



Olin Welcome Remarks to the Olin Partners

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On behalf of the faculty and staff of Olin College on this historic day, let me welcome all of you and tell you that I am just ecstatic to have you here. Today marks the beginning of a historic adventure that we will share—one that will result in establishing a new institution, with new traditions, and with nearly unlimited potential. Our role as pioneers provides us with unique opportunities and with special responsibilities. I am extremely pleased to have you as partners in this venture, and I look forward to working with you for the next five years and beyond.

Now, to the Olin Partners, let me congratulate you on your outstanding achievements in high school. Olin College is committed to rewarding merit, and your achievements certainly demonstrate meritorious performance—inside the classroom and out. I have never worked with a more uniformly gifted and accomplished group of students. There is absolutely no question that you are all of uniformly exceptional intelligence and ability, and that you are multitalented. In addition, you have all demonstrated at least one passion, often unrelated to your career objectives, which makes you interesting as individuals and provides an opportunity for personal joy and satisfaction.

Chances are many of you have been at or near the top of your class in high school and grade school, probably for as long as you can remember. You are used to being regarded by peers and teachers alike as among the smartest ever to attend your school. Repeated reminders that you are the smartest are very hard to ignore, and you may have even established a sense of personal identity that depends on this recognition—possibly more than you realize. Of course, now that you are at Olin College where all students are so talented, you might find that some adjustment is necessary.

Beware of your own ambition to excel in academics here, and avoid unnecessary competition. You should know that our philosophy is that you are all uniformly capable of success, and it is our job to help you each achieve your fullest potential. We do not intend to focus on weeding out the weakest link, because there aren't any weak links among you. Class rank should not be your primary focus at Olin College—learning all you can and building lasting relationships should.

To make the most of your academic experience here, I recommend that you make an effort to get to know our faculty outside the classroom. Beyond their exceptional scholarly achievements, they are extraordinary for their passion for teaching and their genuine interest in helping you succeed. Beyond choosing courses for content, you should consider occasionally choosing a course or activity specifically for the purpose of being exposed to many different teachers with different ways of looking at the world. This diversity of approach, which brings different questions, different processes of discovery, and different standards of truth, is sometimes more important than a neatly planned and coherent set of course titles on a transcript.

I would recommend that you attempt to do at least one thing each term that is really fun for you. Look for something that excites you, which you would choose to do on weekends even if it is not assigned, and which you thoroughly enjoy. It is important to sustain your personal passions, especially those passions that bring you in contact with people, even if they have no obvious connection to your current career ambitions. You see, I expect that many of you will respond to the intensity of academic ambition here with a great deal of pressure on yourself to excel. This is likely to result in your choosing to work very hard—maybe too hard at times. I have noticed that it is much easier to sustain such high workloads if you enjoy what you are doing. Your studies here should always be fun. Engineering is by its very nature all about inventing and creating, and it should always have a strong element of adventure and fun associated with it. Don't forget that!

Looking ahead, don't expect that your academic success in college will automatically insure career success and happiness in life—it is more complicated than that. In my career I have had the good fortune to work closely with many successful people, people from many different careers but all of whom are regarded as highly successful. In particular, I have had the privilege of working with several people whose career success

has been so exceptional that they have the resources to provide large gifts to others. In reviewing the background of these successful people I have found that it is rare for them to have been valedictorians in school, or to have earned a Ph.D. Academic success, particularly at this stage in your life, is important-make no mistake about that. But other things are also important. It would be a terrible mistake to allow your academic talent and achievement to make you arrogant toward others. In fact, such arrogance can be a major limitation to your future career success, as well as your personal happiness.

Several senior engineers with large firms have reported to me that many of their young engineers reach an early plateau in their careers. Surprisingly, they report that this is rarely because of limitations in their technical preparation or ability, but rather because of their difficulties in working with people. In fact, for decades corporate representatives have been reporting to the National Science Foundation and others that engineers need to become more effective at communication. I don't believe they are talking primarily about English grammar or writing skills. I believe they are talking more about conversations than formal writing, the ability to establish lasting relationships with others, and to work well on diverse teams. So, when supplementing the rigorous technical preparation we plan to provide, you should seek opportunities to develop your ability to communicate and work with others, particularly those who are not engineers or technical in their background. Making an effort to gauge how others perceive you can be a valuable tool for this purpose. This will be a priority at Olin College, and it is one of the reasons why we have emphasized core values among our founding principles.

I would guess that with your amazing talent and ability at so many things, you are accustomed to achieving success at most endeavors very quickly. Since you learn faster than most of your peers, and you are imaginative and ambitious, you most likely have been able to succeed at nearly everything you have tried, and you probably required less time or effort to finish than most other people. Let me caution you now that to achieve the ambitious goals you are likely to set for yourselves in the next few years, you may discover that a great deal of perseverance is required-possibly more patience and perseverance than you have encountered in the past. Important problems-curing diseases, resolving world conflict, developing breakthrough technologies-even more common problems, like starting a business, or making a marriage last, often require more personal commitment and effort than brilliance. Don't be discouraged, and never give up. As Winston Churchill once said, "Never give up. Never, never, never, never, NEVER give up." You will need to focus on the distant shore while you weather the storm of uncertainty and doubt, trial and repeated disappointment. Very rarely is it possible to achieve anything of great value without endurance and perseverance.

Finally, I would like to remind you of the well-worn adage that luck (or success) is what happens when preparation meets opportunity. As you dream about your future and plan your academic career, it is useful to note that your ultimate success will almost certainly be the result of a combination of factors, some of which are under your control, and many of which are not. We plan to provide an academic preparation for you that is rigorous, thorough, and broad in scope. We expect you to develop a great deal of discipline, combined with appropriate experiences at working in teams and learning how to learn. In short, we expect you will be better prepared to move on to a career or graduate education than many of your peers at other institutions.

However, to translate this preparation into success, you will need two more things. First, you will need a degree of entrepreneurial thinking, to recognize the most important opportunities available to you, and to take the initiative to act on the right ones. In addition, and maybe most important of all, you will need a break-an opportunity-an open door from someone, to get your turn at bat. Never underestimate the value of good fortune in all that you do. There are a great many people who are wonderfully prepared for success but who, for various reasons never get the opportunity to lead or to try out their dreams. I hope you will not forget this as you move on to the success we fully expect from each of you.

As your career unfolds, and you experience more of the ups and downs in life, I expect your awareness of the value of opportunity will become more apparent to you. It became apparent to Franklin Olin when he established his Foundation to provide opportunity for others. In due time, I hope you will consider doing whatever you can to make sure that those around you have the opportunities they need to succeed. I have noticed in watching those deeply involved in providing such opportunities to others that they get a deep sense of joy and satisfaction from doing this. Don't be surprised if giving to others in this way-by sharing or your time and resources to provide opportunities for others to succeed-turns out to be the most rewarding part of your life.

Well, I have probably tried to give you too much advice. After all, this is just the beginning of our relationship. But I want so badly to share with you every bit of wisdom and valuable insight I have discovered to give you the best possible opportunity to excel in your career. Of course, we have years ahead to get this done, and I look forward with great enthusiasm to getting to know you each on a personal level. I couldn't be more enthusiastic about working with you as partners in this great adventure. Thank you for your attention, and the best of luck to you as you pioneer the path for generations to follow.