

“Congratulations! Today is your day. You’re off to Great Places! You’re off and away!”

Welcome graduates, faculty, families, and friends. Beginning this address by quoting Dr. Seuss seems appropriate. He has, in many of our childhoods, inspired us to expand our horizons, accept new challenges, and take different paths. The world is our personal adventure. You know... Plenty of us have heard this story before.

He has told us that we have brains in our head. We have feet in our shoes. We can steer ourselves in any direction we choose. Today across America, there are likely dozens of graduates giving similar speeches to different crowds all referring back to the classic children’s book *Oh, The Places You’ll Go!*. But mine is a little bit different. As it turns out, Dr. Seuss might have missed something.

What are we supposed to do if we don’t know what to do? If we can steer ourselves in any direction we choose, how are we supposed to know what to choose?

For a while, I knew. I had a plan. I was so confident and self-assured that I would scream my plan from the rooftops. “The plan” was a major accomplishment. I had spent nearly four years of my college career trekking down a path with clearly marked signs pointing in the direction of law school. I had figured out what I was going to do with my life when I was seventeen years old, and I was never going to change my mind. Until, of course, I changed my mind last December. I watched the plan start to come together with submitted applications, acceptance letters, and scholarships, all before realizing that I didn’t want to go to law school after all.

Once I told myself I didn’t *have* to go, I slept like a baby. And by that, I mean that I would fall asleep, then wake up every ten minutes and cry. I was freaking out. Where was my confidence? What was I supposed to scream from the rooftops now? People tend to take comfort in plans, and suddenly, the only thing I was confident about was that I knew *the one thing* I didn’t want. But even though when I decided to abandon my plan, my parents were anxious and my advisor nearly fell out of his chair, I know that my four years at Marietta College were by no means a waste.

At graduation, speakers will often look out into the crowd and say they see doctors, lawyers, teachers or journalists. Don’t get me wrong– I’m sure there are some of those out there, but I don’t know who’s going to do what, because life is going to surprise us all at some point. I once had a path, and then suddenly I didn’t. Marietta College is where I found the answers to some of Dr. Seuss’ unresolved questions. The places we go don’t necessarily matter because our liberal arts institution has prepared us for our upcoming

journey no matter what directions we take and no matter how many detours we make. There might be confusion and changing minds and uncertainty, but we are all prepared. Marietta College has prepared us for both the expected and the unexpected.

Many of the students in our graduating class took courses in leadership. In our Global Leadership course, we were taught about the philosophy of Taoism. Taoism is about accepting life around nature's forces. It's about accepting oneself in the moment and going with the flow of life. There is no good or bad decision, and no wrong path, because that's all part of life's journey. Lao Tzu, the founder of the philosophy, is quoted saying the following: "A good traveler has no fixed plans, and is not intent on arriving." Maybe some of us don't know what we're doing tomorrow, but Taoism has taught us that on Tuesday, a door might open up. Marietta College has prepared us to enter any of these doors that might open.

I don't mean to discount any of the graduates in the audience that do have concrete plans. In fact, I think that we have something to learn from them. Our STEM majors know a lot about this sort of thing; math and science deal in a lot of absolutes, and this has led us to some of the world's greatest technology, architecture, and the almighty iPhone. Actually, I have a feeling that some bored toddlers are playing on their parent's iPhones right now. But some of these same STEM majors also learned about evolutionary biology. Through the process of evolution, some things stay the same, but sometimes you end up with weird changes and you pull a three-eyed fish out of the Ohio River. It's okay to take comfort in your expectations, because a lot of times, they'll lead you to exactly where you need to go. But other times, life sends curveballs your way. Science has taught us that those surprises can lead to major successes, too.

In our class, we have a lot of people in fraternities and sororities. As close knit groups of men and women, we try to help each other out. Over the years, I'm sure there's been times where we've heard someone just screaming and crying down the hall. It's three in the morning. And you just wanna get some sleep. But you know you care about this person. So you get up, you go to their room, you get them a snack, and you talk them through why on earth they're sobbing at three in the morning. They settle down. They go to sleep. And you do too. Maybe, through these experiences, Marietta College has taught you how to be a parent.

This class also has a lot of people in athletics. Maybe not every single one of you will go on to be the next Babe Ruth or Michael Jordan, but as athletes, you were taught about teamwork, leadership, success, and how to juggle your time wisely. Marietta has prepared you all to be CEOs.

Maybe you had to take a general education science course. I took Intro to Astronomy with dozens of other students that said the class wasn't applicable to their major or their life at all. But looking back, my biggest takeaway from the class was that the world does not revolve around me.

If you're a humanities major, you've probably been asked what on earth you're going to do with your degree. Well, Marietta College has taught us to think critically, engage in respectful debate, and ask thoughtful questions. So, maybe Marietta didn't prepare us for some of today's political discourse, but it's definitely prepared to be editors, lobbyists, and researchers.

Many of us know the pain of waiting up for an 8am class and having to choke down burnt coffee from Gilman. But look on the bright side: Marietta has prepared us for office coffee.

As Pioneers, we've learned the secrets of the cosmos, the workings of international relations, theories of the global economy, all while simultaneously putting meaning into our lives through the arts, literature, and theatre. This is the beauty of a liberal arts education.

There's more to our experiences as college students than meets the eye. We've learned a lot from our classes and, just as importantly, picked up on some surprising lessons along the way. So, accept who you are today, right now, and don't overthink what's happened before or what's coming next. After all, there was one thing that Dr. Seuss *did* get exactly right.

“Will you succeed? Yes! You will indeed! (98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed.) KID, YOU'LL MOVE MOUNTAINS!”

And if you don't know where your mountain is yet, that's okay too. If there's anything I've learned from not having a plan, it's that Marietta College has taught me more than I ever thought it could, and probably even more lessons that are yet to come.

And that's better than any plan could ever be.