Although Wes has done this very well, I nonetheless would like to welcome all of you. I’d like to welcome the students who are here today, the alumnae and alumni, the staff, the faculty, the delegates from other institutions of higher learning, the other visitors who are here today, my family and friends, as well as everyone who is not able to be here and joins us online or will see the video later.

I would like to thank many people, as well as welcoming you. For the faculty and staff, I want to thank you for the warm welcome and the great cooperation that you've given me this year, and making me feel what great potential we have.

I'd like to thank my inauguration committee for the months of work they put into making this weekend a huge success. The chairs of my inaugural committee, Elizabeth Kojaian and Carolyn Featheringill, I thank especially for their patience, support, and their immense generosity. To Wes Fugate and Keeley Tuggle, I thank you for working so hard to coordinate between the inauguration committee, me, and everyone else who made today happen.

To John Abell, who is a professor of economics here and my officemate in graduate school 35 years ago, I thank you for nominating me for this position. I thank the trustees who chose me and placed their faith in me, and I especially thank Becky Dunn, the chair of the board, who has been a confidant, supporter, friend, and counselor.

I thank my parents, who are no longer alive, for everything they have given me. To my sons, Thomas and Henry, who are here today, and who have been a remarkable support for me through many hard times, I say thank you.

And finally, I want to thank Cyndi, without whose wisdom, love, and support I would not be standing here today. Thank you Cyndi, for everything you do for me, not least the spirit of change and adventure you bring to our relationship.
The title of my address is "Why the Liberal Arts?" And the text for my address comes from a Buddhist priest named Enkyo Roshi, who has said, "When we realize the self, we serve the whole world."

Let me begin my address today by searching for a verb. Carolyn Featheringill, one of the co-chairs of my inauguration committee, asked me very nicely a few months ago if I wouldn’t like to have a verb in the theme for my inauguration. When she learned that the theme I had decided upon was “Why the Liberal Arts?” she pointed out that surely I had been taught, as had she, that a properly stated question involves a verb. So she suggested that perhaps I would prefer the theme for this weekend to be “Why pursue the Liberal Arts?”

I felt that I could hardly argue with her. When I was a tenth grader, each of us in Mr. Raymond Hamilton’s sophomore English class had to construct our own grammar handbook. Each week, we had to copy by hand the rules of grammar into a spiral bound stenographer’s pad until, by the end of the first semester, we had our own grammar handbook. In my small high school, Mr. Hamilton would inevitably also become our junior and senior English teacher and so this sophomore project to have each of us construct our own personal handbook of correct grammatical usage, meant that we would never under his gaze be able to say that we did not know the difference between a relative and a non-relative clause, or how to punctuate them correctly. Nor would we be able to say that we did not know what a split infinitive was. Never would we be able to say that we did not know the rules of punctuation. Because we had each written out in our own hand the rules of grammar, we could never plead ignorance.

All of this history from my high school years raced through my mind in the fraction of a second following Carolyn Featheringill’s question to me about whether I didn’t want a verb in the theme I had chosen for my inauguration. I could see Mr. Hamilton’s face, see his classroom and where his desk sat in the back corner of the room, and I could remember his many admonitions to improve my prose, which he often found wanting. I could remember, for instance, his admonition to me when I turned in my first paper in which I attempted to use a semi-colon. It had been a completely unsuccessful attempt. I can hear Mr. Hamilton now saying, and I quote, “Mr. Bateman, a sentence containing a semi-colon is a complex sentence joining together two ideas. You, Mr. Bateman, cannot write a simple sentence.” He wasn’t done! “Until you have mastered writing a simple sentence, Mr. Bateman, you will not be allowed to use the semi-colon.”
As all of this personal history passed through my mind in a fraction of a second, I immediately came to the conclusion that either Raymond Hamilton and Carolyn Featheringill are distant relations, or that Carolyn had studied with her own Raymond Hamilton. I knew she was right; a question does require a verb. She had me dead to rights.

But I still did not want to relent. It was true, as Carolyn suggested, that I had hoped that this weekend would be an exploration of the question, “Why pursue the liberal arts?” This is the urgent question which two hundred other small liberal arts college presidents and I are trying to answer every day for prospective students and their parents. Last year, half of the liberal arts colleges in America failed to meet their enrollment goal for the size of their first year class. Liberal education has never faced the kind of united front of hostility that it faces now at the beginning of the twenty first century. Many in the media and many politicians have been attacking the value of liberal education regularly, and many of the foundations that have traditionally supported us have withdrawn from making grants to us. So, yes, I was definitely interested that we explore together this weekend why liberal education is worth pursuing.

