

Self-reliance and Options

Thank you Chancellor Struppa.

A warm welcome to our distinguished university leaders, trustees, faculty, staff, students and guests.

And a special welcome to the class of 2020! It's quite an honor to have the opportunity to speak to you en mass.

During my time here at Chapman, I've encountered the following two, very different stories.

In the first example, a student comes to my office in the spring of their senior year—let's call this student, Student A. The student has come for career advice. Student A's parents have a successful family business, and have invited Student A to work in the business after graduation, and eventually run the business if all goes well.

During Student A's time at Chapman: Student A had several meetings with both academic and career advisors, regularly searched the on-line career databases, and completed 2 internships to road test various career paths. One of the internships turned into a job offer. Student A wanted advice on which path to take—family business or job offer. So, in the discussion I add another option (which is job first, then family business), and give Student A my views on the merits and risks of each option. I also encourage the student to ask for other opinions.

And then there is Student B. Student B also comes for career advice in the spring semester of their senior year. Student B is very academically strong, but despite all best intentions to think about life after Chapman prior to this point, Student B ends up asking me the following. “I’m just starting my job search, and wonder if you can tell me what jobs might be good for me.”

So I have a look at the resume and I’m thinking...”Hmm, summer internships...a lifeguard, a soccer camp coach, a golf caddy. Ok, not too much to work with there.” I spend time brainstorming options with Student B. I then introduce Student B to our career counselors, who have been reaching out to student B, with no response, for almost 4 years now. Then we work for several months after graduation (in some cases a year) to help Student B find a place to land.

Both stories illustrate two AIMS OF EDUCATION that I believe to be very important: 1. Achieving self-reliance and 2. Creating near and long term options

Clearly Student A is on a faster path to self-reliance and has already created great near term options. And, while these two student examples are from the business school, the notion of eventually achieving self-reliance and creating options is important, regardless of your major.

So, let me expand on these, the educational aims of self-reliance and options.

I'll begin with self-reliance.

FROM OUR EARLIEST DAYS! From our earliest days, we learn and we are educated. From our earliest days we learn to eat on our own, crawl on our own, walk on our own, read on our own, count on our own, and write on our own. But why do we work so hard to learn, beginning with our earliest days? We do it because these activities lead to SELF-RELIANCE.

I'll give you an example. As you've heard, my twin daughters are now 7 years old. They're a fun and energetic pair. And, from a very early age they would get SO frustrated with me whenever I tried to do something FOR THEM—tie a shoe, pick out their clothes, hold the bike as they learned to ride, you name it.

And even today, if they can even barely attempt something, they want to master it on their own! They want self-reliance. For my daughters, and for each of us, self-reliance allows us to get rid of and shed our constraints.

The earliest days are only the beginning—very soon we want to swim, ride a bike, drive a car, and on and on. Again, pursuing activities that allow us to shed our constraints.

Incidentally, why do you think that our parents want each of us to be self-reliant? It's simple—because they would also like to shed some

constraints. They don't want us sleeping on their couch, riding their bikes, driving their cars, and eating their food when we're 30 years old.

So as you can imagine, when I talk about self-reliance, in part I'm talking about financial self-reliance. Self-reliance that can come from a rewarding career. That rewarding career can happen right after your undergraduate studies, after a master's degree, or even after a terminal degree. Regardless of when you seek financial self-reliance it is important to, at some point, have an intentional plan to get there.

Was financial self-reliance important to Student A, who had the choice of going to work for the family business? Absolutely. For Student A, and for each of us, with self-reliance comes the satisfaction of achievement, and with self-reliance comes self-worth.

But self-reliance is not just about financial well-being and finding a rewarding career that pays the bills. The importance of self-reliance goes well beyond discussions of money. With self-reliance comes independent thought.

For example in my view, independent thought, gained through education, has never been more important in the history of this country. Your ability to generate your own independently informed points of view, versus simply accepting the points of view shaped by others, has never been so critical.

Now, please don't read my next few statements as political statements. Each day when I come to work, I park my political preferences in the same place that I park my car, in the parking lot under your chairs.

But think about this. Think about where each of us would be intellectually, in the chaos of the current presidential election, without the educations that we have today. Regardless of candidate or party affiliation, we'd be so lost...swimming in 24-hour news cycles, tweets, punditry, and rhetorically spun speeches. Our educations give us the self-reliance and independence of thought that help us to make sense of the chaos...to have points of view.

