

Aims of Education IX 2001-02
Connections
By Pat See
Professor of Sociology

Foreword by President James L. Doti

The 2001-02 annual Aims of Education address was delivered before a Chapman Auditorium audience of attentive parents and students new to our university. This wonderful Chapman academic tradition has been practiced for nine years. The goal is to inform first-year students about the values and heritage underpinning their education and the traditions embedded in the 141-year history of Chapman. This year's address, by Professor Pat See, a long-time favorite of both students and faculty, continues an inspiring and eloquent series of "Aims of Education" addresses by distinguished faculty members. Please feel welcome to share your thoughts on the ideas and challenges presented here with Professor See or with me.

Well, this is a day of beginnings and endings for you all, isn't it? Students are coming and starting a new life adventure on their journey. You parents are also moving into new arenas of your lives. I was in your shoes 12 years ago. My daughter, Ariana, came to Chapman when she was 18. I live six blocks from campus in Old Towne, and have lived here and taught at Chapman for more than 30 years. My daughter went to pre-school and took summer programs here. Chapman was like a second home to her.

As we prepared for this pivotal event in our lives, there was growing tension and conflict between us. Maybe you can relate to it. I called it separation anxiety; the letting go was difficult for both of us. But the big day came. She put everything into the car and we drove the six blocks to school and carried everything into her Braden Hall room. When our moving chores were complete, she turned ever so slightly away from me, as if politely saying "bye now, mom. I have other things to do." So I very politely went down to the car, drove the six blocks home, sat on the couch in the living room and cried hysterically. It was a hard day. However, an unanticipated consequence was that for the first time in 18 years, I got a good night's sleep.

It's a great honor to be invited by President Doti to speak to you. My intention is to tie in this year's Orientation theme, "Connections," with my view of what comprises the aims of education. As a social psychologist, most of my work focuses upon connections. So this topic is right up my alley. There are three levels of connections I'd like you to consider while you are here at the university – connections to self, to experience and to others.

Connection to Self

The first level of connection I'd like you to think about is the connection to self. As your education progresses, you can grow more deeply into and become more connected to yourself. Please make a space in your life for this to happen. You can do this by meditation, prayer, solitude, dancing, walking, running – whatever works for you. This is a very important part of your life, not only now, but also in the

future. Our culture doesn't reward this kind of behavior. You will never get paid for meditating. But building reflection such as this into your life is crucial to your well-being and balance.

As a class technique, when there is a paper or an assignment given, I ask students to do the reading and/or research and then to forget about it, to do something entirely unrelated to this piece of work. Later, when they sit down to actually write the assignment, the material will have "perked" in their brains and the result will be a surprisingly creative and knowledgeable piece of work. This perking, or "crock-pot" method works like a charm. Here's an example of how it works.

Last June when President Doti asked me to do this talk I plugged his request into my psyche and forgot about it. Then, in August, I was listening to a choir from Germany at the Mammoth Lakes Sierra Summer Festival. While I was listening to Brahms, up perked the elements of the talk I am presenting today. I began furiously making notes on my concert program. It seems like a kind of magic, but you can trust the process. This is how you can connect to the deeper regions of the self.

Doing reading and/or research at the last minute is certainly not uncommon. However, what you have done is foreclose any participation of your inner wisdom in the preparation of this piece of work. Why? It's the hard way and not the smart way to work.

Connection to Experience

The second level of connection I'd like to talk about is to experience. This is a unique and marvelous time in your life for connection to experiences of all kinds. Never again will you have the opportunity to taste so many different things and to open yourself to limitless possibilities and experiences. Your time here at Chapman will change you. Your experiences will change you. You will become a different person. You'll be different when you go home at breaks and between semesters. You're going to be different in May, at the end of your freshman year. Each year as you progress through Chapman the differences will become more profound. At your commencement in 2005 my colleagues and I will celebrate with you as you receive your degrees. With great pride we will talk about how wonderful you are.

We faculty members like to think we play some role in your evolution, and of course we do. But it's hard to pinpoint exactly how we change your life. We are guides and we are facilitators. But you do the magic. And the more you allow yourself to be open to all of us and all the ideas and everything Chapman offers you'll be an even better person when you walk through that commencement line.

I've been at this for a long time and have discovered that magic requires intention and presence. First of all, sample as much as you can. Do not focus too soon. The general education requirements here at the university are designed to provide new lenses, new perspectives, and new ways to do things, new ways of thinking. Take advantage of every single one of them. Don't close a door on anything.

