are entering a community that will embrace them, that will challenge them, that will push them, that will care for them-and that is committed to their intellectual and personal development.

And now to the Class of 2014.

I'm wondering what you're feeling right now. I'm guessing some of you are feeling excited or motivated or inspired -if so, that's terrific! With these remarks I'm going to try to preserve, perhaps even enhance those feelings. And no doubt some of you are feeling hot, or preoccupied, or antsy. And for you who are feeling that way, I'll try to be brief.

First let me give you just a little bit of historical context. You probably are not aware that Gettysburg College was founded by Samuel Simon Schmucker. Hence the name of the building that houses our Conservatory and part of our Visual Arts Department - Schmucker Hall. He founded this college in 1832. That makes you the 179th class to enter Gettysburg College, which, by the way, was known in the beginning as Pennsylvania College. So you are joining a long line of students who have attended this great college. I myself was in that long line of students-not *quite* back at its founding- but more than a few years ago. And I never suspected that I would return to this place to spend a career as a faculty member and to be appointed its president...

Neither would I have imagined, when I was a student, that one day I would have an office here in this building - Pennsylvania Hall - a building that was built in 1834 and that served as a hospital following the Battle of Gettysburg. In fact, we are but a short walk from where Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address at the dedication of the national cemetery in the fall following the Battle.

I bet most of you don't realize that Lincoln would most likely not have come to Gettysburg for this event were it not for the initiative of another person in that long line of Gettysburg students, David Wills. Following his graduation from Gettysburg, David Wills practiced law in Gettysburg and lived right in the center of town. He was asked by Governor Curtin to take action following the Battle to establish an appropriate cemetery for those who had fallen. Wills bought the land, hired the architect, worked with the governor to design the dedication ceremony, and wrote to President Lincoln inviting him to say a few appropriate remarks as part of the cemetery's dedication. Tomorrow evening, we'll walk together to the cemetery as students did back in November of 1863 and we'll hear from Lincoln Scholar and award-winning author, Michael Burlingame. Burlingame was the 2010 Lincoln Prize Winner and also delivered our annual Fortenbaugh lecture here last fall.

Beginning with today, the next four years here will set a course for the rest of your life. There is much in store for you. Hundreds of courses, more than 40 majors, exceptionally distinguished faculty who are here because they are scholars in their fields who love to teach, abundant off-campus study programs, public service opportunities, more than 120 student organizations. There is so much to do, and no two students will have the same experience.

But the way you do it will become your unique Gettysburg experience. Your job is to design an experience that challenges you to think about the world differently, to think about yourself differently, and that will enable you to become an active participant and leader in a rapidly changing world.

Though your Gettysburg experiences will vary, there are two aspects that should be central to all of your Gettysburg experiences-and those are initiative and integrity.

Taking initiative here at Gettysburg comes in many forms-it consists of going to see a faculty member to ask a question or to continue a class discussion. It consists of wandering over to audition for our musical groups. It consists of investigating what kinds of experiences you might find if you get involved with the Center for Public Service. It consists of going to the off-campus studies office to inquire about study-abroad opportunities. It consists of speaking out against an injustice. It also consists of reaching out to a classmate who needs help or someone to talk to. In every case it requires you to initiate action. To make the most of your Gettysburg experience, you must take some initiative.

And integrity... Let me simply reinforce what you've already heard today. We expect Gettysburg students to act with integrity - we expect honesty not only in your academic work, but in your interactions with other members of this community. We expect you to take seriously your responsibility as a student and as a community member, and we expect you to act with respect and with honor.

And where will these next four years take you? What will you have to show in four years? Well if we have done our work well and you have done

yours, in four years, you will have learned how to translate this wonderful liberal arts experience into:

- The ability to think creatively
- The ability to solve problems
- The ability to speak and write and articulate what is important
- The ability to understand and appreciate diverse perspectives
- The ability to translate your education into action - in your professions, in your communities, and in society - to become activists in the world, advocates for human rights, global citizens - scientists, business persons, researchers, lawyers, physicians, teachers, social workers - individuals who act with great integrity and who make a positive difference in our world.

Every one of you has the potential to make a positive difference, to make a significant contribution - and over the next four years we pledge to support you and to challenge you as you prepare yourselves to realize that potential, as you begin to make your contribution.

To quote our 2010 Commencement speaker, Robert Egger, President and CEO of the D.C. Central Kitchen, "You have been called Generation Next...but I must respectfully disagree with that timeline. From where I stand, looking out at you today....you are Generation NOW. Your country needs you NOW. The world needs you NOW."

Students, your time at Gettysburg has arrived. Your time is NOW.