Self-reliance, at all levels, comes from knowledge, skills and confidence; and I believe that self-reliance starts in the classroom. The most important transfer of knowledge that happens on this campus happens in the class room. It starts with your professors, who are among the best on the planet at what they do.

You'll get the best out of your experience if you: come prepared and ready to participate in the classroom; if you ask for help when you need it; and if you bring a focus on retaining what you learn, so that what you learn sticks and you can use it in the future to eventually achieve self-reliance.

But I don't think that self-reliance alone creates a better life, which brings me to options.

I believe that creating options for yourselves is an equally important aim of education.

Early on here at Chapman I got an important education about different options for driving home from work. Any of the Chapman people who live south from here will appreciate this story. Driving south you have two options. There's option 1.—go down to Chapman Avenue, turn left and take Chapman to get onto the 55 freeway heading south. There is also option 2.—take Glassell down to the 22 east and then pick up the 55 south.

Well, in option A, right after you enter what you think is the 55 freeway, you have about 3 seconds to get over 3 lanes to your left, to avoid the interchange that puts you over to the right and onto the wrong freeway. So, the first few times heading home I chose option 1.

And then one day it happened. A very large semi-truck wanted to get on the very interchange that I was trying to avoid. And, what's worse, it attempted to occupy the same point in space and time as the car that I was driving!

I did avoid the crash, but here's an important lesson for those not from Southern California. When you put on your turn signal here to change lanes, it really means "please RUN OVER me if I attempt to merge into your lane with plenty of warning!"

I didn't have to be a physicist to then realize the benefits of option 2.

That's a very simple example, but demonstrates the point that it's very important to have options when you need them.

You're sitting here today because your success to date, and your access to information made Chapman an option for you! You either got information about your college options from a counselor, an advisor, a parent, or a friend. Wherever you got the information, you partnered with others to understand, pursue and to select the Chapman option. Some students don't have such partners, or such options.

Let me explain. Caroline Hoxby of Stanford and Chris Avery of Harvard conducted a study called **The Missing "One-Offs": The Hidden Supply of High-Achieving, Low Income Students.**

They discovered that, each year, schools in the U.S. produce about 35,000 high achieving, low income students—low income defined as students living in households earning \$40K or less.

35,000 students turned out to be many more than selective universities thought existed. Hoxby and Avery showed that, and I'm quoting, "the vast majority of very high-achieving students who are low-income do not apply to any selective college or university." Even though they can attend tuition free at several of these schools.

The writers go on to say that "income-typical students come from districts too small to support selective public high schools, are not in a critical mass of fellow high achievers, and are unlikely to encounter a

teacher or schoolmate from an older cohort who attended a selective college.”

Now, for these students, the options do not always come easy. They have no support network. Their knowledge and their education is just not enough to create the options that you enjoyed when considering colleges and universities.

In a somewhat similar way, your near term and future options will not likely come easy—options for the careers that you have access to, options for where you live and work, and who you work with.

You’re operating at a different level now. You’ll find that there are helpful resources here, and after Chapman to set yourselves up for important internships, fellowships, and career options. It’s not that you won’t have resources or network opportunities.

The key is that now you’ll have to personally and proactively seek out the resources that are available. You alone can create space in your days and weeks to take advantage of these services and helpful people.

Student B, from my earlier example, learned that quite late.

My hope is, that when you graduate, you have multiple options. “Do I go straight to graduate school for my MFA or my MS, or go after working for a few years; do I accept an offer with this accounting firm or one of the others; do I start work in the Chicago theaters or try New York right away; do I start a business or take my corporate job offer?”

And most importantly, I hope that you think of education as a lifelong pursuit that continues to expand your options as your careers progress.

Let me offer a few closing, summary thoughts.

TWO light bulbs should come on long before you graduate,—1. what’s my major and 2. how do I want to use it after I leave here. The process of lighting both of these lightbulbs should begin early in your months and years here with us, not in the spring semester of your senior year.

Collectively, we are committed to deliver a great education, access to resources, and to partner with you in shaping a future of self-reliance and access to options.

But every partnership has two sides.

You should walk this campus with the attitude that there is much more that you want from this education, beyond the diploma handed to you on graduation day.

The diploma is not the endgame, a rewarding career is the endgame!

A rewarding career, leading to self-reliance and options.

Let’s work together to achieve these aims! Thank you!