



## NEW STUDENT CONVOCATION – AUGUST 2011

*Liberal Arts for Life*

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Good afternoon! It is an honor today to add a warm welcome from everyone in Academic Affairs, especially our College faculty, to all of you—new students, family, and friends! Would all of you who are new students raise your hands, please? Welcome!!

Students, you are entering the academic community within which you will be spending the next few years of your lives. I hope that you will find these college years to be challenging, productive—and enjoyable, too.

Speaking of enjoyable, how many of you have FaceBook pages? Did you know you are one of 750 million users<sup>1</sup> Last year the number was only 500 million—a 50% increase in only one short year!! How many of you read or write blogs? – If you do, you're in good company there, too: 152 million blogs have been identified as of January of this year.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>

<sup>2</sup> According to <http://royal.pingdom.com/2011/01/12/internet-2010-in-numbers/> accessed August 19, 2011.

Do you text-message? Tweet? You will be surprised to know that last August there had been a total of just under 22 *billion* tweets created,<sup>3</sup> compared to only 4 billion the year before. How many tweets this year? One *billion* per week!<sup>4</sup>

Do you watch or upload videos to YouTube? There are so many YouTube videos being created that no one knows for certain how many there are!<sup>5</sup>

FaceBook

Blog

Text message

YouTube

Twitter

If I had used any of these terms when we began these academic convocations a mere seven years ago, no one would have understood me. Let me repeat: these words were *not words*, or not in common use, as recently as seven years ago!

Checking with the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which identifies when words are added to the English language, I found that the word “blog” appears for the first time in 1999, while “text message” as a verb doesn’t

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<sup>3</sup> According to GigaTweet, <http://popacular.com/gigatweet/>, accessed August 20, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> <http://blog.kissmetrics.com/twitter-statistics/>, accessed August 20, 2011.

<sup>5</sup>

appear until the year 2000. Texting appeared in 1999, and, mercifully “sexting” is still not officially a word. “Podcast,” another Web 2.0 technology, was added to the *OED* in 2009, with a 2004 date as being the first time it was documented.

So—imagine that! When we say “blog” or “text message” we are using some of the very newest words in the English language. Not one of us could have predicted these new methods of communication—now called “social media,” itself a new use of old words—ten years ago, let alone offering college courses to prepare anyone to do so. Therein lies the importance of the liberal-arts-based curricula in which you will be immersed here at Ursuline.

A former president of Dartmouth College once described this type of education as one that prepares “students to answer questions we haven’t even thought of...” I think we could add that it will prepare you to embrace whatever new direction life takes you, to understand whatever new concepts are created, and to be prepared to learn how to master things like...blogs...text messages...social networking...and all those other technologies that right this very second are only gleams in the eyes of their engineers!

You have no doubt read statistics to the effect that over a 40-year period graduates of four-year colleges will likely earn a million dollars more than those who stopped with a diploma from high school. Those who continue their studies in graduate and professional schools stand to earn a great deal more yet. Thus one concrete benefit of your enrollment at Ursuline should be economic.

In fact, jobs and/or promotions may very well be uppermost in the minds of many of you—and in the minds of your families as well. Parents in the audience, I'm sure you agree that moving your daughters and sons off the family payroll is a high priority!

The true worth of the education you will be receiving at Ursuline College, however, transcends economics and short-term benefits. As a favorite colleague of mine was fond of saying, “College is short, and Life (if we are lucky) is long.” Ursuline College seeks to prepare you for success in life, and related to this is another interesting statistic: a recent research study from the Bureau of Labor Statistics that tracked 10,000 workers found that they held on average nearly 11 jobs during the period from 18 to 42; job changes were particularly rapid early in their careers.<sup>6</sup> Quite obviously, the

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<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704206804575468162805877990.html>. Accessed August 19, 2011.

days of learning narrowly only what you need to know for one job are long gone.

How exactly does our core curriculum, the Ursuline Studies Program, help you to thrive in this atmosphere of change, complexity, and uncertainty? You have already received information about USP, and all of you are probably registering for at least one core course or satellite. Regardless of your individual major, you must complete the core's requirements. In this way we hope to ensure that every Ursuline College graduate receives the benefits of the Ursuline Studies Program's learning outcomes.

First and foremost among these outcomes are two that should stand you in very good stead in the face of the uncertainties and change that I have noted above: making decisions based on values and taking responsibility for society. Taken together, these two outcomes of our liberal arts core should enable you to become the kind of leader that our country, and the world, so desperately needs.

The Ursuline Studies core courses you take will guide you toward identifying and confirming your values, thereby making them the centerpieces of your decision-making process. We hope that they will also develop your personal leadership abilities to the fullest.

It is important to emphasize at this point that an Ursuline College education does not teach you what values you must espouse. Rather, we encourage you to identify and shape your own values in the hope that you will use them to act in a socially responsible manner and work toward a just, peaceful society for all.

Furthermore, all of the outcomes of the Ursuline Studies core curriculum are consistent with the demands of the new marketplace for extreme flexibility. For example, your course work should develop your critical thinking and communication talents, as well as your problem-solving and analytic abilities. These skills are translatable to any career.

Most of all, you should be learning how to learn, and this ability is the one that will be critical if you are to adapt to the demands of a future that is increasingly difficult to predict.

What I hear again and again from community and business leaders is that employees who are truly educated can always learn even more. Effective leaders know that in order for their organizations to become even greater, their employees must be able to embrace change and to be able to learn the new skills and acquire the new knowledge that change inevitably brings.

Depending on the program you select, you may or may not graduate from Ursuline College with the exact skills you need for a specific position,

but regardless of your major you should definitely graduate with the ability to apply your education to learn the skills that a particular job requires. Ideally, you will maintain that desire to learn throughout your entire life.

I would emphasize that employers in all fields agree that industry-specific skills are easily taught on the job, if, and this is an important distinction, the employee is ready to learn them. In other words, even if your skills help you land a position, it is your *education* that will enable you to keep it and ultimately to prosper in your chosen career.

Similarly, if your goal is graduate or professional study, the outcomes of an Ursuline education should prepare you well, since the same flexibility, critical thinking, and communication talents that are needed in the world of work are needed to an equal extent in graduate school.

Moreover, no matter what your ultimate goal for your Ursuline College education may be—career enhancement, preparation for graduate or professional study, or personal development—we hope that you will find the core curriculum equally valuable in enriching your life apart from work.

Here at Ursuline we hope to instill in you both an exciting creativity—an energizing sense of your role in creating a socially just future—and the confidence in your ability to meet successfully whatever the future may hold for you.

Fourteen years ago, when I joined the Ursuline College academic administration, Sr. Diana presented me with a quotation from the Prologue of the *Counsels of St. Angela Merici*, who founded the Company of St Ursula. The quotation reads as follows:

**“Do something—get moving—be confident—risk new things—stick with it—get on your knees—then be ready for Big Surprises!”**

It’s nothing short of amazing that St. Angela’s words, in particular “risk new things” and “be ready,” echo so loudly from the 16<sup>th</sup> century all the way to the 21<sup>st</sup>. These days being ready for those new things is no small task.

We hope that you will be prepared for whatever “Big Surprise,” awaits you, and that the liberal arts foundation you receive here will assist you in navigating successfully the uncertainties and challenges you are bound to face throughout your life.

Parents, congratulations on supporting your children so well. Friends, thank you for sharing this moment with us. New students, I look forward to congratulating you on the not-too-distant future day when you walk across the stage to receive your degrees.

Thank you so much.