Welcome to all students, faculty, staff, trustees and esteemed guests. To the Class of 2017, I extend to you a special welcome as the newest members of the Pomona College pride. As we fawn over your arrival, much like a family fawns over any new addition, I encourage you not to let hubris cloud your true calling as a Sagehen. Although President Oxtoby, the Admissions staff and now even Forbes may laud your innumerable accomplishments, they are by no means the sole reason for your presence here at Pomona College.

You are not here solely on the laurels of your academic portfolio – we turn away classes of valedictorians, nor are you here because you took 14 AP tests, won a national science award, made an all-state athletic team or started your own company. If you did those things, Congrats, join the club. Those endeavors, in and of themselves, do not make you special. They do not make you a Sagehen. Rather, you are here today because someone saw within you the potential to fulfill the Pomona Promise. That is, a Promise coursing through the veins of every loyal Pomona affiliate.

The Pomona Promise is a commitment to couple uncommon talents with exceptional compassion. It reflects the truism that in this world, knowledge entails equal parts empowerment and conscription. And conscript you must, for now more than ever, our country needs leaders with this rare combination. We face historic wealth inequalities threaten our democratic ethos and the future of our economic stability – class can challenge us to walk humbly. Tensions between folks of all stripes have reached unsettling heights as recent court rulings, policy decisions and demonstrations have shown us that Americans still struggle to dismantle the colored veil – race can challenge us to do Justly. Everyday, women across this country seem to sustain attacks on their freedom over already objectified bodies – gender can challenge us to love mercy. Antiquated behavioral tropes for particular bodies still constrain individual agency and true freedom of expression – sexuality can challenge us to entertain brotherly Affection. And those are just the problems discussed in an intro class. We have made great strides yes, but the eyes of all people do not yet rest upon a shining City on a Hill. And it matter not whether you sit behind me or before me, no one person has the panacea to all of our problems. I would venture to say that one does not exist. For even the purest intentions behind principled actions can still yield problematic outcomes. Instead, the best for which we can strive is to earnestly cultivate and pursue our uncommon talents with a heart tempered with exceptional compassion.

That’s not to say that you need to go off, graduate and join the peace corps. The Pomona Promise can just as easily be fulfilled from the corridors of Citigroup as it can from the classrooms of TFA. You can be a banker or a basket weaver, a consultant or a coach or anything in between and still remain loyal to our promise. Still remain loyal to the dream of a land that never has been yet— And yet must be. That is to say, that each one of you Sagehens has a particular role to occupy in curbing tomorrow’s problems. Our collective creed

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requires only that you serve your role, whatever that role may be, to the best of your exceptional abilities with considerable compassion.

You can see the Pomona Promise at play in numerous ways. We can see the Pomona Promise at play in the life of our late and great trustee, John Payton. Following the footsteps of Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall, John devoted his life to the pursuit of justice and substantive equality through law. We can see the Pomona Promise at play in the life of a staff member named Will who worked full time, yet found it in his heart to volunteer as a youth sports coach to mentor at risk children. You can see the Pomona Promise at play in the works of an alum like Alex – who created a wonderful company that donates its profits to charity. The Pomona Promise also shines bright when a partner at a prominent law firm takes time away from his busy day to show faith in a student’s potential Or even further, you can feel the Pomona Promise when a wiley old professor and faithful dean serve as surrogate fathers to a student in need.

Friends, I implore you to ask yourself how you’re honoring the Pomona Promise. The range of stories I shared shows that you need not devote your life to the Monastery to uphold our covenant. Indeed our Promise is needed as much in Wall Street as it is in Main Street. For problems as expansive and extensive as ours require problem solves in an equally expansive net of sectors. Simply ask yourself a few questions: What have I accomplished, to what end, and to whose benefit? If your words, deeds and beliefs bestow riches in trust for humanity, you’re on the right path.

And if for some reason, like spending too much time north of 6th street, you find yourself astray, I’d like you to remember the words of wise old Henry Wadsworth Longfellow when he remarked that “All are architects of Fate, Working in these walls of Time; Some with massive deeds and great, Some with ornaments of rhyme.

Nothing useless is, or low; Each thing in its place is best; And what seems but idle show Strengthens and supports the rest…”

Do what you can to make manifest the Pomona Promise. You act in concert with the collective body of the Pomona College family. With that said, I leave you with one question: will you keep your promise today?