President Ainlay, Trustees, faculty, staff, students and guests,
I am pleased to welcome you today.

Union’s founding at the apex of the 18th century was in the spirit of Americans’ unquestionable faith in a better tomorrow and a better world.

Though today’s challenges may be different than those encountered more than two centuries ago, imbuing this spirit – an essentially entrepreneurial spirit – in our students has never been more important.

Today’s world is more technically sophisticated and interdisciplinary, interconnected in ways our ancestors could never have imagined.

This means we must prepare students with deep disciplinary knowledge but also empower them with an ability to grow beyond traditional disciplinary bounds so they can contribute to the grand challenges at hand with empathy, confidence and critical thinking.

We must prepare them to become more than professionals in their chosen fields. We must prepare them to be become the leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

The skills needed to achieve these goals have been and always will be rooted in a liberal arts education. Union’s curriculum gives us the freedom and the responsibility to continually innovate, to be creative, to take risks.

As faculty, we are challenged to make sure that what we teach is relevant in the broad context of the human experience so that acquired knowledge becomes useful rather than passive.
As British mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said in the early 1900s, “Education with inert ideas is not only useless: it is, above all things, harmful – *corruptio optimi pessima.*” (“Corruption of the best is the worst.”)

To the students in the audience today, know that your professors want to help you keep knowledge alive.

Whether you’re studying art history or astronomy; English or engineering; neuroscience, computer science or environmental science – we want to guide you toward understanding that you can live the passion you will discover and develop here at Union long after you leave campus.

This entrepreneurial spirit is, I think, what makes a Union education so special, and what propels Union to a unique position in higher education. Let’s all embrace it as we celebrate and build upon the founding of this great institution.

Thank you.