Acting President McCarty, Trustees, faculty, staff, students and friends,

I am proud to welcome you today at the start of another academic year. As a faculty member, a committee chair and a Union parent, I know from my varied experiences here that Union is one of the best, most inspiring and most beautiful liberal arts colleges in this country. We are, and always have been, dedicated to educating young people who can go forth and make a difference in the world.

To our newest students, including those who join us from 36 other countries, I say, get ready for the adventure of your lives.

The opportunities to excel and find your niche – academically, socially and intellectually – are plentiful here at Union, and the desire on the part of your professors to help you on your educational journey is authentic. My colleagues across all departments are known to be genuinely interested in seeing you succeed.

Today, I’d like to challenge you to think a little differently about success.

Sometimes, paradoxically, finding success in the world means failing first.

That’s right. To succeed in life, it’s essential that you fail while you are at Union.

I don’t mean fail to show up for classes, bomb that organic chem test, botch your theater audition or miss that winning goal, the crucial shot or pass.

I mean that to grow, you will have to venture far outside your comfort zone. After all, college is not only about achieving high GPAs. It’s about exploring and taking chances.

Sometimes, taking those chances doesn’t work out the way you had hoped. That’s why it’s equally important to be resilient, have a healthy tolerance for failure. You must learn to persist through failure, and fail fast – and often – so you can attain success.

What does pushing yourself outside of the proverbial comfort zone look like?

It means challenging yourself. Don’t be afraid of the unfamiliar. Run toward your fears, not away from them. Experiment. Embrace complications and entanglements. Take risks. Take a leap of faith – and see where you land.

Academically speaking, this means:
- If you’re an engineer, take a language course.
- Scientist? Try our many great offerings in poetry, literature, classics, philosophy and the arts.
- If you’re a social scientist, don’t be shy about venturing into engineering or computer science.
- And, here’s a call to all humanists: Calculus won’t kill you. It might even make you stronger.
One of the best quotes on failure I’ve ever heard came from Robert Kennedy: “Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.”

Or, as Bill Gates said, “It’s fine to celebrate success, but it is more important to heed the lessons of failure.”

So, get motivated, get going, get real.

Get ready to fail – and ultimately, succeed, like generations of accomplished Union students before you.

Thank you, good luck and enjoy. I know it’s going to be a great year.

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