

## PHI BETA KAPPA INDUCTION CEREMONY REMARKS

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Congratulations on your induction into Phi Beta Kappa. It is an honor that is recognizable in the world of academia and beyond. It is an accomplishment you should be proud of. It represents exceptional attainment.

When Pastor Tune asked me to speak with you this evening, he suggested I talk about why I think a liberal arts and sciences education is valuable, and the difference it made in your own education and life.

Let me start with the later...I did not have a liberal arts and sciences education. My undergraduate degree is from Penn State. I do bleed blue and white, but that is for another time. I was a business major, finance specifically because my advisor, a finance professor, asked if I would rather report history (accounting) or make it (finance). We had distribution requirements. I took Spanish, psychology, sociology, astronomy, physiology, and the physics of hi-fi. My advisor said I made the right choice, and then told me I would have to take more accounting and more economics than the major required, but not enough for a minor in either. My transcript would not look that much different

than yours might if you are business major at Wittenberg. My experience was a lot different.

With the benefit of hindsight and life experience, I have a better sense of what I missed than I did in the early 80s. Within a discipline, each course I took built on the previous. There were some connections between the business disciplines and economics, but not a lot of emphasis on those connections. For everything else, more or less, each course was a discrete event. There was little attention to critical thinking, not so much within classes, but certainly across them. My 400-level classes had around 40 students. Many of my classes had 400-500. Not much time spent on teamwork and collaboration, some on writing, and very little on speaking and listening. I learned things, developed some technical skills, but there wasn't much attention, by me or the university, paid to developing "skills considered essential for a person to take part in civic life."

So, where are we today and why do I think the education Wittenberg, and places like us, provides is so valuable. In thinking about that, I want to start with a quote from a report by Gallup from 2017.

The term "liberal arts" no longer works as an effective means of communicating one of higher education's most precious assets.

"Liberal" is politically charged, and "arts" has a negative connotation regarding improving graduates' job prospects, which is the main reason why Americans and currently enrolled college students value higher education.

Putting the words *liberal* and *arts* together is a branding disaster, and the most effective way to save or defend the liberal arts may be to change what we call them. Note, the problem isn't with the substance of a liberal arts education but with the words we use to describe it.

Gallup, August 2017

They found that, despite similar descriptions, an education for “21<sup>st</sup> century skills” was viewed more positively than a “liberal arts” education. Labels matter, and we may not have the best one. However, I do think we have the best thing going in terms of “preparing capable citizens,” educating the whole person, and preparing you to “lead personal, professional, and civic lives of creativity, service, compassion, and integrity.”

For some reason, I seem to like things that come in threes. So let me give you three Cs that I believe make a liberal arts

education, or whatever else we decide to call it, valuable and essential.

First – COGITATE. We ask you to think deeply about things and cultivate your ability to do that within and across disciplines.

Next – COLLABORATE. We create opportunities for you to collaborate with each other, with faculty and staff on campus, and in the local and global communities to learn from each other and to make a difference together.

Last – COMMUNICATE. As our mission states, a Wittenberg education “develops the individual’s capacity to ... communicate with precision.”

I think the power of what we do is that no matter what you have studied, you will leave here with the ability, developed through practice, to cogitate, collaborate, and communicate. All of that will have happened in a fourth C, community. Those things are everlasting and evergreen.

My life has taken many twists and turns since I graduated from Penn State. I think I’ve managed them well, not always, but mostly. I might have managed them better with the benefit of a Wittenberg education. By the time you are my age, your life will have taken more twists and turns than mine has. Take comfort in the fact that you are well prepared to face those challenges and seize those

opportunities. Though some today question the value of higher education, I do not and you should not, especially because you have the best form of all.

Thank you.