Undergraduates tend to change their majors two or three times. I did that myself seven times. And "it" happened in the second semester of my junior year. I took a sociology class and I knew a profound connection was being made. Not all of you will change your major, but many of you will. Unless you are certain that you know what you want to do, keep your choices and options broad. Do not limit

yourself. Even though you think you know today what it is you want to do, you may not be right; change happens.

A second suggestion is not to specialize too soon. Even if you are certain you know what it is you want to do, still try to provide yourself with a broad background. No matter what you do, the road life gets complicated. You know that. And if you educate yourself broadly while you are here, you will have an advantage over your peers in the workplace because you will be able to problem-solve with a broader base than those who specialize too soon. They just won't have the breadth and depth. Keep that in mind. Keep it broad.

A third thing I'd like to suggest is that you stretch yourselves. I'd like to see you take advantage of every single thing Chapman has to offer. Maybe you've never been to an opera. Ever try it? I never did until 10 years ago. I went with a dear, deceased colleague of mine, and ended up becoming an opera nut. Avail yourself of dance concerts, sports events, plays, concerts, and lectures by Chapman professors and visiting guests on subjects about which you know nothing. Please, don't stay in your room and watch television. Do not foreclose on these adventures. You never know what it is that will be some kind of catalyst for your future.

About 10 years ago we had an undergraduate student in our department. Her name was Maryann, and she was 82 years old. What a kick she was! One story she told me that typifies her style and underscores the point I am making is about her going to a literature class. The syllabus was handed out. She looked at it and thought to herself, "I don't know anything about this, never read any of these books. I'm going to drop the class." Then she caught herself and said, "Oh, this is what I am here for. This is an entirely new area for me." She stayed in the class and loved it. She was absolutely delighted with the course and joked about how she almost shut that door before she had even opened it. Isn't that amazing that at 82 she was still reminding herself to expand and drink new things?

Connection to Others

The third connection I'd like to explore with you is the area of connections to others. There's nothing more important in our lives than our connection to family and friends. Ninety-four percent of Americans state that the source of their greatest satisfaction is a happy life. In a lecture last spring, I asked the members of the audience to respond to the following question on 3x5 cards, based on a Japanese movie called "The Last Exit." If you haven't seen it, I urge you to do so. It's profound. The premise of the movie is that if you could take one memory with you to the next plane what would it be? Just one memory. Almost every response had to do with family and friends and experiences with relationships. Nobody said, "I'm looking forward to taking my Ferrari..." It just wasn't an issue.

Here are some samples of the replies I received:

"Standing on Normandy Beach with my dad and listening to stories about my grandpa, my dad's childhood and me as a child. It was amazing to think I was sitting on that beach, talking to my dad about three different generations, while years ago people fought on that very beach for their lives, one of them being my grandfather."

"The memory of planting, watering, harvesting, cleaning, and packaging bundles of green onions with my grandma and taking them to the farmers market."

“The day I graduated from college; my family and friends were there to celebrate with me my accomplishment.”

After graduation, you are going to remember some classes, ideas, maybe a particular paper or two. But in the main, you’re going to remember people and relationships; these memories are in the making. Make them with care, presence, kindness, and responsibility.

Stretch your Soul

I hope I’ve made some sort of connection with you this morning. May your time here at Chapman be in continually making connections in these three areas. You will grow, and continue to grow more deeply connected to the self, and become more and more familiar with that territory by respecting and being open to connections with your inner self. This will be challenging because you will be departing, sometimes painfully, from your illusions and defenses.

You will take and will continue to take risks in the depth and breadth of experience. By taking responsibility for your choices, you realize you can’t have it all. There will always be a road not taken. Choose not to regret it.

Embrace the joy and the difficulties of connections with others, which serve to minimize prejudice, provincialism and certainty. In doing that you will stretch and nourish your soul.

About the Speaker

Professor Pat See is director of the honors program and has taught at Chapman for more than 30 years. A professor of sociology, among Dr. See’s areas of expertise is marriage and family relationships. She is a long time campus leader and is actively involved in a wide variety of community activities including Orange County Wellness Week and the YWCA, and she is a frequent speaker for local organizations and churches. Among her honors have been Outstanding Teaching Award (voted by Chapman students), Presidential Award of Achievement, California Council on Family Relations, and the Valerie Scudder Outstanding Teacher Award.