

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

**Service of Perspectives & Reflections
President's Address to the Austin College Faculty and Staff
August 13, 2020**

Let me say again, welcome back! These past six months have been unlike any in our history. Life has been disrupted. We have adjusted. We have adapted. We have persevered. And here we are, about to begin the 172nd year of Austin College!

I take particular pleasure in speaking to you from this place—the refreshed yet familiar spaces of Wynne Chapel: the Clifford Grum Sanctuary and the Sallie Majors Small Chapel. After the events of the past six months, it is comforting to return to this place that has seen so many openings of school and will see so many more.

We had quite a year last year. We have faced challenges as individuals and as an institution. But while these challenges are significant and aren't going to just go away, today I'd like to focus not on what keeps us up at night, but rather what gets us up in the morning. For me it is the resiliency, creativity, and sheer force of will of our community.

Despite the disruption of the Spring, the mission of the College continued unabated. Students continued to engage in the deep exploration of ideas. Classes pivoted to remote in the blink of an eye but didn't skip a beat. Students went home while some stayed. Twenty students completed honors theses in 14 different disciplines. Concerts and recitals, art exhibits and theatre events continued in person, virtually, and via Facebook Live. You—all of us together—helped make this possible.

The achievements of members of the College community continued as well. To name just a few: Four students were finalists in the Fulbright Scholarship program; the Environmental Sciences Sneed Prairie Restoration Project received a 2020 Texas Environmental Excellence Award; eight faculty members were installed in chairs and professorships.

In athletics, for the first time in program history, women's basketball won the SCAC Conference Championship and earned a spot in the NCAA tournament. Austin College saw its first conference record holder in men's swimming. Women's and Men's water polo had six student athletes selected as All-Americans; they also combined to have 23 named as All-Academic and

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Academic All-Americans! These accomplishments are just a few highlights of the many honors that were earned across all of our sports.

Last year at this time, I was announcing several construction and renovation projects, and thanks to the hard work of so many and careful oversight from our own David Turk, those projects have been completed. The North Flats, our new, apartment-style student residence, is ready for occupancy. The Jim Rolfe basketball court, dedicated in February, has been completed. The Sally and Jim Nation Theatre and Learning Commons in the Ida Green Communications Center are simply spectacular. They provide classrooms and student study spaces that will be utilized this semester and for years to come.

Also, last year at this time I gave you an update on the progress of the POWER Austin College campaign. We had made outstanding progress and then our nation's economy was hit with double-digit unemployment and a sharp drop in the stock market. Those difficult circumstances just make me even prouder to announce that we have completed the campaign and *exceeded* our goal of \$125 million, making POWER Austin College the largest campaign in the history of the College.

In less than a week, our students will begin returning—most will be here on campus while some will be taking classes remotely. In a little over a week, we will be welcoming a third consecutive large class—approximately 373 first year students and transfers! They hail from Texas and 12 other states and eight other countries. Students of color represent almost 50 percent of the class. Almost 25 percent are first generation students. Almost 40 percent are student athletes. They are racially diverse and come from varied socio-economic backgrounds. This diverse group of students come here to grow, and we in turn grow as an institution because of them.

So here we are, despite all that has happened these past six months—despite all those things that have kept us up at night—we are here today to take a moment to remind ourselves of what gets us up in the mornings.

We are about to begin a new academic year and I can't help but be reminded of what the great American Poet, Robert Frost, said when he tried to sum up in just three words all that he had learned about life: **It goes on.**

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So, too, does Austin College. New students are about to begin their journey while returning students will continue theirs. Teaching and learning goes on. Questions and answers, experiments and research, preparation and action goes on. We cannot stop; it's not what we do. We go on, life goes on.

So, let us begin this new year, this next chapter, with optimism, with energy, and the firm belief that tomorrow will be better than yesterday.

We transform students so they can transform the world. I believe that deeply, and you've heard me say that all the time. I think it is good for us to hear that at the beginning of each school year.

But I'd also like to remind everyone that none of this happens without you. I know this year will look different. It might not be exactly what we had in mind, but I know we can do it. Look at what we have accomplished already. Together we can do anything.

Thank you for all that you do. Let's do this!