

*Seeing and Believing:
Surviving and Thriving*

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Congratulations to the finest group of young minds ever to grace the Juniata campus, the Class of 2003! Thank you for welcoming me as one of your honorary members. I have known Juniata for many years. Your president Tom Kepple is a good friend and a respected national leader in higher education and I have known you through him.

I began my academic career not far from here, in Happy Valley, and it was then that I first visited your beautiful campus; but my real tie to Juniata is family. Ikenberry roots, like Juniata roots, grow out of the Brethren tradition. For generations, members of the Ikenberry family have found a home on this and sister campuses. And for that and much more I am grateful you invited me to join you on this special day. And a special day it is. You are graduating from one of America's finest liberal arts colleges with an academic foundation on which you can build for a lifetime. You studied at a place that values academic excellence – William Phillips, winner of a Nobel Prize for his work on cooling and trapping atoms with laser light, was a Juniata graduate in 1970.

Juniata is focused on excellence in teaching. Your professor David Hsiung was recognized in 2000 by the Carnegie Foundation

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for the Advancement of Teaching as America's Teacher of the Year. Juniata graduates who go on to study medicine and the law have a 90 percent acceptance rate and that too says something about the quality of your education. And perhaps most important, you are leaving here with good friends and memories that will stick with you for a life-time. So, today is special. Stand up and give yourself a hearty round of applause. Thank your friends and family who believed in you and who helped you to reach this moment.

A lot has happened since you enrolled at Juniata, not all of it good. Even now you remember the day that changed the world, the day four planes were high-jacked and used as instruments of terror and destruction, September 11. You have seen two wars follow: one in Afghanistan, with a peace still in the making; and one in Iraq, with a peace just beginning – both with uncertain futures, both with risks shared around the globe. You and your parents saw the exuberant bubble of the stock market in the late 90s burst, and savings and expectations evaporate. And just as you were planning your round-the-world trip with stops in Hong Kong, Beijing, and Toronto, the world was hit by SARS, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, with death rates and contagion risks many times greater than anything known before.

The reality is that the world you are entering is filled with risk. You can't walk through an airport without being reminded of risk. You must be screened, scanned, and patted down, take off your shoes, forfeit your finger nail clipper and pocket knife, and be surrounded by scores of armed guards. But before you decide to re-up your student loans and hunker down at Juniata for another four years you need to remember that risk is simply part of life and always has been. When you take a breath of air, cross the street, say hello, whatever you do, there is risk.

Post 9/11, some politicians appear to be promising us that they will eliminate risk and move us from a code orange to a code green world, no problem. My sense is that's a false promise. Reduce risk, of course, but eliminate risk? Not possible.

Our Founding Fathers: George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and others risked their lives to create a new nation. The vision was to be free from Britain, and to do something no other society had done before: create a democracy, a government by the people and for the people, an untested, radical

notion at the time. The American Revolution was risky. But out of that risk came the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, a free economy, and the liberties we enjoy today.

Every time a surgeon approaches the operating table he and the patient confront risk, but lives are saved and miracles happen. In the search for new medicines, scores of possibilities fail before the cure is found. Every decision you make carries risk, but without accepting risk you would forfeit life's greatest rewards. As you launch your career, there is the risk things won't work out. As you choose that special person with whom you will spend the rest of your life, there is a risk you may drift apart. Even as you bring a new life into the world there is risk, to the mother, to the child, and to an uncertain future. Still, absent of those risks, life would be sterile, shrivel up and blow away, dull and dusty, not worth living. So how do you live in a risk-filled world? I wish I could give you all the answers, but I can't. There are, however, at least three ingredients you may find useful in the struggle: knowledge, faith, and courage.

With knowledge comes a vision and sense of direction. You need one, obviously, and if it is to be worth anything, it must be informed. Based on prejudice, greed, ignorance, manipulation or myth, history teaches time and again that such a vision is risky in the extreme. I mentioned the new risk presented by SARS. It was the knowledge and the technology of molecular biology that enabled scientists and health care workers to unravel many of the mysteries of SARS in days and weeks rather than months and years. It was knowledge that helped reduce the deaths and control the spread of SARS. And in time there will be a vaccine, and if and when it comes, it will come from knowledge. Your last four years at Juniata have been spent gaining knowledge. It's not the specifics of what you have learned that are so important, much of that will slip away.

The important thing is that you have gained a foothold from which you can continue to learn and grow, and to the extent it is strong and firm your knowledge will grow and be renewed and from that you will gain a vision of how to cope with life's risks and challenges.

I wish I could tell you that knowledge, alone, is enough, but in my experience it is not. You need more than knowledge and a sense of purpose. You need the faith to believe and the courage to

act, and those are even more difficult to come by. Juniata has been open in talking about what it believes and I hope you will take some of that heritage with you. For Juniata, the key precepts include community, peace, and service. They include engagement, connectivity, challenging the status quo, and leadership with a global perspective. Going forward, you will need to struggle even more with your own values and beliefs. Unless you know what you believe, you will lack the passion and conviction to face life's risks with confidence. Even the most trivial risk can become an excuse for inaction. If, on the other hand, if you really care deeply about something, if you care about it as much as you care for life itself, no challenge, no risk will intimidate you.

Some of you will expand the world's energy supply while others will help us use the energy we have more sensibly. Some of you will pick up the pieces from the dot com world and find ways to do the world's work easier, faster, cheaper, and better. Some of you will feed the hungry while others care for the sick. Some of you will teach the young and make sure we leave no child behind. Some of you will heal communities and others will sacrifice your lives in service to others. Whatever you do, let it be driven by passion, by a set of beliefs and convictions that will give you the strength to confront the uncertainties and risks that come life's way.

With a good education, passion, and conviction, great things lie ahead, but you will also need courage: courage to reach out, courage to grasp opportunity, courage to walk through the dark and hold your head up high, and courage to confront the risk of failure as you pursue your dream. Do you need the knowledge and vision to see? Yes. Will you require the faith to believe? Yes. But in the end, you must also have the courage of your convictions, the courage to act. Knowing what is right, believing what is right, and acting on what is right, and in the process, overcoming risk, not surrendering to risk, that is life's secret.

Today is a commencement, a beginning of a lifetime journey. Stay connected with Juniata. Create more opportunity for the future generations who will come here. And may the knowledge, the belief, and the courage you have gained here be invested in service to humanity, and may you bring great pride and inspiration to your family and your Alma Mater. Congratulations, good luck, and Godspeed.