Opening Convocation 2014

Ensure Student Success

David M. Fowler

Ahoy Park Pirates and welcome both to everyone here in Breckon Sports Center and to those viewing the webcast from around the country.

My thanks to the other speakers for joining us and for sharing their thoughts and advice.

We also would like to thank Becky Mitchell and the other staff members who organized this event. It has been a smooth experience.

My message today (Ensuring Student Success) – Park’s Promise is practical thoughts for ALL of you: that includes students, faculty, staff, alumni and anyone who has hacked their way into this webcast. You know who you are.

I have enjoyed meeting so many of you already and I am very appreciative of the warm greeting you have given me. As Park University is approaching its 140th year, I am proud and honored to be your president. I say “your” president because I am here to serve YOU. I have ultimate accountability/ I am responsible for your success.

Even though my time at Park University will most likely last but one year (while the board of trustees conduct a comprehensive search for the next president), I aspire to leave a lasting impact at Park. But I will not do it alone. We will do it together; Because what is important to understand is that at Park University we embrace inclusivity that fosters diversity, teamwork and collaboration. Thus, if you are successful, then we have all been successful. However, if you fail, then I have failed because I am accountable for your success.

Normally, I don’t make it a practice to talk about myself except to my mother. But just this one time, since I am new to Park, let me share with you some of my background and experiences to give you a perspective of the advice I intend to share with you today. The advice I will share today is an amalgamation of experiences over my first career of nearly 37 years with the global public accounting firm, KPMG.

I hope to provide to you today a simple proven path to ensure your student success!

I spent my entire tenure with KPMG in various roles, but always interacting with leaders and their employees from many perspectives. Leaders of businesses, leaders of government, leaders of charitable or civic organizations, leaders of faith, or individual leaders in their field. I have had the privilege of working with leaders of businesses who make things, move things, sell things, fix things or provide other services to those businesses. I have collaborated with each of the past several mayors of Kansas City as well as other cities on various matters.

I have worked with the boards of directors and officers of nearly every successful company in and around Kansas City including: Garmin, UMB, Sprint, Cerner, Ecco Select, AMC
Entertainment, H&R Block, Koch Industries, Hallmark Cards, and Children’s Mercy Hospital.

Park University is privileged to include officers of several of these companies on its board of trustees.

These are the same successful global companies who will be hiring you or where you may already be employed. In addition, I have served on innumerable charity boards of organizations which assist those in need. Many of the business leaders with whom I worked, also served with me on charity boards. They understand the link between organizations who celebrate global citizenship and the charitable beneficiaries of good corporate responsibility.

One characteristic these businesses and their leaders have in common is a strong sense of core values that is pervasive throughout the entire organization and its employees. Listen to me when I share with you that…. This is what these companies will also look for in hiring you!

That is why the Park University core values are so instrumental to our success and why we will place such a high priority in making them a part of our fabric in all that we do.

Core Values (See page 4 of the program)

Park University's core values describe who we are, what we do and how we do it. They guide our educational strategy, our institutional behavior and our relationships with business partners, suppliers, students, faculty, communities and each other.

It is essential that we advocate for each and every one of our core values, not just some of them. We can’t pick and choose one and not the others. If we exclude even one of our core values, our fabric will have hole in it and we will not be as successful.

We expect ACCOUNTABILITY .....for our actions at all levels, to each other and to Park University

Imagine working for an organization or a team with no ACCOUNTABILITY or responsibility for one’s actions. Every person for themself. How would that work in the military?

We treat all with CIVILITY and RESPECT ......while being open and honest in our communication.

How rewarding would it be to exist in an environment where we did not treat each other with CIVILITY AND RESPECT, but rather talked about each other behind their backs?
We seek EXCELLENCE ......in all we do, with passionate learning as our highest priority

What if we settled for only being average rather than seeking EXCELLENCE?

We celebrate GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP ......through our connected learning and working environment, as well as community stewardship.

What would our community be like if we abandoned GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP and only worried about ourselves and did nothing to assist those in need or less fortunate.

We embrace INCLUSIVITY ...... that fosters diversity, teamwork and collaboration.

What if we only accepted students and faculty who looked and thought exactly alike? What kind of creativity would come from a team where there was no diversity? With no INCLUSIVITY, there would be no teamwork or collaboration.

