

Valedictory Address | Class of 2001

TRAVIS DUMSDAY

Elbert Hubbard once said: “You can lead a boy to college, but you cannot make him think.” Well, at Augustine College, we have been made to think.

In some ways it is difficult to believe that our time at Augustine is almost at an end. However I am confident I can speak for the rest of my classmates in saying that the last eight months have been truly well spent. They have been a time of genuine intellectual, social, and spiritual growth for which we will always be grateful.

First *the intellectual*. From an academic standpoint, it is amazing to think just how much we have learned about such diverse subjects. Among many other things we have been introduced to Gregorian chant, modern German philosophers, Latin Grammar, Baroque architecture, the history of calculus, ancient Greek science, the Church Fathers. Our knowledge and understanding has been progressively built up under the guiding hands of our professors and in such a manner that these subjects, while diverse, are not seen as wholly disconnected.

Our teachers have emphasized the need to develop a unified view of Western intellectual history so that our newly acquired knowledge is seen not as a hodge-podge of unrelated facts but as parts of a greater whole, a single mosaic. I know that one of Dr. Hunter’s complaints about the modern secular university is that it is really a multiversity in which students are presented with bits of information but no grand unifying vision with which to embrace and unite them. At Augustine College, we have certainly been given information, but we have also been taught the vital necessity of unification.

We have seen how developments in science can be linked with the rise of philosophical movements; how musical styles have been influenced by social and historical factors; how religious doctrine has played such a huge role in Western painting, sculpture, and architecture. In addition to such specific interrelations we have also learned to see the whole mosaic, all of intellectual history, in light of the Lord of history. We have seen how the Christian revelation impacts all areas of life and how every facet of human existence can and should be viewed in the light of faith.

We owe our professors a great debt of gratitude. They have devoted so much time to course preparation, teaching, marking papers. They have been willing to provide extra help when needed and have shown genuine concern for our intellectual and spiritual development. What a difference it makes, knowing that your teachers care. They have received little if any monetary reward for their efforts, their main recompense being the positive impact they know they are making on the lives of their students. I can honestly say it has been a pleasure and a privilege to have had the opportunity to study under this group of distinguished academics.

We also owe a debt of gratitude to our families and supporters who made it possible for us to have this wonderful experience. We appreciate not just their financial aid but the love and the prayers which they provided and which have helped to sustain us throughout the year. Of course, our fellow students also played a huge role in the learning process. In our countless discussions and debates we have furthered the process of piecing together what we have learned

in class and in our readings. Throughout the year I have been impressed time and time again with the depth of insight possessed by my classmates.

Of course, with all this talk of insight and of the unification of information I don't want to disregard the importance of random, disconnected facts. Why, in science class alone, we learned that Renaissance astronomer Tycho Brahe had a brass nose, that penicillin was first developed in a bedpan, and that the wombat is the only species of animal besides man which possesses an appendix. And, once again, my fellow students have contributed to this form of knowledge. There were many mornings when I walked into the classroom and saw scrawled on the whiteboard some helpful bit of wisdom, such as: "When life hands you a lemon, use it as part of an elaborate revenge-getting device."

This brings me to the next area of development, *the social*. I remember that at the beginning of the year we students were somewhat nervous. But it is incredible just how quickly we formed into a tightly-knit community, united by common interests and aptitudes, but most importantly by our common faith in Jesus Christ. In our little microcosm of the body of Christ we have experienced what a Christian community is supposed to be. This past year has been a lot of work but it has also been truly fun and enjoyable and we will cherish the memories of our time together.

I wanted to provide a couple of examples to draw attention to this fun and enjoyable aspect of college life, and there were certainly a lot to choose from. A highlight this year was the musical ability possessed by a number of the students. On any given day a visitor to Augustine would be liable to hear Rebekah singing an obscure Italian Aria or one of our skilled pianists playing some Debussy or Chopin. However, by far the most dignified and sublime musical performance of the year was

provided by Mark. During one of our weekly community meals, Mark, on a dare, stood at the front of the classroom and sang a wonderful German *Lied* by Schubert – while *at the same time* eating a bowl of chocolate pudding and whipped cream with no hands. Seeing as Mark speaks no German his pronunciation was only improved by a mouth stuffed with pudding.

Being an Ottawa native myself, still living at home, I have not experienced first-hand all of the goings-on at the Augustine residence. However I have heard strange tales of spontaneous dance parties at 3:30 in the morning, of one student running through the house shouting "I am not neurotic," and of another keeping an extensive collection of arcane medieval weaponry stashed away in his room.

In addition to the intellectual and social spheres, the physical is not neglected at Augustine. Now it is true that with the exception of a short-lived sparring club and a ping-pong table in the basement, our college has no organized athletic program. But nonetheless our physical endurance has been tried.

I have learned from my fellow students this year that it is possible for the human body not merely to survive but thrive on four to five hours of sleep per night, while being nourished on nothing but microwave burritos, Mr. Noodle, and ice cream. However, I believe that this year's sleep deprivation record must go to Erika, who, during a week when she was particularly swamped with work, managed to go for two days in a row, 48 hours, on two-and-a-half hours of sleep a night. She clearly deserves some kind of trophy or commemorative plaque for this accomplishment.

I now come to the third sphere of activity at Augustine, *the spiritual*. The professors and students at this college not only learn and laugh together but pray and worship together. It has

been so wonderful to have been part of a community that finds its sense of purpose and unity in something greater than itself.

We have learned this year the importance of turning our hearts in loving devotion to our maker. What education would be complete without this emphasis? There are some who go their whole lives remaining unaware of what their true purpose on this earth is, of who they are and where they are going. They may be quite happy. They may be quite intelligent. But they have missed the point. Perhaps the central purpose of Augustine College is to ensure that its students do not miss the point. And I am glad to say that we have not.

Dr. Patrick said something in the first semester that has remained with me. He said that the professors at Augustine were teaching in the hope

that they would produce leaders, people who would go out and make an impact on a society and culture that had lost its way. At the risk of sounding preachy, which is surely a forgivable sin at a Christian college, I would like to end this address with a call to action for my fellow students.

We have been given so much knowledge this year: let's put it to use. Whatever diverse paths we take in life, whatever sphere of activity we are called to, let's make a difference for the Kingdom of God. Let's show people the love of Christ in word and deed. For the life of a Christian is first and foremost a life of service and devotion, to God and to humanity. May we serve well.

Thank you.