

**PRESIDENT STEVEN P. O'DAY  
AUSTIN COLLEGE**

**Inauguration Address  
March 23, 2018**

*What's Next: Looking To The Future With Confidence*

Members of the Board of Trustees, Chair David Corrigan, Presidents Hass, Imhoff, and Page, faculty, staff, students, community members, family, and friends, many of whom have traveled a long way to be here—I thank you.

I want to also extend a heartfelt thank you to Rebecca Gafford and all of the members of the inauguration committee who organized every last detail to make this ceremony a celebration of one of the finest colleges in the country. Particular thanks to Anna Laura Page and Carmen Tafolla for their special contributions and to all who are participating in today's ceremony and all the events of the week. Thank you to all my esteemed colleagues present today representing your colleges and universities. Thank you to absent friends and all those who are with us today to recognize this special moment in Austin College's long history.

I am about to talk about how the world has changed and as I reflected on that question, I couldn't help but first look at how my life has changed. As you know, I started my professional career as an attorney, became a soccer coach, and then made a life-changing transition to higher education. Dr. Bill Marshall hired me to coach the women's soccer program at Franklin & Marshall College. This was my launch into higher education. Kent Trachte was next when he hired me as the pre-law advisor and, since then, he has been a treasured mentor and friend to me. He was also a prophet one evening when we were returning from a meeting in New York City many years ago. He described in great detail the promotion he was offering to me. When I eagerly accepted, Kent paused, turned to me and said—"Steven, you have no idea what you're getting yourself into!" Of course, he was right. What I did know, however, was that Kent would keep me on track, give me opportunities to grow, be a great friend, and, in the years that would follow, prepare me for a college presidency.

I have been blessed to be surrounded by others, too, who have helped me along the way. Lewis Thayne, president of Lebanon Valley College, John Fry, former president of Franklin & Marshall and, now, president of Drexel University are others who have had a profound impact on my life and career. Also, all those incredible colleagues and friends with whom I have worked and with whom I have learned, thank you for training me so well.

I have also been surrounded by a family that has supported and encouraged me to grow. My brother, Mike, my sister, Eileen, the rest of my family back east, and, of course, my parents. Both have passed away, my dad just last summer, but I have no doubt they are watching, proud of what they began, proud of their son, and pulling some strings here and there just to let me know they are paying attention. I was quite sure of that when the inauguration committee suggested today, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, as my inauguration date. Today is Dad's birthday. Of course, it is. Well done, Dad.

The other family that has encouraged and pushed me to grow is the family I married into. Cece's parents, Forrest and Kitty (I know you're watching from a snow drift in Pennsylvania—It's okay), Cece's sister, Sarah, and our niece Catherine are here today. They all have helped me to be ready for this moment.

And then there is Cec and Ryan. You have made this possible. You are my inspiration, and I love you both more than words can describe.

---

### **“What's next?”**

I propose that we are all here, in this place today, because the people of Austin College have always asked, **“What's next?”**

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the country was changing quickly. We were a young and pioneering nation. No one knew exactly what would come next, but some knew that education would hold the key. So, with great effort, planning, and a gift from Emily Austin in 1849, a group of determined Presbyterians were granted the charter for Austin College.

From the College's start, its mission was to provide an education grounded in the liberal arts and sciences. The College's charter was modeled after the charters of Princeton and Harvard for the “education of Youth in the learned languages and in the liberal arts and sciences.” Also, from its early years, Austin College has been committed to educating the whole student, following the classical tradition of *mens sana in corpore sano*, a sound mind in a sound body. Daniel Baker, the preacher who was a driving force in the establishment of Austin College, became its second president and spent much of his life as its champion. As our own Light Cummins noted in his *Austin College, A Sesquicentennial History*, Baker spoke often of the importance of physical activity with academic studies. “For exercise to be profitable, the mind must be recreated as well as the body,” Baker would claim, and, “Ball playing and gymnastic exercise are the very thing.”

Of course, these Presbyterian pioneers were not going to ignore the spiritual development of their students either. Service was emphasized, and students were expected to live virtuous lives.

In the years since its founding, Austin College continued to ask, “**What’s next?**” Academic programs evolved. Literary societies flourished. In 1892 a baseball team formed. Football followed in 1896 and then basketball in 1910. In 1905 a glee club was formed and half the student body auditioned. An orchestra formed, too. And, in 1942 an *a cappella* chorus began. The College has never lost focus of its mission to educate the whole student.

In 1918, the College again asked, “**What’s next?**” and became a coeducational institution. It wasn’t just men who sought an education of the mind, body, and spirit. So, new literary societies were added, and a service club and a women’s basketball team were formed almost immediately.

Since then, the College has had its share of challenges, but all the while it has stayed true to its values, it has been unwavering in its belief in the importance of personally, individually educating the *whole* student. Our work is to transform students so they can transform the world. Can there be a higher calling than this? This is why we dedicate ourselves, day in and day out, to our work as educators, mentors, students, administrators and staff, Board members, alumni, and friends. We are an entire ‘RooNation committed to the ideal that Winston Churchill so simply proclaimed, “What is the use of living, if it not be to strive for noble causes and make this muddled world a better place for those who will live in it after we have gone?”

