

**TRINITY COLLEGE
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT
Convocation August 29, 2019**

Welcome to the new academic year and for many of you, the formal beginning to your life as Trinity College Bantams. Students, parents, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends, we are all part of the Bantam Family. This is a community of people who care for one another, hold each other responsible, take an active role in advancing the college, and enthusiastically support the next generations, paying forward the opportunities they received.

Convocation is an especially happy occasion, because it's when the entire campus community comes together to welcome our newest members and officially launch the academic year.

You, the Class of 2023, are Trinity's Bicentennial Class. In 2023, when you graduate, the college will celebrate its 200th anniversary. It is humbling to think about the 200 years of tradition that we both benefit from and carry forward, and it's incredibly exciting to think about the college's next 200 years and see the future in all of you.

With us today are members of another historic Trinity class, one with which you'll always have a special bond: the Class of 1973. Fifty years ago, Trinity welcomed its first fully coeducational class. Tomorrow, you'll carry on the tradition of signing our Matriculation Book. In the fall of 1969, those women became the first undergraduate women in the history of the college to sign the Book.

Several members of that historic class are with us today, as well as some of the women who preceded them as transfer students in the classes of 1970, 71, and 72. I want to take this moment to ask them to stand and be honored. Thank you for helping to make Trinity what it is today. You led the college through extraordinary change, and you have been deeply invested in Trinity ever since. We are forever grateful for the significant role you have played in shaping this College.

Now, to our newest students: How many of you have a relative who attended Trinity? How many of you are the first in your families to go to college? How many of you live within an hour of Hartford? How many of you had to take a plane to get here? How many of you are fluent in a language other than English? You see, we come from different places with different life stories, having made a choice to join this community: Trinity College. Our differences can make coming together challenging, but it is our differences that make us who we are and that make our community strong.

One wish I have for you as we assemble here today is "range." Let me tell you what I mean. This summer I read a book called "Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World," by David Epstein.

The book begins with a comparison of world-class athletes Tiger Woods and Roger Federer. The author makes the case that Roger's route—playing a variety of sports, gaining wide-

ranging athletic experience and skills before specializing in tennis—is actually the most likely route to expertise.

While Tiger’s story of extreme specialized focus on golf from a very young age is famous, it turns out that among elite athletes, Roger’s story is more typical, and that the “sampling period” these athletes experience before specializing is critical.

Epstein also draws lessons from many different fields that offer insights into problem solving. You see, with “kind” problems with a “kind of” solution, immediate feedback and more practice lead to improvement. For example, a computer can beat a human at Jeopardy because the answers are known, and more practice equates with better scores.

On the other hand, with “wicked” problems, where choices are more numerous or complicated and feedback is less immediate or clear cut, simply practicing more doesn’t always guarantee success. It’s the “wicked” problems—solving climate change or curing cancer—that require humanistic, flexible thinking. A wider/broader range of skills is better for solving complex, wicked problems.

The book resonated with me because I saw elements of my own story.

I grew up in California, I loved school, I loved skateboarding, and musicals. [I tell people if I had the talent, I would have become a Broadway star!] But back to reality... like many of you, I headed east to attend college at a liberal arts institution. I specialized in psychobiology but took courses in subjects ranging from philosophy to art history; I was sampling.

After receiving my undergraduate degree, I went on to pursue a master’s in public health in environmental health sciences and policy, and I spent several years at an environmental engineering firm in California. There, I realized that I had a talent for science, but also for analyzing options and navigating complex political systems. This was something that felt considerably different from the scientific analysis that I had learned in my classroom work.

Eventually I went back for a doctorate and became a neuroscientist, and I specialized in studying neural pathways that connect disparate activities into a unifying concept of learning. But those zigzags in my early career and that time to discover my personal strengths have served me well along the way, and especially now, in academic administration, where I seem to be faced with a new wicked problem every day!

So, parents, I’m here to say, don’t quibble over the subject matter of the classes your student is taking. Don’t worry if they are spending lots of time playing sports, in clubs, or volunteering in the community. Your students are here to sample an array of subjects and gain a range of approaches to learning both inside and outside of the classroom that will prepare them to solve life’s very “wicked” problems in the future. And in the process, they’re learning

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about themselves and how to be engaged citizens in a diverse community. What more can you ask for? I KNOW, a job at the end of it all!

Students, I said earlier that I see the future in your eyes. I like what I see, in part because I know that here at Trinity you will learn to embrace complexity and ambiguity, connect disparate pieces of information in new ways, and analyze and communicate effectively and across numerous fields. This is the purpose of a Trinity liberal arts education.

There is time yet to specialize, but this year, right now, right here, I encourage you to open your minds and your hearts and develop your range!

One more thing: As new students, you're joining the Bantam Network—an inclusive, supportive learning community. Each one of you is part of one of 10 Bantam Nests, which are organized around first-year seminars and supported by faculty, staff and other students, who help you transition to college life and provide you with guidance in myriad ways.

Just before Convocation, you were handed an envelope to be opened during this ceremony. Now open those envelopes and discover your nest.

We are all part of the Bantam Network!

It's now my pleasure to invite Interim Dean of Faculty Sonia Cardenas to officially launch the academic year.