A few weeks ago, I had my 7th grade Latin class do an exercise. I gave them the names of 10 colleges and universities and asked them to find out what the school’s motto was. I was trying to help them see how Latin can sometimes sum up a rather big concept in just a few short words. Of course, we considered Delbarton’s motto “Succisa Virescit” as an example. I’m not sure if I succeeded in making the point: but, from that list of mottos, three stood out to me as worthy of your consideration today: From Rowan University – Eruditio spes mundi; (Learning: the hope of the world) from Middlebury College – Scientia et Virtus; (Knowledge and Character) and from Harvard University – Veritas (Truth)

Eruditio spes mundi- Learning: the hope of the world

Every moment of teaching is a moment of hope, both on a small scale and a much larger one. Every time a teacher walks into a classroom and begins a lesson, he or she does so with an attitude of hope – hope that the ideas will be communicated effectively and hope that the students will grasp them. That, of course, is the small scale. On a somewhat larger scale, there is the hope that each and every one of your teachers brings to school every day that, somehow and in some way, their presence in your lives will make a difference. We, the faculty, have dedicated ourselves to the task of trying to instill in you the love of learning along with the desire to help you be the best person you can be. And this is where the really big picture comes in. Every form of education is about helping people learn something. Most of the time we only focus on the short term goals like: I need to learn bookkeeping, or quantum physics or I want to learn how to play the banjo -
and that’s all well and good. But why? Well, the immediate goal is the acquisition of some knowledge, skill or ability, but beyond that, I think, there is often an unexpressed goal of wanting to become a deeper, richer, more fully-engaged human being. Education awakens in us a more profound sense of what it means to be alive in the world. It makes us more fully human. The paradox, though, is that the more education awakens our own inner life inside of us, it also helps us remove the blinders that keep us from seeing the world outside of us. Learning is a path to self-knowledge; and self-knowledge is the first step in change, change in ourselves and change for the world around us. That is what we hope for you and from you. That is why learning is the hope of the world.

Scientia et Virtus

One of the things I try to communicate to my first year Latin students is the importance of paying attention to the word “et”, the little Latin word for ‘and’. I say that, because in Latin “et” always joins two things that are of equal value. So, when I look at Middlebury’s motto “Scientia et Virtus” I see that they have put two values on par with one another: Knowledge and character. Again, it’s a shorthand way of saying knowledge without character is not a value, you need both knowledge and character. Education is not just about the acquisition of knowledge, but it’s also about becoming a good person. It’s hard to see in English, but the word ‘virtus’ in Latin contains the word for ‘man’ and in its original, most basic meaning it meant ‘manliness’. That’s a slippery slope today, but it tells us something about how the Romans thought. It also explain why one can translate it as character and not simply virtue.

In his 2015 best-seller “The Road to Character”, the columnist David Brooks begins this way: “Lately I’ve been thinking about the difference between the résumé virtues and the eulogy virtues. The résumé virtues are the ones you list on your resume, the skills that you bring to the job market and that contribute to your external success. The eulogy virtues are deeper. They’re the virtues that get talked about at your funeral, the ones that exist at the core of your being – whether you are kind, brave, honest or faithful; what kind of relationships you have formed. Brooks points out that most of the educational systems in the U.S. today are focused on the résumé virtues. I’d like to think that Delbarton is one of the educational institutions that tries to develop both kinds in its students.
Drawing from an earlier author and the two creation stories in the book of Genesis, Brooks talks about two kinds of individuals, or maybe even the two sides of each individual. One he calls “Adam I”. Adam I is the career-oriented, ambitious side of our nature, Adam I is the external résumé guy who wants to build, create, produce and discover things. He wants to have high status and win victories. Adam II is the internal Adam. This Adam wants to have a serene inner character, a quiet but solid sense of right and wrong – not only to do good but to be good. This Adam wants to love intimately, to sacrifice self in the service of others, to live in obedience to some transcendent truth, to have a cohesive inner soul that honors creation and one’s own possibilities. In reality, what we strive for at Delbarton is a mixture of both, a balance that honors both Adams. That is the goal of an education in body, mind and spirit. Brooks concludes: To nurture your Adam I, it makes sense to cultivate your strengths. To nurture your Adam II moral code, it is necessary to confront your weaknesses.

We, your teachers have tried to show you, in our own small way, what it means to be a whole person, with both strengths and weaknesses. I hope that we have succeeded.

**Veritas**

Harvard University’s motto is just one word – VERITAS: truth. What can that tell us about their aspirations? Well, for me it is pretty obvious: the goal of all education is to arrive at the truth. For me, one of the saddest lines all of scripture is found in St. John’s account of the passion of Christ that was sung so beautifully here in this abbey church by three of your peers on Good Friday. Pontius Pilate is interrogating Jesus and asks him whether he is a king. But Jesus’ answer isn’t clear to him. “So Pilate said to him, “Then you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” And so, my friends, that sad question “What is truth?” has persisted throughout the whole of human history.

At the time of the Enlightenment, however, our ancestors in Western culture came to the general conclusion that the truths of faith and the truths of human knowledge are two distinct goals. Faith and reason are two separate paths to arrive at the truth. The pendulum in the Science Wing is meant to remind us of
that every time we pass it. We, today, are the inheritors of that tradition of faith and reason. Here at Delbarton we enter the classroom day in day out, both faculty and students, with the conviction that the truth is knowable. This is particularly true in the sciences, but not only. Since the 17th century, the natural sciences have espoused a process known as the scientific method. This method is almost universally recognized in Western culture as a way of coming to an understanding of the truth about natural phenomena. Most of you, I hope, will be familiar with the steps. The scientific method is a method or procedure that consists in systematic observation, measurement, and experiment, and the formulation, testing, and modification of hypotheses. Experiments are defined as a procedure designed to test hypotheses. Experiments are an important tool of the scientific method and to be termed scientific, a method of inquiry is commonly based on empirical or measurable evidence subject to specific principles of reasoning. This method of scientific reasoning has provided us with the bounty of human life that is too vast to enumerate; over the last thousand years science has lifted us out of the dark ages and brought us to a world in which most of our problems are caused not by our ignorance of the natural world, by our stubborn inhumanity to one another.

As a thinking person and an educator, I wonder why anyone would consider abandoning the most successful system that the human mind has ever invented for the discovery of the truth, not only about the natural world but about ourselves as well. But sadly we can see the signs of that around us. Science (and the idea of using reason as a basis for human belief in general) is routinely questioned, denied, ridiculed and disrespected. I find that scary. Science, as we know, is not always perfect and sometimes the evidence may be inconclusive or misleading, but that in itself does not invalidate science or the scientific method. What I am saying today, gentlemen, is that truth matters. This simple assertion seems self-evident, but I fear that in the years to come it will come increasingly under assault. But truth does matter; and I believe that deep down we all know that. As one author has written recently, "The biggest threat to truth in the 21st century is not skepticism or outright rejection of specific scientific theories, but disrespect for the standards of truth that lie behind scientific reasoning in the first place."
We your faculty have tried to instill in you a deep respect for the truth. We cannot be, must not be like Pontius Pilate with that question “What is truth? in our minds or on our lips. Look at our “we believe “statements and see what we proclaim about ourselves! We believe in the importance of seeking truth, beauty, and goodness. That’s who we must always be!

So, as you prepare to leave Delbarton, I urge you today on behalf of the faculty: be men who never fear the truth but always embrace it in every circumstance, because truth matters.