

Challenge to the In-Coming Freshman Class from the Faculty
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Delivered by Mitch Yamasaki, Ph.D.

Chaminade Class of 2009, welcome. I hope that gaining knowledge is a primary reason you are here. Why? What is so important about knowledge? How many of you have heard of Mao Zedong? Mao became the leader of the People's Republic of China in 1949, even though he did not have a good education. Mao cared deeply about the Chinese farmers. They were the people who brought him into power and they were the people whose advancement he had dedicated his life to. So Mao reacted swiftly to a problem that plagued the farmers. The problem was sparrows – little birds that ate the farmers' grain. Mao launched a program to eradicate the sparrows. The farmers eagerly took part in the program, knowing it was being carried out for their benefit. They managed to exterminate a significant portion of the sparrow population in China. Unfortunately, the sparrows not only ate the grain but also the insects that fed on the grain. With their natural predator gone, the insects multiplied astronomically. They devoured the grain, causing a famine in which millions of Chinese starved to death. This is an example of disasters caused by good intention applied without proper knowledge.

How many of you heard of Joseph Mengele? Mengele had a good education – earning advanced degrees in medicine and anthropology. What he lacked was a moral-ethical compass to apply his knowledge. As chief medical officer at the Nazi death camp in Auschwitz, Dr. Mengele violated the most basic oath of the physician – to honor and preserve human life. In order to advance the Nazi eugenics program and his own reputation as a scientist, Mengele injected disease-ridden substances into his patients. He amputated their limbs and sexual organs. In one experiment, he tried to change the eye color of his victims from brown to blue by injecting chemicals into them. It did not change their eye color but it did cause immense pain or blindness. This is an example of atrocities caused by knowledge applied without moral and ethical considerations.

For these reasons, the goal of Chaminade University is to educate the whole person – to cultivate both the mind and the heart. We have people here that will guide you on this journey. They are your professors – these people in the funny-looking outfits. As you can see, professors come in all shapes and sizes. They also come with different beliefs and attitudes. We have demanding professors, such as Dr. Bob Chandler, who will hound you on your grammar and punctuation. If your reaction [to him] is “he doesn't like me” or “he is in a bad mood,” I think you will be missing an important point – that some professors are more concerned with your success than with being liked by you.

How many of you lifted weights or played sports that required effort in order for to improve – sports like volleyball, basketball, football, baseball or tennis? Didn't you improve when you pushed yourself to the limit? Like your muscles, your mind improves when you apply vigor. We have professors here that will make your mind sweat. Getting back to sports, did you improve when you cut your practice short because you felt tired or didn't feel like it? I didn't think so. Therefore, when your professor constantly let's you out of class early, he is not doing you a favor. He is merely short-changing your education.

At the end of the day, however, it will not be your professors that determine what kind of education you receive here. It will be you. You will decide whether to miss that history class to go surfing. You will decide to download a term paper off the internet instead of actually writing it. And you will decide to take classes that let you out early instead of those that challenge you. On the other hand, you who will decide to skip the party everyone's going to in order to finish your interior design project. You will read Albert Camus' *The Stranger* for your literature class and then spend the next three weeks reading his other works -- *The Plague* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* -- even though neither are required for any course. And you will take a service learning course then go on to dedicate your life to intelligently helping your community.

An old country lawyer was defending a man accused of murder and facing the death sentence. In his closing statement, he approached the jury, clasping something in his hands. The lawyer opened his hands to reveal a baby dove. He handed the dove to one jurist. He then told the jury, "The fate of that helpless bird, as well as that of my client, are now in your hands." At a time when education is so crucial to a person's life, I say to you -- Chaminade's Class of 2009 -- your futures are in your hands. Thank you.