But I also knew that I wanted to do more than that. I had not yet written this speech when Carolyn asked me her fateful question about the necessity of having a verb in a question, but I understood already that I wanted to explore many verbs in my remarks. One set of verbs would refer to the critics of liberal education.

Thus, I wanted to ask of the reports in the media,

- Why disparage the Liberal Arts??

And I wanted to ask of the politicians,

- Why berate the Liberal Arts??

For the supporters of liberal education, I had another set of verbs I wanted to explore.

Thus, I wanted to ask of faculty members,

- Why make a career of the liberal arts?

And I wanted to ask on behalf of our staff, alumnae, alumni, and our many generous donors,

- Why support the Liberal Arts??
So while it might have been desirable to have had a verb in the theme for my Inauguration, in fact there was an entire catalog of verbs (and verb phrases) that are needed to cover the inquiry that I had hoped to make together this weekend. Even truncated to the short list above, we end up with five verbs:

- Pursue
- Disparage
- Berate
- Make and
- Support

In the process, I had hoped that together we could explore broadly the question of “Why the Liberal Arts?” this weekend. That is still my dream. In yesterday’s symposium, in this morning’s interfaith service, and now in this address, I hope that we will find a common vocabulary to enunciate why liberal education is worth pursuing, celebrating, and supporting.

The relentless attack on liberal education in the media in the last four or five years is not that difficult to understand. Perhaps the most interesting thing about it has been the bipartisan nature of the attack. From both the right and the left, in both the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times, the attack has been very much the same, and consists of a very simple message. “Liberal arts majors can’t get jobs, so why would any parent agree to send their child to one of those expensive little colleges? Why pile up debt, when you can’t even get a job after it’s all over?” Only Thursday morning, I received yet another e-mail linking me to yet another article making exactly this argument, this time in Forbes magazine.

This argument is squarely aimed at the anxiety that prospective students and their parents have about the current job market. I understand this anxiety because I have sons who are 22 and 26, both of whom attended small liberal arts colleges. This kind of anxiety makes sense in the current economic moment when we have been through the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Not only was the financial crisis of 2008–09 the worst in seventy-five years, it has been followed by an anemic recovery in which joblessness has stayed at record levels and median family income has still not returned to its pre-recession levels. Even if you have a job today, you probably worry that you’ll be able to keep it.

And people’s anxiety about their employment prospects makes sense for a second reason, perhaps more fundamental. For beyond the financial crisis and the ensuing recession, we are living through what
I am sure is the period of the greatest amount of technological innovation since the Second Industrial Revolution after the American Civil War. Not since the vertical integration that produced big oil, big railroads, and big steel has the economy been so fundamentally transformed by technology. But with technological innovation comes job destruction and we are destroying middle class jobs at a remarkable clip. Academics at Oxford University in Britain estimated earlier this year that 47% of current jobs will be automated through developments in digital technology in the next 20 years. But the researchers at Oxford were very explicit to say that they are not talking about the kind of low-skill jobs that have already been so deeply affected by technological change. The 47% of jobs that they predict will disappear in the next twenty years are high-skill jobs that have traditionally been immune to technological obsolescence.

I want to return to the issue of how technology is changing the world of work in a minute, but first I want to step back and de-bunk the attacks on liberal education that have appeared in the media. I want to do that in two different ways.

The first is to mention some excellent work done by Kevin Carey in the *New Republic* magazine. In an article entitled, “Bad Job Market; Why the Media Is Always Wrong About the Value of a College Degree,” Carey reveals two important things about the media’s coverage of the supposedly bad job prospects for liberal arts graduates. One is that this kind of reporting has appeared regularly in the American media during each recent recession. In the early 1980’s, again in the early 1990’s, the media was full of stories about liberal arts graduates who were working at jobs like bartending and taxi driving. He traced this out and traced the occurrence of the peak of references to things like, “Liberal arts education isn’t worth the investment.” But Carey did his work carefully. He went back and tracked down the individuals who had been the subjects of these articles in the early 1980s and the early 1990s, and he discovered something interesting. Today, those same people owned their own companies, worked as vice presidents of large corporations and philanthropies, and served in other equally impressive roles. What he found was that media stories of the type that featured under-employed liberal arts graduates fed on people’s fears and anxieties. So, then, why disparage liberal education? Because it makes good copy, I guess. Fear and anxiety would appear to sell newspapers better than hope and reason.

