

I am delighted to have the opportunity to participate in this Honor Convocation, because it is truly one of the most significant events in the life of the University.

Coming at the very beginning of the academic year – and at the beginning of the collegiate career of the Class of 2016 -- it provides an important opportunity for us to affirm our shared commitment to the goals and values that bind us together as a community of learning.

There are few times as exciting as the beginning of a new school year. This Honor Convocation, in particular, serves to re-ignite that sense of anticipation which comes from the prospect of intellectual challenge and social interaction in the months ahead.

And, while it is an important event for all of us here today—including faculty and administrators—it is especially significant for you, our new students, who are embarking upon perhaps the most formative period of your lives—years that will in large measure determine the course of the remainder of your lives.

The class of '16 is distinctive in that your four-year collegiate career will be bracketed by two significant quadrennial events: the summer Olympics, just completed, and the Presidential election, upcoming. By the time these occur again, you will have completed your Mary Washington experience.

Now I realize this seems a long way off at the moment. It isn't. And you'll be amazed how quickly that time will pass.

No one can predict, of course, what challenges those years will present or what joys they will bring -- but, if recent history offers any insight into the future (and it does) we can be certain that it will be an exciting time.

Whatever those years may hold, however, I can offer you what should be a comforting thought as you are starting out – and that is my confidence that you will emerge from your UMW experience well equipped—academically, socially, ethically—for the remainder of your life's journey.

And, in the process, you will benefit from the unique characteristics that make Mary Washington such a truly special place.

You are already aware of some of these special qualities. There is, for example, the beauty of the campus and the University's reputation for academic excellence—things that no doubt contributed to your decision to come here.

But there are other qualities—not so immediately evident—but qualities that you will come to appreciate in the days ahead.

Among the most important is the extraordinary quality of our faculty. You will soon learn that we have truly outstanding professors—teachers who will constantly challenge you to expand your academic horizons and to develop your intellectual capabilities.

And you will also learn that they are deeply committed both to their profession and to their students. You will find them approachable and eager to help you, even as they challenge you.

But of all the special qualities of life at Mary Washington, none is more highly prized than honor—because a commitment to integrity, decency, and respect constitutes the very foundation of our approach to education.

Many of the freedoms you will enjoy here—both inside the classroom and beyond—are made possible by the existence of the Honor System.

The System works because you make it work—through the collective impact of each student’s individual integrity.

In short, at Mary Washington, Honor is not merely a principle that is taught, but a philosophy that is lived.

For that reason, I am convinced that—among all the important developments that will affect your lives while you are students at this University—none will be more important than the nurturing of mutual respect that is grounded in ethical, honorable behavior.

Indeed, I suspect that, long after specific lessons of the classroom have escaped your memory, you will still recall, with satisfaction and with pride, the spirit of honor, decency, civility, and respect that prevailed during your years at Mary Washington—and, moreover, that these values will follow you long after your graduation—because they are lessons for life itself.

And so, in conclusion, let me remind you that the Honor System which we proudly celebrate today is a tradition that we all share—but it is one that will survive only so long as it is supported by this community’s central element: you, the students.

I am confident that you will continue to uphold, strengthen, and promote the ideals of Honor that you have inherited from previous generations of Mary Washington students—and that the Honor System will remain through the years as one of this University’s most respected traditions.

I wish each of you the greatest success as you begin what I know will be a rewarding career at Mary Washington.

Thank you.