

PRESIDENT STEVEN P. O'Day
AUSTIN COLLEGE

Opening Convocation Remarks
AUGUST 28, 2019

WIDER WORLD

Good evening, students, faculty, and friends. Welcome to a new year, the 171th year of Austin College. Whatever your story is, wherever you come from, wherever your journey ultimately takes you, each of you is now part of Austin College's history, and you have the opportunity to make your mark on that history.

This is the first convocation for incoming students! We welcome 410 first-year and transfer students from 11 different states and 3 different countries. Your last six days have been full of activities to help you meet new people, learn how things work, and get a sense of what Austin College is all about. Turns out, you already have a good sense of what we're about.

As part of Orientation, you continued an Austin College tradition by participating in *First, We Serve* and packaging meals to be sent to Honduras. You did it voluntarily, you did it on a hot day when you could have been doing something else (or nothing else!), but here's the thing, you did it and you did it in vintage Austin College form—last year, with an incoming class of over 430 students, we set a record of preparing 38,000 meals. This year, your class is a little smaller so we set up smaller stations for this service event. Here's what you did. On Monday, the class of 2023 packed 40,608 meals! A new record!! Welcome to 'Roo Nation! You're going to be just fine.

We are also happy to have returning students here today, especially the class of 2020! Seniors, I hope to see you all at the President's House following Convocation.

There are a lot of exciting things happening on campus. As you've seen from the fencing, Wynne Chapel is offline right now. Seniors, you can look forward to the first Baccalaureate service in the new Clifford Grum sanctuary. Later this year, we look forward to beginning renovations in the Ida Green Communications Center that will result in the creation of the Sally and Jim Nation Theatre and Learning Commons. Ground preparation has begun for a new Flats-style residence hall behind the Forster Art Building and Jordan Family Language House.

This is exciting stuff! And students, it is for you! You are the reason we're all here!

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We have all come together around this thing called an *Austin College Education*.

First-year students, you are beginning a learning experience like no other. With the new COMPASS curriculum, you will examine science, art, and humanity. You will connect the dots between things that had previously seemed unrelated. You will apply what you've learned in the classroom and lab through internships and research opportunities that prepare you for a first job and then a career that may not even exist yet.

This process begins through your coursework and the extraordinary work of a faculty that I would proudly put up against any faculty in the country. We all know that learning doesn't happen only in the classroom or the lab, but also on the stage and the athletic field, in the mock trial courtroom and the Language House, through international study and late night talks with friends—to name just a few.

Why are all these opportunities so important? In his book, *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World*, David Epstein writes that “Nobel Laureates are at least 22 times more likely to partake as an amateur actor, dancer, or other type of performer. Nationally recognized scientists are much more likely than other scientists to be musicians, sculptors, painters, printmakers, woodworkers, mechanics, glass blowers, poets, or writers. ... The most successful experts also belong to the wider world” (33).

Here, at this place, you are part of the wider world! I encourage you to get involved! Be engaged!

Seniors, I haven't forgotten about you. We have big plans for you. You will be doctors and therapists, counselors and teachers, artists and musicians, entrepreneurs and CEOs—leaders in your 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. Your professors, mentors, advisers, coaches, tutors, administrators, housekeepers, groundskeepers, police officers, dining staff, support staff—all of us and those who have come before you—have no doubt of that and you shouldn't either. Don't worry. You've got this.

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As I said before, we have all come *together* around this remarkable thing called an Austin College education—with the operative word being TOGETHER. None of the great things that happen at AC happen in a vacuum. We are here together. We are a COMMUNITY, and that makes a difference.

So, I remind everyone that being part of this extraordinary community demands that we be good to each other. Always and in all ways, **be good to each other**. I don't have to tell you what that means. In your heart and in your mind, you know what that means.

Now, I close with one last thought for you to keep in mind. Bring your A game. This is the beginning of a new year at Austin College. For some it is a continuation and for others, the start of an unforgettable journey. This is an exciting time of renewal, reinvention, and possibilities. You have this opportunity but once in your life. Many never have it at all. Whether you are a senior or freshman, whether you have been at Austin College for 40 years or six days, in this year to come, be open to the possibilities, be willing to explore, be good to each other, do well, do good.

Let's go, 'Roos!