

Education as a Meeting of the Minds
Aims of Education X 2002-03
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Foreword by President James L. Doti

The tenth annual Aims of Education Address was delivered during Orientation 2002 before a Chapman Auditorium audience of parents and students new to our university. It has become a cherished academic tradition, and the goal is to promote the values and heritage underpinning a Chapman education and the traditions embedded in our institution's 142-year history. This year's address is by Associate Professor Susanna Kim, who joined the faculty at the Chapman School of Law in 1997 and is a favorite of both students and faculty. Her eloquent and thoughtful address continues the inspiring Aims of Education series, presented by distinguished faculty members. Please feel welcome to share your thoughts on the ideas and challenges presented here with Professor Kim or with me.

Education as a Meeting of the Minds

Good morning, and welcome to Chapman University! I am so honored to be here this morning and to be this year's Aims of Education speaker. As President Doti said, I am a professor at the law school here at Chapman. That, of course, means I'm an attorney – which also means that I often have to overcome certain stereotypes or perceptions people have of my profession. In fact, a few years ago, I was asked to speak to a group of junior high school students about my background as a lawyer, and some of the challenges I faced as a corporate lawyer in practice, and also about overcoming some of the stereotypes that people have of lawyers. After I finished a really heartfelt presentation about my experiences, I opened it up to questions from the audience. A young girl in the back of the room eagerly waved her hand, stood up, put on hand on her hip like this, and said, "I have a question. My dad says that all lawyers are just professional liars!" My first thought was, "Okay, that's not a question." My second thought was that this young girl had just the right amount of spunk to be a great lawyer herself someday, and I sort of wanted to tell her father that. . . . Well, putting all stereotypes about lawyers aside, I hope *this* audience realizes that everything I say to you this morning is true, and sincere, and from the heart. This is a very special day for you, and I have some special sentiments I'd like to share with you as you begin your adventure into higher education.

It wasn't very long ago that I was exactly where you are now. I can remember my orientation week in college – the excitement, the confusion, moving into the dorms, and also opening my very own checking account for the first time (with a nice deposit of my parent's money – that was great). I probably felt many of the same things you are feeling right now. I was excited about finally being in college, unsure of what classes I should take, nervous about making new friends, and most of all, just generally terrified that gaining the "Freshman 15" would mean I wouldn't be able to fit into any of my clothes by the end of the year. That, by the way, is a complete myth. I did not gain 15 pounds as a freshman. (I gained 20 as a junior. But

that's a different story altogether.) Now it's time for *you* to experience all the wonder and excitement of being a university student. It's *your* turn to discover the joy of climbing into the driver's seat and traveling down a road of your own choosing.

This year's orientation theme is "Cruising into the Future." You each have a bright and promising future that lies just beyond you today, waiting for you to reach out and take hold of it. The process will require risk and struggle, but risk and struggle are always inherent in any endeavor worth achieving. The key is to take action, to keep moving forward and striving for growth. You know all this already. You've been doing this all your life. You have worked hard to reach this point and you've accomplished a great deal already. Yet you know that there is still more work to do as you make your way toward your goals. So you've made the choice to come to college and spend the next few years of your life with us. You have done the right thing. Helping you to achieve your future dreams is exactly what we at Chapman are here to do. We're here to give you the skills you will need to carve your own glorious path into the future. And the way we will give you those skills is by engaging you in a rigorous but wonderful process called "education."

Education itself involves action. It requires a tremendous expenditure of effort on the part of two people: a teacher and you, the student. The teacher works hard to communicate with the student and to engage the student's mind. The student works hard to understand the communication and exercise intellectual muscles that have never been used before. In the process of education, there's a deliberate and active meeting of two minds. When I say "meeting of the minds, I am talking about a process of learning, a way of connecting that allows information to be passed on from one person to another. A light goes on, the student gets it, and the connection is nothing short of exhilarating.

