

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

**Opening Convocation Address
August 22, 2018**

REACH

Good evening, students, faculty, and friends. Welcome to the 170th year of Austin College. This is a place steeped in history, and all of you are now part of that history. Whatever your story, wherever you come from, wherever your journeys ultimately take you, we are all here, at *this* place with a common goal—to make the world a better place. And how do we achieve that goal? We begin with education.

“The first duty of the university is to teach wisdom, not a trade; character, not technicalities.”

Winston Churchill uttered these words in a speech to the University of London 70 years ago, in 1948. Austin College already knew that 100 years earlier.

Today, we live in an era of deep divisions—of haves and have nots, of polarity, where too often people look for absolutes with little regard for nuance and the gray areas in between. We live in a time when the temptation is to measure success and progress only in dollars and education only as a necessary means to a monetary end. Amidst all of that, *you* have come here to learn. Amidst all of that, *you* have come here to teach wisdom, teach character, and prepare students for rewarding careers and full, engaged, and meaningful lives. Amidst all of that, *all of us* have come here to *REACH*.

I have great news for everyone! It turns out that all along Austin College has known what we're doing.

According to the medical resource *Medscape*, studies find that doctors who are great communicators have patients who follow their prescribed therapies more and who are more satisfied with their care.

The *Washington Post* recently reported that when Google identified its top performing employees, it found that skills linked to the humanities—good communication, empathy, having insights into others, and making connections across complex topics—were the most important traits linked to success at their company.

President Steven P. O'Day
Opening Convocation Address
August 22, 2018
Page 2

When business leaders and experts from around the country met this spring at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, they emphasized the importance of creativity and the human factor.

It is not just learning “a trade,” as Churchill said. It’s not learning what to think. It’s learning *how* to think, how to empathize, how to communicate, how to make connections across disciplines and across cultures, how to examine, create, collaborate—how to *REACH*. These are the things that you seniors have been experiencing since day one at Austin College and that those who are new to this place and its extraordinary people are about to experience every single day. This is the Austin College education. This is what we are all about.

You heard me mention a minute ago that Austin College has known what it’s doing for 170 years. Well, it also turns out that you know what you are doing, too. You accepted the invitation to join one of the finest colleges in the country.

Today, we welcome *everyone* to campus. This convocation ceremony is the reunion of a teaching and learning community, the start of a new year when we again challenge ourselves to *REACH*.

We especially welcome our seniors. Today is your last Opening Convocation as a student but only your fourth in a lifetime of convocations to which you will always be welcome.

We also welcome our first-year and transfer students. Today is your first convocation and you bring with you some history of your own. You are the largest incoming class in Austin College history and you are an impressive bunch. We have with us today published writers—of fiction and of research results—musicians who have released CDs, artists and actors who are also athletes, leaders who have served in so many ways—at camps for kids with special needs, by supporting cancer patients, and helping to provide school supplies and hurricane relief. You are smart; you are engaged. You have come here to examine what you thought you knew and explore what you never considered. You have come here to learn in the classroom and studio, on the playing field and the stage, through service opportunities and research experiences, and around the globe. You have come here, to Austin College, to *REACH*.

I know from talking to many of you, and talking to your parents and guidance counselors, that one of the other reasons you are here today is because you also want to be part of a real

President Steven P. O'Day
Opening Convocation Address
August 22, 2018
Page 3

community. You value the individualized learning and close relationships that make AC so special. Now you are part of the community, part of the Austin College family. This is the ethos of our campus, and it is your job not only to join 'Roo Nation but to make it even better. How do you do that?

Talk to your professors, your mentors, your advisors, your coaches, your classmates. All of us. Ask questions. Bring ideas and solutions.

Engage in the classroom AND in something else. For nearly 40 percent of our new students, something else will be a sport. For others it will be music or art, for others student government, for others service. The list goes on.

How do you make 'Roo Nation better? You must *REACH*.

Also, being part of this extraordinary community demands that we "Be good to each other."

If you pause for a second and think about it, everything boils down to that. Every late-night decision you will face will boil down to a question of being good to each other. Every rule, every policy, every oath has that as its premise.

We don't always have to agree, but we do have to respect each other. Our mission statement "embraces opportunities for students to engage in a climate of civility and respect that encourages free inquiry and open expression of ideas. We are a community that fosters lively intellectual and social interaction among persons of different origins, experiences, beliefs, accomplishments, and goals."

Stated a different way, we tell the truth with kindness. We are good to each other. Each of you knows in your heart and your head what that means. If you are good to each other, just about everything else takes care of itself. Please remember that.

Now, I know this all may sound a little daunting for you new students and you may be a little nervous as you get started, but we're not worried. I know you are here because you dream big. You have big plans, and we have big plans for you. You will be doctors and therapists, counselors and teachers, artists and musicians, entrepreneurs and bosses—leaders in your

President Steven P. O'Day
Opening Convocation Address
August 22, 2018
Page 4

communities. Somewhere in this room, among us right now, are people who will help sustain the planet, make our lives more beautiful, cure cancer, teach, and achieve peace and justice. You are going to make the world a better place. You are going to *REACH*.

Now I close with a challenge. This is the beginning of a new year at Austin College. This is an exciting time of renewal, reinvention, and possibilities. You have this opportunity but once in your life. Many never have it all.

I challenge you, whether you are a senior or freshman, whether you have been at Austin College for 40 years or 4 days, in this year to come, be good to each other, do well, do good, and ...
REACH.

Thank you very much. Go, 'Roos!