

**Freshman Convocation
Sunday, 30 August 2009
4 p.m.
Smith Center**

Good afternoon! It is a great pleasure to welcome all of you to GW – students, parents, relatives, and friends. To those of you who are accompanying the class of 2013, thank you for all you have done to bring these talented and motivated students to GW. To the class of 2013, I extend a warm welcome on behalf of the entire GW faculty. We are very glad you are here, and we are eager to be a part of your intellectual and personal journey.

For much of your lives, this moment has been a goal – a finish line to be reached after years of hard work. I commend you on that hard work and ask you to consider this question: what are you going to do with these four years to carve out a path for your life? And further: how are you going to find that special field or subject that lights your intellectual fire? These are sizable queries, and, on the face of it, they may seem insurmountable at this point in your brand-new college career. While your

outstanding accomplishments to date have brought you successfully across one finish line, there is always another goal in sight, and these questions will help you set and achieve that next goal, and the one after that. Allow me to offer some suggestions that I believe will allow you to engage in your GW experience in a deep and meaningful way and to carry away with you the skills that will allow you to succeed in both career and life.

But first – I am curious. By a show of hands, how many of you maintain a Facebook account? (pause for response) It is clear from that response that you have determined that Facebook has an important role to play in your ability to stay connected with friends and family as well as to follow current events and social causes that are of importance to you. Through this medium, you are constantly reinforcing connections and making new ones. In fact, there are approximately 17 million Facebook users between the ages of 18 and 24 – that's up 20% from just last year. My own age group has seen a nearly 200% jump since last year, so you never know who you might find there... By the way, GW has

a Facebook presence, and I urge you to become a fan if you haven't already!

Of course, social networking doesn't require a computer. You now find yourself among a diverse group of faculty, staff, and students with whom you will be interacting during your time here. I urge you to build your own non-virtual, on-campus network. As your academic opportunities take off during your time at GW, this new network will expand with you and allow you to be a part of exciting developments and innovations in your areas of study. Talk to your classmates, and your circle of friends will grow to include students with similar academic interests, stimulating debate and discussion.

Invite your faculty into conversation, and you will find that they can add whole new layers to your network – research opportunities, support in your studies, and connections to vital centers of study and action at and near GW. The expertise of GW's faculty spans time and technology, revealing ever more

exciting horizons of study. Recent work includes major discoveries: a unique beaked, plant-eating dinosaur, found by Professor James Clark and his Chinese colleague, and 1.5-million-year-old human ancestral footprint fossils in Kenya, unearthed by Professor Brian Richmond and his team. At the Folger Shakespeare Library, GW undergraduates work with the library's centuries-old texts in an unprecedented book-history course, learning how the earliest books were made and the role they played in shaping culture.

Cutting-edge work is happening at the GW Institute for Nanotechnology, which moves, manipulates, and studies materials one million times smaller than a pinhead, paving the way for new discoveries in mechanics, electronics, the environment, and health care.

As you grow your academic network, use this time and GW's resources to uncover or further develop your own capabilities in several key areas. Learn to write effectively, read critically, and

think analytically. Learn to argue issues with solid understanding. Learn to appreciate the humanistic side of life. Each of these skills will certainly serve you well in a chosen career, but each will also allow you to mold yourself for the future – for a lifetime of learning and self-discovery.

GW stands ready to support you in these endeavors. Our faculty is our best resource – take advantage of them! When something inspires you in class, stay a few minutes afterward to talk to your professor about it. Attend office hours early and often to tap your instructor's knowledge and experience as a supplement to regular class sessions. Make a point of meeting your professors face-to-face; their stories are fascinating and inspiring.

Your fellow students – the very people sitting next to you right now – bring a wide range of experiences and learning styles with them to the GW campus. Take advantage of GW's diversity to expand your own horizons. Start or join a study group to broaden your understanding of material presented in class.

Challenge yourself constantly. Delve deep into your chosen field of study by seeking out special events on campus, proposing a research project, and connecting with expertise local to the GW campus. Explore an entirely new field and see where a newfound intellectual passion takes you. Learn a new language – one of the most valuable efforts you can undertake in our shrinking world.

This is a heady and challenging set of endeavors, and help is here when you need it. Your academic advisor, who has already helped you select and register for your courses, is well trained and eager to help you develop your course of study. The University Counseling Center offers a wide range of services, from Academic Progress Groups, which meet regularly to discuss academic success strategies, to podcasts on topics such as reducing text anxiety and ways to prevent procrastination. Peer advisors at the Writing Center and resource librarians at Gelman Library can help you define paper topics and provide the

resources to develop strong arguments on paper. The Mount Vernon Campus – just minutes away by shuttle – provides tutoring services in several subjects as well as monthly conversation groups in foreign languages. The Office of Disability Support Services offers support for different learning styles.

These are just a few examples of the many ways in which GW stands ready to help you succeed in whatever you choose to study here. Now it's up to you. Take the leap. Take the initiative. Take some academic risks. You have built your online network to expand your social connections and awareness. Now create your GW network – join a group, become a fan, invite a friend, and discover just how limitless the possibilities truly are.