The second way that I want to de-bunk the myth that a liberal education fails to prepare a person for a career is to look the beast directly in the jaw. When I asked Maryam Brown, Randolph’s director of internships, for information last summer on what employers actually look for when they are hiring a
new college graduate, she gave me data collected from a huge nationwide survey that answered my question. Not surprisingly, three of the top qualities that employers report looking for in a new hire are:

- The ability to communicate clearly
- The ability to think critically and solve a problem
- The ability to work in a small group with people who are not like you

I have been told that a recent survey of Chicago area employers by a leading human resources firm turned up exactly the same list.

The first thing that has to be said about this list, of course, is that it perfectly fits the list of what the graduate of a liberal arts college can do! At America’s liberal arts colleges, we train students to write clearly and to speak well. We train them to think critically. And we constantly put them in small classroom settings to work with people who are not like them. That is to say, we provide the perfect preparation for a lifetime of work. Thus, while it is not why we do it, we do create the qualities in our students that employers value the most in a newly hired employee. In truth, there is no better preparation for a lifetime of meaningful work than the pursuit of a liberal education.

This fact runs exactly counter to the onslaught of disparagement in the media, of course. Whereas, they claim that a liberal arts graduate “cannot get a job”, because they take a job as a taxi driver or a bartender, we are, in fact, preparing the best trained people in the country. Of course, as Kevin Carey found in his article in the New Republic, it is true that some graduates of liberal arts colleges take jobs during a recession that require much less than the training they have received in their liberal arts educations. But as he also showed, this is not because they can’t do anything else, or don’t do anything else, with their lives. It is not their fault that the economy is performing badly. Business leaders and government leaders have to shoulder that blame. But know this, like every other American in a recession or a depression, liberal arts college graduates will roll up their sleeves and look for work. We cannot fault them for graduating into a bad economy, nor can we fault them for their willingness to work to support themselves during hard times.

Recent research published by the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), reinforces the story that Carey uncovered in his article. Looking at long term data that stretches out across the length of people’s work lives, the AAC&U researchers found that while liberal arts graduates start their work lives earning slightly less than their peers who had more career-oriented majors in college, by their
50s the graduates of liberal arts colleges earned a few thousand dollars more, on average, than those who had more narrowly defined majors in college.

To return now to the technological backdrop to our current economic situation, I would like to suggest that a liberal education will become even more valuable in the coming decades. In a world in which 47% of the middle class jobs that currently exist will be made technologically obsolete, why would anyone want a degree that is narrowly focused in doing one job? If that one job is made technologically obsolete, if it disappears permanently like harness making or working as a telephone operator did, then what would you have left? Nothing.

Far better, then, to have the ability to communicate well, to think critically and solve problems, and to work in small groups of people who are not like you. Far better to be prepared to work in a dynamic economy in which you will change jobs many times in your life. Far better to have the ability to adapt and change then to be trained in one narrow job.

If we turn to the critique that some politicians make of the liberal arts, it is no different than the criticism that the media has been making in recent years. And yet they publicly berate the Liberal Arts. In the last two years, the governors of both Florida and Wisconsin have publicly criticized the Liberal Arts because, they claim, they do not prepare people for work. The governor of Florida has proposed creating a tuition structure that will charge more for those who major in liberal arts disciplines. This strikes me as a particularly perverse idea. I'm trained as an economist, and economists teach that things that aren't valuable don't cost as much. But the governor of Florida apparently sees tuition as a punishment and he wants to punish those who do something he doesn't approve of. Likewise, the governor of Wisconsin has suggested that liberal arts disciplines be de-emphasized in the curricula in the colleges in the UW system because they don’t lead to jobs for graduates.

It is clear that the ferocity and the intensity of the attack on the Liberal Arts has been effective. As I said earlier, half of liberal arts colleges in America last year failed to make their first year class. Blogs and comment sections on web sites are full of people repeating the misinformation and populist ideas they have heard from politicians and in the media. Perhaps most telling of all, there has been no clear, well-defined defense of what we do that has emerged as a counter to our critics. We have been caught flat footed.

I think, however, that this situation may be changing. I have recently listened to a speech by my colleague Sean Decatur, the new president of Kenyon College, that offers a clear and articulate defense
of what we do. Those of you who were here yesterday for the symposium heard my colleague Kwang-Wu Kim, the new president of Columbia College Chicago, deliver what I believe as a very impassioned defense of the liberal arts, and it also gives me hope. And I have mentioned the research recently published by the AAC&U showing that the lifetime earnings of liberal arts colleges graduates are generally higher than people with more narrowly defined degrees. I trust that in the next year or two that the argument in favor of liberal arts education as the best preparation for a lifetime of meaningful work will begin to catch fire.

