Members of the Class of 2011, transfer students, graduate students, family and friends, we’re so pleased that you are with us today. What an outstanding group of students we have before us. We know from your admission materials that you are exceptionally gifted and have already achieved a great deal, both academically and personally. You are the best and the brightest. Thank you for choosing the College of Charleston!

Today is the start of a new chapter in your life…and it is for me as well. Like you, I am new to the College. I became the College’s 21st President in February. Like you, I will be experiencing my first fall semester at the College…first Convocation, first “Rock the Block,” first Parent’s Weekend, first soccer and volleyball and basketball seasons.

Like you, I went through a careful due diligence process to determine whether I should leave my home and job in Georgia and move to Charleston. You may not yet know whether you made the correct decision. It takes time to find your place in a new environment. After 6 ½ months here, my wife Jane and I know we made the correct decision. The top-notch faculty; the infectious learning environment; the incredibly strong relationships between students and faculty; the history and traditions of the College; the beauty and charm of the campus…and it’s all woven into the fabric of Charleston, one of the great destinations cities of the world. We made the right decision…and I’m quite confident that you did as well.

During your years at the College, the skills you will learn, the studies you undertake, and the people you meet will shape your personal identity, and profoundly influence your future. Whatever your educational objectives are, we will help you achieve them. We are committed to your success. We’re here to help you build the foundation for your careers, and to provide you with the ability to question, to analyze, and to make sound decisions. These are critical skills that you will need in both your personal and professional lives. I believe that your future success in these areas will be the best indicator of the quality of the education you received at the College.
During the next few months, you’ll be adjusting to new schedules and challenges that at times may seem overwhelming. So I want you to remember four things that will help you keep your life in perspective and help you make the most of your time at the College.

First, remember that our academic program is the main reason you are here. For each of your classes, know the policies and the deadlines and the requirements. You will be held accountable for them.

As you will find out, college demands much greater self-discipline than high school. You will need to manage your time very carefully…and stay up to date with all of your assignments. If you start to fall behind, reach out for help immediately before it becomes a problem.

Second, take advantage of the College’s resources. Don’t sit back and wait for the programs, events, and people of the College to find you. Aggressively seek them out yourself. Much of the learning that takes place at the College occurs outside the classroom. Get involved. Play intramural sports; participate in student government; join one of our 150 student organizations. Or write for the campus newspaper, the George Street Observer. And don’t be afraid to experiment or take risks. Try something new. Take a class that is completely unrelated to your current interests or future career. Do it purely to broaden your mind.

Third, like the faculty and staff of the College, you are now part of the Charleston community. Reach out to Charleston and the Lowcountry. Do volunteer work. Remember how much you have been given, and share your many gifts with others. Charleston will grow stronger through your efforts and you will become better prepared to assume leadership responsibility in the communities you will live in after college.

Fourth, and most important, take care of yourself. You are out on your own, many of you for the first time. You will be confronted with a lot of new opportunities. Some will enhance your college life; some will be unhealthy and dangerous. If the choice you face is difficult or unclear, reach out to us for help. If you make an unwise choice and need help, reach out to us…to any of us on the faculty and staff. We will help or direct you to our excellent wellness and counseling program. The resources to help you navigate through college are here. Please use them!
Finally, as you progress through the College, please give us your thoughts on how we can improve our university. We are all fortunate to be a part of this very special institution. We all benefit from the men and women who crossed the Cistern before us. We, in turn, have a responsibility to those who will follow us. Please help us identify ways to improve the educational experience and quality of student life at the College.

Again, a warm welcome to all of you. Have a great fall semester. And don’t hesitate to contact me if I can ever be of assistance.