

## Actions Speak Louder Than Words

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Thank you President Struppa. It is an honor to deliver this year's "Aims of Education" address. To all the new students and their family members here tonight, welcome to the Chapman family. You are joining us at an amazing time in Chapman's history, and tonight kicks off what will be an exciting year in your life. A few weeks ago, I was trying to explain to someone who does not work at a university what it means when there is an official event where faculty wear their academic regalia. The best analogy I could come up with was that it's a bit like Oscar night in Hollywood. We come together to celebrate our profession, the faculty procession is a little bit like the red carpet, and the conversations among us often includes the question, "And who are you wearing?" But instead of fashion designers, our regalia represents where we received our graduate education. And yes, it can get a bit pretentious.

I stand here before you in the official regalia of my graduate school alma mater, a little school up the road known as the University of Southern California. My son is currently a student there. He is a political science major, and he's there and not here because apparently being in the same department where Mom was on

the faculty didn't appeal to him. More importantly, I mention USC tonight, in this venue, because of the challenges that it and every other college and university is currently facing. Lately, I brace myself before I open my LA Times app on my phone, hoping that I won't find another cringe-worthy headline, and I'm not just talking about the football team. It's tough to be a proud Trojan these days, but as a USC mom and alum, and especially, as a senior faculty member at a neighboring institution, I hope that there are lessons learned from what has happened at USC and other major universities and that we can all learn from them and do better going forward.

From the moment I received my PhD in political science from USC in 1997, I have wanted to make a difference, no matter how small, in the life of the university that would be my professional home. And it is here at Chapman, where I have been since 2005, where I teach students about American politics and government, along with the importance of civic engagement and due process. And it has also been at Chapman where I have had the opportunity to further my research and proudly represent this university beyond our beautiful campus.

The current political, social, and cultural environment is challenging in many ways, and no university has been immune from that. So, in addressing the aims of education, I think this is the perfect time to reflect on what we do well in my profession, and some of the areas where we can do better. In doing so, I first

want to focus on two things that make me particularly proud to be a Chapman faculty member, because they both speak directly to the challenges that those of us in higher education are now confronting.

The first is Chapman's commitment and outreach in recent years to first-generation students. We talk a lot about diversity in this profession, and I have always believed that recruiting students who are the first in their family to attend college embraces diversity in such a unique way by bringing together so many different life experiences.

Like several of the incoming freshman this year, I am a first-generation college student. The pomp and circumstance of any official event that allows me to wear my academic regalia is still a special experience. As a matter of fact, the last time I was wearing a cap and gown while on stage speaking was my high school graduation, in a rural part of Northern California, all the way back in 1984. That makes me 53, for those of you trying to do the math in your head. I mention that because this reminds me of the hard work that comes in not only earning an advanced degree and then pursuing an academic career, but that as an incoming freshman at UC Davis, I could have never imagined the career I would end up with that would bring me to this point tonight, speaking to you about the aims of education.

I am the embodiment of the opportunities that can come from this complicated and sometimes inglorious world of higher education. And so many opportunities are waiting for you as well, whether you are a first-generation student or not. This is the start of your educational journey. Keep an open mind about all the possibilities ahead of you. Don't assume the path is straight forward or linear. Mine was not, and yours probably won't be either.

The day I graduated from UC Davis with my bachelor's degree in hand, I assumed I was done with school forever. After three years working as a journalist, I found myself in graduate school. Two master's degrees and a PhD later, I began my new career as a professor, and for the two decades since, I try to never take for granted what a privilege it is to do what I do for a living. But beyond whatever major you choose, or double major, or minor, or some combination thereof, or no matter how many degrees you will earn here or once you leave Chapman, it's the other things that you will learn, like critical thinking skills, how to have a meaningful conversation where you might engage in constructive disagreement, and hopefully developing a lifelong desire to always learn new things, that are truly the most important. And let those of us on this campus help you to achieve those things and let us enrich your time here. Because that is, more than anything else, our primary job as educators.

The second thing that makes me proud to be a faculty member at Chapman is the fact that on this campus, free speech and viewpoint diversity are valued. As a political scientist, the topic of civic engagement is inherent in many parts of my discipline. One of the most important topics I discuss is the idea that the framers of the US Constitution, along with James Madison's ideas found in the First Amendment, gave us a deliberative democracy. My students can tell you that I talk about this topic a lot, and it's because it is so important in so many aspects of our lives. And that is especially true in higher education, because protecting free speech as an educational value is one of the biggest challenges that universities face today.

I like to think that Chapman is ahead of the curve in doing that, and that we are setting an example for other schools to follow. On this stage tonight, all sorts of political and ideological perspectives are represented, and that is the ideal to which every university should strive. As a matter of fact, next week, at the American Political Science Association annual meeting in Washington, DC, I will be presenting a paper about promoting constructive disagreement on campus with my colleague, and your dean of students, Dr. Jerry Price. With our research, we hope to start and continue as many conversations about this topic as possible, not only on our campus, but in taking what we have learned at Chapman to a much larger audience. And while we at Chapman are not perfect, on this or any other issue, I

am proud of the commitment that exists among the administration, staff, faculty, and students to embrace diversity and inclusion in every way possible.

My commitment to free speech and viewpoint diversity comes from the fact that I truly believe that words matter. That is also reflected in what I study; my expertise is on the American presidency, and specifically, presidential communication strategies and the presidential/press relationship. What a time to study that topic, right? Never a dull moment. So, I understand that words have consequences; they can inspire or they can cause tremendous harm. I'm sure we have all experienced both extremes. But I am also a firm believer in the fact that sometimes, actions speak louder than words, and that ethical leadership comes from understanding the power that both words and actions can wield. That is true within the halls of power in Washington, in Sacramento, and on every university campus across this country.

Higher education as a profession has taken a bit of a public relations beating as of late, some of it well deserved, and some unfairly. And to those like me who are fortunate enough to do this for a living, I say this: Let's continue to celebrate all that we do well, while at the same time, taking stock of the things we can and should do better. Let this be a moment where we renew our commitment to the ideals of what it means to be an educator, and what it means to set an example in not only our words but in our deeds. It's easy to say all the right things but backing

it up with action is what matters most. So whether we are talking about issues of diversity and inclusion, whether we are talking about opportunities for first generation college students, whether we are talking about protecting free speech on campus, whether we are talking about tackling the high cost of a college education or whether we are talking about gender equity and letting women's voices be heard on all issues on every campus, I challenge my entire profession to always remember that actions speak louder than words.

In closing, to the parents, I say, take a deep breath, especially if this is your first child going off to college. It will be okay. Come next May, if all goes as planned, I will have survived the parent's college experience twice, a few more gray hairs and Plus Loans notwithstanding. And to all the incoming and returning students here tonight, know that I value your presence at this university, as do the people I share this stage with tonight. Take advantage of all we have to offer you, and in return, hold us accountable to be our best as we help you learn to be your best. And one last thing. Remember to call home regularly. Mom and dad will miss you terribly. Well, most days anyway. But that phone call is the proof, for them and for you, that actions really do speak louder than words.