

Heidelberg Fall 2024 Opening Convocation

President's Remarks

22 August 2024

Thank you, HU Marching Band, and Dr. Ben Herrick, our new Director of Bands! Thank you, Jacob Reuter for the *National Anthem*, Zaria Keys for *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, and Karsten Snitker for the *Blessing*!

Good morning to the incoming Class of 2028 and to all undergraduate, transfer, returning, and graduate students! My name is Rob Huntington and I hope that everyone had a fun and productive summer.

Welcome to our **175th** year of educating young women and men through our integrated *Professional Liberal Arts* curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular programming. Since 1850, we have remained steadfast *Opportunity Makers* on a mission defined by your success as a student, through your graduation, into your careers, and spanning the arc of your lives of purpose with distinction. Why? Because we believe in people!

Thank you very much to all **1,097** UG/G FT/PT and CCP students for choosing Heidelberg University this year. I am grateful that so many upper-class students have joined our freshmen for Convocation today.

Thank you to our Faculty, Staff and Partners who worked very hard to prepare your academic courses, HYPE Career Ready programming, teams, ensembles, activities, services, residence halls, foodservice, and campus grounds for the start of fall semester. Everyone did a great job!

Our keynote speaker is Heidelberg alumna, Ms. Haylie Robinson '15, an award-winning TV producer and the creator of the national PBS series called *Finding Festivals*. Haylie likes storytelling, which she did brilliantly as narrator of our largest ever fundraising campaign video a few years ago. She will be introduced momentarily. We appreciate you being with our students here this morning, Haylie. Thank you!

We are welcoming **292** new first-year, **23** transfer, and **10** readmit undergraduates to our school this fall. All **325** students are motivated to succeed. This freshman class is quite talented and very interesting.

One new student is from each of these nine states AZ, CA, KY, LA, MD, PA, SC, TN and WI; 2 exchange students are from Germany; 3% identify as non-binary; 7% are in our Honors Program; 13% come from Tiffin and Seneca County; 15 U.S. states are represented; 18% had a 4.0 or higher GPA in high school (3.5 average GPA); 18% identify as underrepresented students; 21% are from outside Ohio; 25% participated in Scholars Day; 31% are Heidelberg legacy families; 39% are first generation college students in their families (Congrats!); 41% identify as females; 56% identify as males; 67% are NCAA DIII student-athletes; and **100%** of our new students want to engage, succeed, graduate, and advance their careers at The Berg. Outstanding!

Your top three declared first choice majors after three days of classes are Business Administration, Education, and Sport Management.

Our incoming first-years were very active in high school! Everyone played multiple sports, and/or worked jobs outside of school, and/or played in the band, and/or acted in theatre, and/or participated in 4H, and/or got involved in a variety of clubs, and/or volunteered to help others in community service. Some of you probably did all of these things! Like one of the 4.0 students who was in choir, 4H, science club, theatre, NHS, band, basketball, student council, and was class president. All of you accomplished wonderful things! Like the football player who was elected captain, served on student council, and had the lead in the high school musical. Engagement matters!

But sometimes we trip, get knocked down, or fall short of our goals. It happens to all of us. That is life. What matters is how we respond. Reset to refocus, get back up, try again. At different times, everyone has challenges, difficulties, and setbacks. In this caring community, please know that you are not alone. Welcome to your Heidelberg Family!

For this Convocation, I am recommending two novels published in 2022 that achieved something together never done since 1917. They shared the highly coveted Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2023.

The first Pulitzer Prize 2023 novel is *Truth*, written by Hernan Diaz, an Argentine-American writer (New York), whose first book was a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction finalist in 2018. This story takes place mainly in NYC, is about tremendous wealth, and pivots on a shadowy financier and his wife. The book is challenging to read and quite gnarly to understand. It is comprised of four mini-novels written by fictional authors that span decades of time and often focus on the same characters while using different names. Diaz weaves information, history, and characterization that is sometimes contradictory and exclusive of what precedes it. The surprise diary at the end is the fourth mini-novel and it upends the first one. In a very creative manner, Diaz lets the reader decide the truth.

The second Pulitzer Prize 2023 novel is *Demon Copperhead*, written by Barbara Kingsolver (Southern Appalachia), an accomplished author who also became the first person to win the Women's Prize for Fiction twice. This story takes place in Appalachia. In a blistering, graphic, and often hysterical manner, the reader grows up with a boy from the opening line ("First, I got myself born.") across 546 pages of poverty, abandonment, hunger, high school football, drug abuse, crime, tragedy, love, hope, and aspiration to the closing paragraph ("That's where we are."). Kingsolver is a brilliant writer! Inspired by Charles Dickens' famous novel *David Copperfield* (1850) about children lost in England's cruel poverty 175 years ago, Kingsolver pushes and pulls the reader to find a way out.

To all new and returning students, please get engaged and be intentional about everything you imagine. Jump in and grab on! It is our privilege to support your academic and career aspirations. We want all of you to graduate successfully from Heidelberg in four years or sooner. Move things forward. Always.

Good luck to all of you and especially to the Class of 2028! Thank you.