We act with INTEGRITY ......through honesty, efficiency and reliability.

Without INTEGRITY, you will ultimately fail. I can pretty much guarantee that. The world is full of people with no integrity who have ultimately failed. There are many companies that lacked integrity in leadership that have gone bankrupt or that have lost credibility.

There are many other good qualities to embrace, and I encourage you to add as you go, but I strongly believe if you follow all of the Park University Core Values you will have greater chances for success than one who does not.

All freshman and other newcomers to Park start out equal in many regards.

You only get one chance to make a first impression and build your reputation. Your reputation is who you are, what you do and how you treat others. Let our core values be your compass and the substance of your reputation. Consistency is imperative. One cannot maintain strong core values every other day or only with certain people. It must be part of your DNA. If you've ever watched the TV detective show CSI, you know what DNA is.

Now that we have established how you develop and maintain your reputation, let me shift gears and provide some thoughts about setting a course toward a successful outcome or happy ending. I have worked with hundreds, if not thousands, of employees and students of all ages, many of whom are just like you sitting where you are today. Some I come across are wishing they had a fresh start.

The choices you make early on are the most impactful. They set the course.

Ultimately, all of the choices you make throughout your collegiate experience determine where you will end up.
Having a well-thought plan for your university career will enhance your chances of success. Allow me to share a reliable path or series of choices you might consider which I guarantee will pretty much propel you toward a favorable launch.

First, establish personal priorities and define what success means to you.

What priority is most important to you? Having a career, supporting a family, serving as a care giver, making as much money as you can, living in a specific city or area.

Second, what do you enjoy? Interests, hobbies, work with people, athletics, arts, military, sciences, math, teaching others? The possibilities are endless.

Third, at what are you particularly good? At what do you have an aptitude?

Keep in mind that it does not always work out that what you like to do is the same thing at which you are particularly good. (I enjoy golf, but I’m not very good at it.)

Fourth, thinking about after graduation, what career choices match up with both what you like to do AND at which you are particularly good?

Fifth, what academic field of study would enable you to be qualified to work in your chosen career?

All of this must line up (be consistent) to achieve maximum success. But what is success? How do you define success? What looks like success for one person, may not be success for another. Thus, each individual person must arrive at their OWN definition of success.

Once you have defined success, you can then design a path or multiple paths to get there. That is where your resume’ comes in.

Your resume’ is, in reality, a summary of your personal history, your university activities or achievements and your employment whether full-time or internships. In other words, your life’s historical biography.

Some people let their life happen to them. Others go out and live their life with purpose and planning.

So given the two following alternatives which would you conclude will have a greater likelihood in achieving one’s definition of success:

A. Complete an aspirational resume’ (your blueprint) of how you would like it to look like when you graduate. What kind of grades would you achieve? What activities would demonstrate your proficiencies in leadership, creativity, involvement? What internships would give you experience in your chosen field which might be valuable in your career once you graduate? How have you differentiated yourself from others?

B. A student who starts out with a clean slate on their resume with no real plan and then four years later, fills it in with whatever came along.
The first version is like writing a movie script with a happy ending and then filming it. The second version is like embarking on a sailing adventure with no clue where you want to end up. You just want an adventure, and hope to find gold at the end of the rainbow.

If you said version “A” would have greater chance for success, you would be correct! I know several prominent CEO’s who still maintain a “life’s plan” and work toward that plan.

When you see me on campus, please come up and introduce yourself. Tell me why you are proud to be a Park Pirate. But know that I will ask you about your life’s plan and how you intend to achieve success. Know that I will also ask you which Park University core value you have demonstrated most recently.

In conclusion, let me summarize my advice to you today:

Establish your personal priorities and align them with activities at which you excel, what you enjoy, what you should study and what skills are employable.

Define success and develop a plan to achieve your goals.

Recognize that your resume will document your progress. Take pride in your accomplishments and accomplish things of which you can be proud.

Let your core values guide you along the way and be true to them.

So Pirates, let’s board our ship together at Park University, set a course, fill our sails with the wind at our back in seek of buried treasure of success and happiness. Good luck, and above all, let’s have fun doing it!