

“HONOR”: GLORY, RENOWN, AND FAME EARNED

Remarks for Final Convocation

April 25, 2024

At least a few colleges I know call this gathering “Honor Convocation.” Here at Hampden-Sydney, we have our own Honor Convocation before classes begin when our freshmen commit themselves to living into and up to the high expectations of our codes of honor and conduct. For you seniors, we trust that living with honor and character have become your way of life over these last four years.

Today’s final convocation is another kind of Honor Convocation, when we gather to recognize the scholarly, creative, and leadership accomplishments of our community members. Our contemporary word “honor” is derived from a Latin word meaning glory, renown, and fame earned, which is especially relevant to this ceremony. The honors we bestow today have been earned. In earning these honors, you award recipients have enriched the intellectual vitality of our campus, you have modeled the curiosity that is at the heart of any college or university, and you have contributed to a culture of inquiry that we are continually seeking to strengthen. You have earned distinction through your creative endeavors and your co-curricular leadership. On behalf of a grateful College community, I thank you for your efforts that have led to the honors we are bestowing on you today.

So what will you student award winners do next? In addition to all you have learned, I trust your time here has strengthened your sense of purpose and agency. I trust that if you haven’t yet found a calling, you are on your way to finding one. And, I trust that you seniors are taking with you the belief that you have within your grasp the ability to accomplish great and noble ambitions. We believe that the study of the liberal arts is the finest form of undergraduate education, and we therefore want and need you to use this extraordinary educational foundation to be the leaders of tomorrow in every field of endeavor.

And, returning to where these brief remarks began, we expect that you are also taking from this place an appreciation for the importance of character, honed from four years of study at a college that has long had codes of honor and conduct, and—for 248 years—the mission of forming “good men and good citizens.” The desire and inclination among men to do the “right thing, always” is needed now as much as at any time in history. Peggy Noonan, who authors a weekly column for *The Wall Street Journal* concluded her most recent column by writing, “In the daily press of events we don’t think enough about the character of those we’re putting forward to represent us” but it “would be a good long-term project for us as citizens [to ...g]et a better class of humans to go into the business of leading us.” We need you Hampden-Sydney students to be that “better class of humans” and we expect you young men of character to soon get “into the business of leading us.”

Congratulations all!