But in closing today, I want to shift my focus and consider a very different problem for the Liberal Arts, or another problem caused by the criticism that our graduates are not employed or employable. As serious as the threat to us is that high school seniors and their families will come to see us as failing to prepare them for employment, and so will not pursue liberal education, I have now come to fear that this false impression will shape us into something unrecognizable. In other words, I fear that we will focus so intensely on career preparation and that we will so fully shape ourselves around this purpose that we will forget why we exist.

For while I firmly believe that there is no better preparation for a lifetime of meaningful work than the pursuit of a liberal education, liberal education itself was not designed for that purpose. In its origin, liberal education was designed to educate people for freedom. When it was developed 2,500 years ago, it was the education for the people who were not slaves. Now, of course, it is not just a lucky accident that the education that teaches us to think critically about the society in which we live and prepares us to work for its good also happens to be the best preparation we have for pursuing a lifetime of meaningful work. The same skills necessary to effective citizenship turn out to also be good skills for sustaining and leading large enterprises, whether they are for-profit or non-profit enterprises. Some of these qualities are:

- the ability to see a situation with clear eyes and without prejudice
- the ability to communicate clearly with others what you see and understand to be happening around you
- the ability to understand the point of view of other people without feeling the need to demonize them.

But liberal education was never meant to be just about a set of skills. In its original guise, liberal education was meant to preserve the polis, or the political body, and it did that by producing good
people. Bill Quillian, Randolph’s fifth president, once wrote that the purpose of liberal education is “enabling each individual to fulfill to the highest degree his or her potentialities.” Only when people have realized their full potential could they fully protect and defend the polis. Only in realizing their own potential could they become truly free and so become able to defend and preserve freedom.

The full potential of this idea was never realized in antiquity. In its original form liberal education was for men, not women. It was meant for those born into freedom, but not meant to be extended to those born into slavery. It was not until liberal education took its characteristically American form in the small, residential college that the idea was formed that liberal education might also be about extending freedom to others: to those born into slavery, to women, and to the oppressed of any kind.

This transformation was not easy. When William Waugh Smith, the first president of this College, asked the trustees of Randolph Macon College to admit women, they said, “No!” He had to give up his job as the president of that College and, as John Peters explained earlier, raise the money to found this College to be able to provide liberal education to women. When Bill Quillian racially integrated this college in the 1960s, he was met by loud protests from many quarters.

But in these brave actions of my predecessors, we see characteristic moments of what makes the small, residential liberal arts college so crucial to American democracy and worthy of our support. This I believe is why my colleagues in the faculty believe that their chosen profession as liberal educators is worthy of their commitment. It is why they make liberal education. Through its long evolution to this moment in which I stand in front of you, the American liberal arts college has been shaped as an institution that not only offers the skills of freedom for those who already enjoy freedom, but also teaches that every person deserves freedom, and that that freedom is worth standing up for against the forces that seek to keep people subjugated.

Thus, the work that we do is much more than simply preparing people for work. We prepare them for citizenship and we prepare them to help others. The Zen priest Enkyo Roshi says and again I quote, “When we realize the self, we serve the whole world,” and I believe that this sentence perfectly captures the essence of the transformative experience that lies at the heart of liberal education. When we become liberally educated and learn to live fully as free people, we cannot help but see that others deserve that freedom, too. We cannot help but see that to fully realize our own potential, we must, as Ginger Worden explained this morning in her homily at the interfaith service, extend loving kindness not only to ourselves but to those around us.
It is this potential to help others, to spread freedom, and to help every person more fully achieve their potential that makes the Liberal Arts worth our support. Yesterday in the symposium, Kwang-Wu Kim and David White pointed out the difficult time that we have in holding that dream. They talked about the fact that easy victories, such as the Voting Rights Act, do not seem so much within our grasp, but there is much work that remains to be done.

I would like to finish my remarks today by thanking the Board of this great College for calling me to be the tenth president. It is an honor to lead an institution with such a rich history. In its birth as Randolph Macon Woman’s College, in its sometimes difficult transition to becoming Randolph College, this College has always embodied great teaching, great learning, and the pursuit of honor within the context of a small, close knit community. At its finest moments, which have sometimes been its most difficult moments, the College has shown an unusual dedication not just to the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of the individual learner, but to the pursuit of a better world outside the red-brick walls. This is because as Enkyo Roshi says, “When we realize the self, we serve the whole world.” I commit myself, through good times and rough times, to maintain the traditions of great teaching, great learning, and the pursuit of honor. In pursuing that commitment, I look forward to pursuit of a life worth living, an abundant life in every way.

Vita Abundantior