And now, we gather today, 169 years after this cause began.

Unlike the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we now face a time of unprecedented scrutiny of higher education, a liberal arts education in particular. The value of what we do and how we do it has been questioned by some. There are those who say the era of the liberal arts is over. I argue the opposite. Never in history has higher education been more valuable. Never has an education in the liberal arts and sciences been more important. Why? Because we cannot know with certainty **what’s next**.

The world is changing. The world of work is changing rapidly. The U.S. Dept. of Labor projects that, unlike even 25 years ago, people will now experience, on average, ten to 14 jobs by age 38. We also know that the majority of jobs that will exist five, ten, 20 years from now do not yet exist.

In a future where careers will be measured not by a single job but, rather, multiple jobs over a lifetime, employers are looking for people who can cope with this uncertainty and fluidity. They need people who can adapt, can make connections, and have a wider way of engaging with the

world. They want critical thinkers, collaborators, clear communicators, and creative problem solvers. These are the very values embedded in a liberal arts education, an Austin College education.

In his book, *You Can Do Anything: The Surprising Power of a “Useless” Liberal Arts Education*, Pulitzer Prize winner and New York Times bestselling author George Anders writes that “In a tech dominated world, the most needed degrees are the most surprising, those in the liberal arts. Curiosity, creativity, and empathy aren’t unruly traits that need to be reined in to ensure success. Just the opposite. The human touch has never been more essential in the workplace than it is today. The job market is quietly creating thousands of openings a week for people who can bring a humanist’s grace to our rapidly evolving high-tech future.”

When introducing the iPad 2, Steve Jobs summarized his strategy this way: “It is in Apple’s DNA that technology alone is not enough—it’s technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the results that make our heart sing.”

These skills—critical thinking, an analytical mindset, empathy, a breadth of perspective, and the ability to communicate your ideas—are instilled here at Austin College through personal mentoring and through teaching and learning across and beyond the campus. This is in our DNA, too, and is echoed in names like Hall, Mason, Pierce, and Street.

As we ask, “**What’s next?**” we know that these skills and educational values have their *place* here but we must also ensure that they have a *space* here.

In his biography of Leonardo Da Vinci, Walter Isaacson writes, “Ideas are often generated in physical gathering places where people with diverse interests encounter one another serendipitously. That is why Steve Jobs liked his buildings to have a central atrium and why the young Benjamin Franklin founded a club where the most interesting people of Philadelphia would gather every Friday. At the court of Ludovico Sforza, Leonardo found friends who could spark new ideas by bringing together their diverse passions.”

Austin College is such a place. Here a basketball player is also a jazz musician and goes on to law school. With guidance from faculty, students at the IDEA Center study the efficacy of cancer gene therapy. During a JanTerm trip to Scotland, a student discovers her calling to the ministry. Through the Johnson Center, faculty members share their research and strengthen their pedagogy. A student, through an internship, discovers his passion for working with nonprofit organizations. Students learn from mentor professors, coaches, conductors and directors, advisors, and coordinators, and they learn from each other—not only through their seminars and

simulations but through discussion in the residence halls and lessons learned through practice on the stage, the mock trial courtroom, and on the playing field.

What we do inspires. It inspires not only those who work and live here but it also inspires those who seek to support our mission. Those like Linda Morris Elsey, her son, Todd Liles, and the Morris Family Foundation who, just a few weeks ago, pledged a \$7 million leadership gift to transform the former Moody Science Building into the Jack B. Morris Center, where the study of business, economics, and entrepreneurship will find a home and the most interesting people will come together to spark new ideas in one another. It will be a place of which Leonardo and Ben Franklin would be proud.

Other transformational gifts have begun to emerge in these opening months of my presidency too. \$1.5 million from Bob and Joyce Johnson to support faith and engagement, our students, and faculty. \$4 million from Nancy Bryant and Jerry Taylor to support students and faculty to study science and technology. I believe still others will be inspired and consider exciting ways in which they, in their own way, will join in Austin College's bright future.

**What's next?** What will be the next thing that challenges us to go further than we thought possible? How will the students sitting with us today change tomorrow?

**Austin College—this is our time!** And here are we to carry on and to build anew. To remember our past and look to our future. To soak in knowledge and spark new ideas.

**What's next?** In some ways we *do* know. We will continue our unwavering commitment to the personal education of the whole person and the value of the liberal arts and sciences in forming creative analytical thinkers and collaborators. Our students will be prepared for a future of wonder, challenge, and opportunity. They will lead and serve, create and solve, collaborate and communicate.

This will not change.

**What's next?** In some ways we *don't* know. Who could have imagined that 12 seconds on the beach at Kitty Hawk would someday give rise to great ships named Gemini, Apollo, Enterprise, and Endeavor? Who would have imagined 50 years ago that rotary dial telephones and cathode ray tubes would give way to cell phones and Bluetooth in an age of the internet and computers that fit in your hand?

**What's next?** Our world is different now than yesterday and it will change again tomorrow. We can't know exactly **what's next**.

We just know we will be ready!

God bless all of us here today, God bless Austin College, and may God bless our work together in the years to come.

Thank you.

*Steven P. O'Day*  
*President*  
*Austin College*  
*Sherman, Texas*  
*March 23, 2018*