

Dr. Jeff Jones, associate professor of music
Opening Convocation remarks, Aug. 24, 2016

In preparation for today, I've spent a lot of time on YouTube watching some really entertaining convocation and commencement speeches. Unfortunately for you, this is not one of those speeches. I toyed with the idea of emulating some of the good ones, but it didn't feel right. So, what I offer instead is this: I'll make a few points that I think may be useful as we start a new year. These will, inevitably, be cliché, but those points will be valid and I will be earnest.

A couple of years ago, David Brooks published an article in the New York Times called "The Moral Bucket List." In it he extolls the merits of eulogy virtues over resume virtues. By the end he comes to the conclusion that goodness and character come from a more or less solitary process of honest self-reflection and commitment to personal development. It all rings true enough when you read it and I recommend it to you. However, I think it's important to acknowledge, as I'm sure Mr. Brooks would, were he here, that one need not sacrifice resume virtues in order to cultivate eulogy virtues. And, I submit for your consideration, that your experience here at Sweet Briar can be well-suited to developing the knowledge and skills that you will need in the world of work as well as the generous spirit and depth of personal character which many of us would like to share with the wider world.

How, you ask?

Well, one way involves what Jessie advocated for in her welcome to you. Challenge yourself, get out of your comfort zone, and try stuff that seems interesting and worthwhile, even if it makes you a little uncomfortable at first. Discovering and developing your passions is a great way to build resume virtues. If you're passionate about doing something, there's a fair chance you're going to engage with it deeply. You keep doing that long enough, and you're gonna get pretty good at stuff. Maybe not all of it, but it's really likely that you will get good at some of it.

While you're doing that, seek out and develop relationships with faculty and staff mentors. They can help you with the process of transforming your passions into resume virtues. Mentorship is a hallmark of the Sweet Briar experience. We all value this and are deeply committed to it. I invite you to take advantage.

So, there you go. There is no secret recipe to developing resume virtues. Try stuff. Zero in on things you're passionate about. Keep at it. Work with mentors to refine your knowledge and skills, and to conceive of ways of framing your knowledge and skills to entice potential employers. Voila. Resume virtues.

But, how can developing resume virtues lead to the development of eulogy virtues?

Use them to serve others.

When you're working on developing your knowledge and skills, your resume virtues, a lot of that work focuses on you. How you are doing. What you need. It's not a bad thing, it just, is.

But, when you apply that knowledge and those skills to the service of others, you're focusing on how other people are doing. What they need. As you serve others you are constantly connected to the truth that it's not always about you, and that you can do something to make the world a better place. You are planting the seeds that can grow into empathy and compassion. This can increase your commitment to service, which can give your resume virtues a purpose beyond getting and keeping a job. You'll now have a calling. You won't stop trying because something is not fun at the moment or is getting hard. Because it's not about you. Vanity doesn't motivate your commitment. Criticism, be it just or otherwise, doesn't hold you back for long, because you don't have time or energy for that. You learn. And you keep moving forward. Likewise, when you fail, and

sometimes you will, you won't be discouraged, at least not for long, because what you're trying to accomplish matters more than your discouragement. You become resilient. You develop the kind of courage and resolve that some people like to call grit.

Empathy, compassion, resolve, courage, resilience, grit. You are now developing the kind of personal character that people eulogize.

That's how you do it. But what's that process feel like? It's probably different for everyone. Sorry. I don't have an easy answer for you on this one.

I'm a music professor. It's my calling. But, it didn't start that way. It started in the school band. Music was challenging, and interesting, and fun. At some point, I began to realize that when we played music, we made other people happy, and I guess that was nice. It went on this way for years. I didn't have one magical moment of transformation. There were a series of little realizations. Playing in the school band, I learned that people use music to connect with each other and to celebrate. In church I learned that people used music to worship. Riding in the car with my grandparents, I learned that they used music nostalgically, to remember and revisit important moments in their lives. At a funeral I learned that people use music to help them express grief. There were so many more realizations, but you get the idea.

At some point clicked for me. Music isn't just fun. It's a way that people articulate, explore, experiment with, celebrate, and try to understand their lives. Music is important stuff. It has the capacity to make human being, better. And I had to be a part of that; helping people lead more fulfilling and happier lives through music. It became my calling and I can't get enough of it.

Note that my calling, my purpose, isn't just about making musical sounds. Service to others is an inextricable aspect of it. I apply my knowledge and skills, my resume virtues,

to research and activism. I spend a fair amount of time on music, community development, and public policy in the developing world. I apply my resume virtues in the classroom. Helping my students discover and develop their passions for music. Outside of the classroom my students and I make music in support of a variety of campus and community functions. Helping people come together and celebrate, worship, remember, and occasionally grieve. Some of my students find that music is also their calling. And that's great. Others find that music is a part of their lives, but ultimately, their calling is in another field of endeavor. And that's great, too.

At Sweet Briar I am privileged and humbled to serve with a faculty and staff that have a wide array of knowledge, skills, and callings. I feel confident that, if you really want to, you will find here, the people and resources you need to develop your resume virtues and your eulogy virtues. Better still, you will have the abilities and support you need to continue evolving these virtues throughout your life.

I hope you do; because the world needs you. And its needs keep evolving. We will always need leaders that apply their hearts and minds toward the betterment of our ever-evolving world, women for whom the impossible is just another problem to solve.

So. Here we are. Convocation 2016. A new beginning filled with so much possibility. So much to learn, and to do, and to become. Welcome, Vixens. I'm very excited for you. Let's get started.