This lesson is what you will learn in your classes here at Chapman. Whether it be in a literature class, biology, economics, or a course in peace studies – in all of those classes, you will encounter a dedicated professor who will open your eyes to an entirely new way of thinking, and you will take a little of that thinking with you, and you will become a different person – an educated person. You will begin to internalize you professors' expertise and then make it your own. Over time, you'll develop the confidence to interpret material in your own way and evoke a creativity that is all yours. And ultimately, you're going to find that education is not about passively absorbing information. You'll see that education is an active meeting of the minds, and each time it happens, it will thrill you.

The wonderful thing about education is that this *active* meeting of the minds does not have to occur only in the classroom with your professors, but it can happen with great minds that have long since left this world and yet left a part of them behind. For example, anytime you read a book written by a great author that causes you to think in a new and profoundly different way, you have made a connection with that author's mind. That happened to me the first time I read James Baldwin's *Sonny Blues*. It was a powerful experience that affected my thinking and my view of the world. So, I encourage you to read actively to connect with great minds. Read Homer and Hemingway. Read poetry and plays. Read great books not just because you'll be tested on them, but because they will nourish your mind with new ideas.

Listen to a Chopin nocturne, or watch a Tchaikovsky ballet, or sit mesmerized through a classic Alfred Hitchcock film. If you are moved or touched or entertained by them, there will have been a meeting of the minds between you and those great artists that will change you forever. Search for new experiences and take action by trying things out for yourself firsthand. Each time you open yourself up to something new, you will grow, and that growth will make you an infinitely more interesting person. It will also give you one of the most powerful assets you can ever have: a thinking mind.

An important aspect of developing a thinking mind is to expose yourself to differences and diversity. Did you know that over 80 different languages are spoken by children who attend our neighborhood schools here in Southern California? I grew up in a time when my neighborhood was not very diverse, and I have some pretty funny memories of being questioned about my cultural background when I was a child. People would sometimes ask me, "Where are you from? Are you Chinese or Japanese?" When I responded, "I'm Korean-American," they would nod their head, and say, "Mmm-hmmm...so, are you Chinese or Japanese?"

There is certainly much more awareness today. But as I was growing up, sometimes I would encounter real bias, prejudice, or ignorance that wasn't so funny. From my parents, I learned to hold my head high and not let those difficulties break my resolve to move forward in life and to reach out for my future dreams. I grew to embrace my uniqueness and appreciate it in others.

Here on this campus, you, too, will have the opportunity to understand and celebrate differences and diversity. I'm not just speaking of racial or ethnic diversity. It's all kinds of differences that exist among us, whether religious or cultural, physical or socioeconomic. Each of you is unique. You have all walked a separate path to arrive at this point today. Cherish your own identity and take pride in who *you* are. Then respect the differences in others and appreciate the path *they* have had to travel to come to this moment too.

An enormous part of your education will come from just getting to know all these wonderful people who are sitting here around you. Make the effort to listen actively to each other and to hear what your fellow students have to say. You'd be surprised how much you can learn. Pursue a meeting of the minds with your fellow classmates, with people in your dorm, with your teammates in sports activities. Your educational experience will come not just from your professors and your books, but also from your peers. Take the time to discover who your roommate *really* is, or pick someone to be your lab partner you would not normally think you'd be good friends with. Some of the most entertaining and educational moments I had in college occurred in midnight conversations with my dorm mates or during afternoon pick-up volleyball games with students I had never met before.

Take action, and make a real connection with everyone you meet. You never know, sitting somewhere in this room right now may be your future husband or wife. (Parents, don't be alarmed, I am *not* encouraging marriage until *after* graduation.) Someone in this room may be your future business partner in an entrepreneurial enterprise that rocks Wall Street. Someone else might be your future campaign manager when you run for Governor of California. Or someone in this room may be the doctor who someday saves your life or that of your child. If

you invest your time in the people here around you, you won't regret it. The returns will be immeasurable. You're all part of the Chapman family now, and the more you connect with your fellow family members, the richer your life will be in the long run.

