

# TRANSFORMATION, NOT TRANSACTIONS

## Remarks for New Student Orientation

August 19, 2016

Along with an outstanding array of faculty members, staff, coaches, and fellow students, I share the great privilege and awesome responsibility of providing you with the very best educational experience possible over the next four years.

So, there's a lot I would like to share with you today. I'd like to tell you about this college's remarkable 241-year history. I'd like to tell you about the loyalty of our alumni and their dedication to this school. I'd like to tell you why we think it is important for you to take courses in many fields even as you develop expertise in a specific major. I'd like to tell you why we focus so much energy on developing your critical thinking and communication skills.

But with all of the excitement of this day, the goodbyes you will soon be sharing with your parents, and all that you will be learning during our orientation activities, I will save those messages for another time.

Instead, I will focus my welcome on just one topic: what I consider the most important choice you must make about your college years.

You can decide to approach your college education as a series of transactions, not all that different from a visit to the ATM machine, where you insert your debit card and receive cash; or a fast-food restaurant where you make your selections, pay, and then receive food; or "liking" your friends' activities on Facebook. The equivalent experience here would be to go to class, obtain the syllabus from the professor, do the required reading, receive an assignment from the professor, complete the assignment, receive a grade from the professor, and so on. You can learn a lot from this approach to your studies, you can even get good grades, and you might even consider yourself a good student.

But I won't. It is important that you do all of those things. But, if that is all you do, if you take this transactional approach to your time here, you will just be going through the motions and you will miss the boat completely. Instead of thinking of your college education as a series of transactions, I encourage you to think of every day during the next four years as an opportunity for transformation.

To realize the potential for transformation, you must do much more than go through the motions of being a good student. You must go see your professors outside of class. You must ask them for advice, ask them to help you build on your strengths and overcome your weaknesses. You must become friends and have conversations with people who come from different regions and who hold very different opinions. You must stretch yourself and try courses in subjects you haven't studied before. You must develop new interests.

Think of this college as a gold mine, and your task is to collaborate with other members of this college to get as much gold as possible from this mine. And, the great thing is, this mine will never run out of gold because no matter how deeply you dig, every idea will lead to another, every great

book will suggest a new read, every great conversation will invite the next. In short, every learning opportunity will open the door to another great learning opportunity.

The difference between the transactional approach and the collaborative approach is as stark as the difference between night and day. When your classes begin just a few days from now, you can approach each course with the transactional view of “what do I need to do to get a good grade,” or you can approach each course with the transformational view of “how can this class change my life.” This is an enormous difference in outlook, and it will make all the difference in your college experience.

In your life so far, you have known one or many individuals who have taken a special interest in you, who have seen something special that you have to offer, who have turned you on to something that has changed your life. In short, you have known people who have made you who you are today. What I want you to remember from what I am saying today is that every encounter you have here at Hampden-Sydney College holds the potential for developing that same kind of transformational relationship.

Let's have an amazing four years together!