

A PLAN FOR EVERY MAN

Remarks for New Student Orientation August 19, 2021

Let me extend my own welcome to the members of the Hampden-Sydney College Class of 2025, and to your parents, siblings, and our Hampden-Sydney colleagues who are with us today.

I want to begin by thanking you parents of our new students. Thank you for entrusting your son's education to Hampden-Sydney, and thank you for the work you've done and the love you've provided in raising your son and preparing him for this day. Much of what we will be able to accomplish here with your son over the next four years will be because of the foundation you have provided, so I'm grateful for your hard work as parents. My wife and I now have both of our children in college, so I know that this is a bittersweet day for you. You've spent the last 17 or 18 years raising your son to leave home and to be independent, but that doesn't make this day any easier emotionally. Please know that you are now as much a part of the Hampden-Sydney community as your son, and we will look forward to welcoming you back to campus. I hope we'll see many of you here for our Family Weekend, which is the first weekend in October this year.

You new Hampden-Sydney men have a lot on your minds right now, but I'll ask you to take some time as you are making this transition to college life to reflect on your parents, and also your teachers, coaches, and other mentors who prepared you to excel during these next four years at Hampden-Sydney. Take time, soon, to thank them for their guidance and mentoring. Your appreciation and thanks in a telephone call, a text message, or a letter will be a blessing to them.

I also want to take this moment to acknowledge not only parents but also the thousands of alumni and friends of this College, who, through their financial contributions and scholarships, have made it possible for you young men to receive the benefits of a Hampden-Sydney College education.

You've chosen to come to a very special college. Since November 10, 1775, when we opened our doors and held our first classes, we have had as our mission "to form good men and good citizens." We believe that good men and good citizens are well educated, and we, like every other college and university in the country will be focusing a great deal of effort on helping you to develop your intellect. But this College has always been about something more. We have never thought it is enough to develop your intellect, but we have always thought it was important to develop your character and your personality as well. As a former college president once said,

It is not enough to develop intellect, for intellect itself is essentially amoral, capable of evil as well as good. We must develop the character which makes intellect constructive and the personality which makes it effective.

This "developing the character which makes intellect constructive and the personality which makes it effective," is what we do particularly well here at Hampden-Sydney, and it is what sets a Hampden-Sydney education apart from the educational experience offered by other colleges and universities.

You've already begun to see many of the ways this College is distinctive. If you don't already, you'll soon see that the cornerstone of our academic program is our one-of-a-kind emphasis on rhetoric. We believe there is nothing more important than a young man knowing how to express himself well, and that he can't learn to write or speak well until he first learns how to think well. All of this we begin teaching during your freshman year, and if you commit yourself to learning to think clearly and to write and speak well, you will be able to accomplish anything you want in life.

Tonight, we will ask you to commit yourself to our Honor Code and Code of Conduct, and while we expect you to live in accordance with these codes during your four years here, Hampden-Sydney students find that these codes soon become a way of life. Indeed, many Hampden-Sydney alumni tell me that living with our Honor Code and Code of Conduct has changed their lives, making them better employees and leaders and also better husbands and fathers.

We also value civility here. We expect you to treat everyone with respect, and you should have the expectation that everyone will treat you with respect. When we walk down the sidewalk here, we aren't fixated on our phones, but we look each other in the eye and say hello. We think this is important because if we become accustomed to doing something as simple as greeting someone, it will make us more likely to do the right and decent thing when we face more complicated situations in life.

The coming days, weeks, and months will give you many opportunities to immerse yourself in this College and learn much more about its special culture and what sets us apart from other colleges and universities. What I want more than anything is for you to make the most of these next four years. Your time here will go very quickly, so the main thing I'm asking today is that every one of you makes a plan. If you think you know what your major will be, go see professors in that field and ask them for advice about how to get the most out of that major. Ask them what alumni who majored in that field are doing so you can explore the full range of career opportunities that will be open to you. If you are undecided about a major, then focus on those fields that interest you the most and decide what courses you will take to explore your interests. Write down how you want to develop your talents and how you plan to strengthen your weaknesses.

Write down your plan because that will help you commit to it. Write down when you will get an internship and, by the way, next summer isn't too soon, and our team in the Career Center is eager to help you. Write down when you would like to study off campus or abroad. Write down what clubs and activities interest you and how you want to participate in the life of this College. And, most important, write down the qualities of the man you want to be by the time you graduate from here and how you plan to cultivate those qualities. You can and should revise your plan many times in the weeks and months ahead, but it is important to have a plan for how you will make the most of these four years.

Share your plan with others and ask how it can be an even better plan. It will be incredibly easy to find mentors here who take an interest in you and your success and want to see you thrive here. Talk to your academic advisor, or a favorite professor, or a coach, or your RA, or talk with me. All you have to do is ask any of us and we will be eager to meet.

And, parents, we ask you to sit here and listen to these orientation speeches, but let me give you an assignment as well. Your son will most likely be coming home to celebrate Thanksgiving with you. He will want to see friends, he will want to sleep, he will want to eat. But, at some point during that

long weekend, plan now to sit down and ask your son to share his plan with you. Let it be his plan and don't even think of trying to write or edit the plan for him, but ask him about what he feels called to do in life, how he wants to make a difference, and ask him if his plan is one that will prepare him to fulfill his aspirations and dreams.

By now, each of you will have received a little booklet, *To Manner Born, To Manners Bred*, authored by Tommy Shomo, a member of Hampden-Sydney's Class of 1969, who devoted his career to educating young men at this College. Much of the book deals with how to be a gentleman, but it is also very much a guide to being a good man and a good citizen.

Following high school, many young men must immediately assume responsibility for earning a living, for being on their own, for renting or owning a home. By attending college, and especially this special College, you have the privilege and, really, the luxury, of having four years of preparation before you must assume these responsibilities. Toward the end of his book, here's how Tommy describes this time in your life:

This campus is a little world, and for our students it is their special place for four years. They know, however, that it will not be their world forever, and they are preparing themselves to be "good men and good citizens" as understood in the 18th century and in the 21st century. It is a treasured thing for a youth to have a special place in which to become a man—a beautiful place where honor is a virtue, civility a habit, and learning a goal.

It is a treasured thing to have this special College and this special time in your life. So, together, let's make the most of these next four years.