FIRST YEAR INDUCTION CEREMONY

Sunday, August 28, 2011

First year Blue Jays, welcome to the some of the best years of your life. Over the next four years, you will make friends who will be—yes, for real, best friends forever. You will learn more than you thought you could know. You will have experiences that you can hardly dream about now. You’ll do so many things over the next four years that it’s difficult to think now about how much you’ll change. Let me just ask you to do two things: keep an open mind. And, keep an open heart.

Keep an open mind. You’re here because you’re smart and because you know a lot. That’s great. But, remember, you’re also here because you have a lot to learn. Believe me, I learned the hard way: you can’t learn something if you pretend that you know it when you don’t. You can’t learn something when you don’t understand it but you act like you do. It is far better to learn to say, “I don’t get this. Please explain.” Open minds grow.

Keep an open mind. You have decided how you want to live and you think you know what you believe. But in many of your classes, in discussions with students whom you meet, and in books you’ll read, what you are certain is right, and what you are certain you think about things, will be challenged. Keep an open mind. Be willing to learn from your teachers, from the students around you, and from the books you read, no matter how challenging their information or their arguments are. Some of the students or teachers who you are certain don’t know what they are talking about MAY... in fact... have some things right. At the very least, you are far better off knowing what you believe if you have had it challenged and have thought carefully about why you think it is right. This campus has speakers with a wide variety of perspectives visiting the college from around the country and the world. You should not miss a chance to hear some of them, especially the ones whom you may at first absolutely know you won’t
agree with or who are going to be speaking on something about which you have already made up your mind.

Keep an open mind. You know what your talents are. You know what you are good at and what you aren’t. You know what you want to do in college and what you want to be. Right? But, what if you’re wrong? What if you have talents that you didn’t know you had? What if being a doctor or a writer is not actually something you’re good at? What if the Sociology prof or the coach or the RA is right when he or she says, “Hey, you’re really good at that...” and it’s something else than what you had been planning to do? Maybe you should try that “something else.” Who knows, maybe you’ll be really good at that “something else”. Perhaps you’ll be much happy doing something else than what you had planned on doing. You may know that you don’t like to lead groups. But what if you have talents for leadership you’ve never even tried? Try out a club or an organization which you don’t know much about but that piques your curiosity. You may find out a huge amount about something you didn’t know, meet new friends, and, most of all, learn a lot about yourself that you would otherwise have never known.

Keep an open mind. You may know what kinds of music, dance, sports, or art you like and don’t like, right? But have you ever really tried to find out about classical music, square dancing, softball, modern art, Indian novels, canoeing or a host of other activities you thought might not interest you? Elizabethtown students are into lots of things. Learn from your classmates, experiment—wisely, and grow.

Keep an open mind. Remember that a large part of your education here happens outside of class. The Music at Gretna concert series brings wonderful musicians to Leffler Chapel. Check it out. There are speakers from all over the country and the world who we bring here. Go hear them. Internships are invaluable. If your major doesn’t require one, go to your advisors or the Career Center and find an internship that fits your talents and interests. And, study abroad, if you are at all able. Every student
who I ever took on study abroad programs to Europe said it was an almost life changing experience.

Check out the Center for Global Citizenship on the first floor of Nicarry Hall and check out BCA, the study abroad consortium on the first floor of Myer, and look at their websites.

Keep an open mind. Everyone, perhaps especially your aunts and uncles or grandparents, asks, “So what are you going to major in?” And, most of you have decided on something to say to that. “Uh, I think I’ll do pre-med” or “uh, maybe, English,” or “I guess I do business.” Meanwhile, underneath, you may not know what you want to major in—and that’s great! When you ask people, what percentage of college students do you think change their majors, most people say about 25 percent. That’s way off. About 65 percent of college students change their major—at least once. Lots of students change their majors twice. And that’s wonderful. The most important education you can get here is a broad one. Some of the best courses you take here may be outside your major. How many times have I heard from alumni something like, “Well, I was absolutely certain I was going to be a biology major (or a history or a business major), and then I had to take psychology (or political science) because it was a requirement, and I fell in love with it, and it changed my whole life.” Keep an open mind.

And, while you’re keeping an open mind, keep an open heart. So many people whom you meet here seem so smart and confident and have done so many things. Right? You’re worrying: “what happens when they find out that I’m just me.” Believe me, all of us have our insecurities. When I was in college, I had lots of things I wasn’t good at or didn’t know how to do. When your roommate, the person in your first year seminar, the person in your Open Book group, your teammate, or just someone you get to know at meals or in your residence hall needs to talk, listen. They need you to be honest with them that you’re trying to do the best you can and it’s hard for you, too, sometimes. All of you, you’re not here to compete with each other on who can be the coolest and most confident. We’re here, all of us, at Elizabethtown College, to do the best each of us can. We all help each other. Yes, the classes you
take will be challenging. You want them to be challenging so you really can expand your mind and your abilities. Adjusting to a new environment while you’re are facing tough challenges in school can be very difficult. You will experience frustrations and disappointment. And, you will learn one of the most important lessons you can learn: to lean on those around you, draw some wisdom from what has happened, and find new energy to go ahead.

Keep an open heart. The next four years of your life will change your minds more than any other years of your life. But they will also see some of the biggest changes in your relationships to your family, your friends from high school, and to the big questions of life. Your parents, especially, may have a tough time, no matter how understanding they may be, accepting you as an adult, as someone who’s making her or his own decisions, and, yes, making what they see as mistakes sometimes. It’s easy for the relationship between you and your parents to get really strained while you’re in college. Believe me, I have a son in college now myself. I have to struggle often to let him be himself, to keep from telling him what I think he ought to do, and to listen to what he’s feeling. Your parents are going to go through the same struggles. Be patient with them. Realize that your relationship is going to change but it can still be a good one. You can help by listening, understanding what they’re feeling, and being aware of your own feelings. Your parents care about you, they want the best for you, and it’s tough for them, at least as tough as it is for you.

Keep an open heart. We all want to get ahead. Especially in the tough economic times we’re in right now, we’re all very conscious that college should help you get a job. Everyone wants to get good grades. We want to do well on the playing field, to be successful in leadership, to have success, however we define it. Achievement is satisfying. It feels good to be successful. But, I have seen many people who succeeded, in the sense that they achieved a lot, or made a lot of money, or had prestigious positions, and had pretty empty lives. It was sad to see how lonely or bitter they sometimes they could
be, for all their success. They had lived mostly for themselves. They had little sense of having given anything to anyone, having formed deeper relationships, or having nurtured their personal integrity. I would never trade their success for my relationships with my family and friends or the values that I hold.

Do the absolute best you can here and always, but never live just for yourself. Keep an open heart.

Keep an open mind. Keep an open heart. You’ll have a great four years and a great life. Thank you.

NOW, you have to say something:

Stand up.

Let’s practice. I want you to say, “Blue Jays! Always! Twenty-fifteen!”

Again: “Blue Jays! Always! Twenty-fifteen!”

Now, for real, three times, as loud as you can:

“Blue Jays! Always! Twenty-fifteen!”

“Blue Jays! Always! Twenty-fifteen!”

“Blue Jays! Always! Twenty-fifteen!”