Good morning students, faculty, staff, trustees and other members of our college community. To the incoming class of 2013, welcome to the Pomona College community. I am sure your nervous excitement had been growing as you approached today, when your college experience will begin at full tilt.

As you begin to consider your place in this community, I would like to begin by considering the ongoing state of the world within which Pomona exists. Our president’s campaign for change, though it preceded the bulk of the crisis, could not have been more appropriate. Whether from the United States or abroad, one cannot deny that we are amidst rapid global change.

An examination of the current logic and rhetoric of global politicians with regards to the crisis will yield that one theme stands above the rest. If misaligned incentives and individualistic action brought us into this crisis, it will take cooperative behavior, and a regard for the well being of our broader global community to get us back on our feet. While we watch this political, economic and social drama unfold on the national and international stage, I urge you to consider what this implies for our own college community.

Though Pomona College is often criticized for existing within a bubble, we have not been isolated from these events. This year marks the first in recent memory that Pomona will be doing less with less. After a period of unprecedented growth in the resources available to us, we must now consider sustainability not just as a buzzword in the realm of climate change, but in accordance with our broader economic decision-making.

As we move through this period of difficulty, we must look increasingly to each other and to our community. As such, it is necessary to examine the institutions and conventions that define our interactions, and identify an effective framework for constructive communication and coexistence. We must take into consideration not only our values, but also the delicate balance we strike between conflicting ideals, in evaluating the choices we make together.

Such introspection into our community raises a number of important and difficult questions, many of which I hope you consider as you make your place here at Pomona College.

With regards to the other four undergraduate colleges, how can we best leverage our resources as a unified five-college community? It is not particularly bold of me to say that Pomona is the least integrated with the other four schools; our broad focus reduces our reliance on our peers. However, over one thousand students are starting their first class as a student of the Claremont Colleges today. What can be done to bring us closer to this group of bright, motivated young people, as well as the diverse offerings of their respective institutions?

What are the limitations that political correctness imposes on our dialogue? How can we expect to have meaningful intellectual discourse when fear of using the wrong language prevents the expression of personal views? At the same time, how can we ensure that the
exchange of ideas is respectful of the sensitivities that may be held by those involved in the conversation?

Another issue that the ASPC has grappled with in recent times surrounds political diversity. Is it right to bring in speakers and guests whose political viewpoints contradict or offend large groups of students on campus? Civil rights scholar Kenji Yoshino contends that the answer to bigotry is more speech, not censorship. But is it fair to use students' fees to pay an honorarium to a speaker with whom they fundamentally disagree?

What sort of balance do we strike between the lack of bureaucracy that Pomona prides itself on and the accountability needed to manage such a complex institution? To what extent does Pomona’s social responsibility as an eleemosynary institution extend beyond its students to include employees of the College? What are the relative weights we put on decision-making efficiency versus incorporating the viewpoints of each community member?

Perhaps the most challenging questions we face come across in the simplest language; for whom and for what does Pomona College exist?

These questions are just a few among many that pry into the core values of our community. Whether you are sitting in front of me as incoming students, or behind me among faculty, administration and trustees, you must admit that these are questions to which you and I do not have the answers.

Since the 1880s, the College has grown from a single operation in an unfinished hotel to a thriving liberal-arts institution offering world-class educational opportunities. Some values have remained constant throughout our history; from the beginning, Pomona has been dedicated to providing high quality education to qualified students regardless of their financial means. Other commitments of the College, like its dedication to environmental stewardship, have risen organically from within the college in response to changing global concerns, and are largely the result of student initiatives.

Throughout our College’s storied history, no single person has had the definitive answer to the aforementioned, or similar, questions. History has shown us that whether or not you or I know the answers is not important, but rather it is our ability to collectively deliberate Pomona’s place in a changing world that has made the College an extraordinary institution. We as members of this community have the power to shape its direction as we move forward into the future.

In the continuation of this tradition of change driven by community discourse, the College makes every effort to incorporate student views on issues of importance. Now, you, the class of 2013, as newly inaugurated members of this community, have the responsibility is to engage in this dialogue. My goal this year is to provide as many opportunities as possible to join in the conversation, with the hopes that you too will weigh in as we seek to refine our values, and contribute to the evolution of the community that you have just joined.

On behalf of the ASPC, welcome to Pomona College.