As you press ahead towards your future, and as you develop an educated mind, don't forget to listen to your own heart. Choose a major that you love and a career that will fulfill you. Trust your instincts, and do what you feel is right for you, even when everyone else is going the other way. Listen to the voices of those that matter, especially your own, and don't be distracted by the clatter of the rest of the crowd.

One of my favorite old stories illustrates this well. I love this parable. An elderly grandfather had misplaced his gold pocket watch, so he called all his grandchildren together and made them an offer: "I will pay \$25 to the person who can find my lost watch." Well, that sent those kids on a mad, screaming scramble as they tore through the house and the yard looking for a lost watch. Everyone except the youngest grandson. He just sat there quietly and observed while all the other kids went running and screaming about in search of the lost watch. As hard as they looked, they all came up empty handed. The next morning, the youngest grandson came forward with the watch in hand and said, "Look, I found your watch, Grandpa." The others were amazed and asked him how he had found it. "It was easy," the little boy answered, "I got up at 5:00 this morning, I went outside alone where it was dark and quiet, and I just sat there . . . and listened for the ticking." May you also learn to perfect the art of listening, and of evaluating the merits of what you hear. Sometimes the voices of the crowd will only lead you astray. Seek the still, small voice in life that matters the most. If you do, you'll find great treasure.

In the end, your education is what will help you to stand tall and form your own opinions in life. The lessons that you will learn over these next few years – whether from your professors, your books, your peers, or from your very own heart – will guide you as you make your way into the future. The aim of education is ultimately to equip you with the tools you will need to be an informed, independent thinker; to make decisions based on facts, rather than fads; to distinguish between what is true and what is artificial. We live in a time when we need *active, thinking minds* more than ever to ensure the future peace and preservation of our world. Education will give you the wisdom and strength you will need to become a leader among the people, not a blind follower who joins the crowd only out of ignorance and fear. Our world today needs wise and strong leaders, not just in the halls of government, but also in the boardrooms of large corporations, in the pulpits of churches, and in the classrooms of our children. Your education here will prepare you for all the different leadership roles you will one day assume. It will give you the confidence you need to forge a brand new road in places where there was no road before.

No one can tell you what your future will be, for *you're* the only one who can direct its course. But I can tell you this: as you enter these university halls, you will receive a first-class education from a first-class institution. You will experience meetings of the mind that will change you for the better. You will learn and grow and join the ranks of the highly educated. But what is most special, what is grandest of all, is that you will find that your education at Chapman will enable you to be a

more noble human being. You will develop intellectually, physically, socially, and spiritually. You'll become the type of person who strives for excellence in everything you do. And you will be inspired to be a dreamer of big dreams – beautiful dreams not just for yourself, but also for the people around you, and for the world in which we all live. Dreams of peace, of kindness, and of unity. Dreams like these are never lost; they are passed down from generation to generation. You now take on the dreams your parents had for you, and the ones their parents had for them. These dreams continue to move the world forward as we *all* reach for the future.

So, now that I've said all that, it's time to let you begin your journey into the future. I wish you all the best as you embark on your adventure here at Chapman. May your future be worthy of your most precious dreams.

Thanks you and good luck.

About the Speaker

Associate Professor Susana M. Kim teaches business law courses at the Chapman School of Law. Prof. Kim completed a double major in English and psychology at Stanford University, graduating with distinction and membership in Phi Beta Kappa. She earned her J.D. from the UCLA School of Law, where she served as an editor of the *UCLA Law Review* and graduated Order of the Coif (an honor for outstanding scholastic achievement). She also clerked for the Honorable Robert Boochever, on the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. She worked in the law firm O'Melveny & Myers LLP prior to joining the faculty in 1997. Prof. Kim recently received the Scudder Award for excellence in teaching, scholarship and service.