

Lewis Musoke Senior Address
May 15, 2011

Distinguished speaker Drayton McLane, faculty and staff, family members, Class of 2011, ladies and gentlemen,

Four years ago, If you had told me I would be pursuing my undergraduate studies at a small liberal arts college in the U.S., I probably would have thought you delirious, bordering on slightly insane. The idea of studying in the U.S. (let alone Sherman, Texas) was as much alarming, as it was foreign, in the Musoke household. But yet here I am today in a place that has forever changed my life in ways I never could have imagined. If I did not believe in fate then, I surely believe in fate today. Those of us who know Austin College for its true worth will know that it is more than just an academic institution but one that prepares and molds global citizens. This coming from a Ugandan who was born and raised in Kenya and is now studying in the U.S. Yet just like every other student here today it took me leaving my home to see the world with a different set of eyes.

It is on this very court that as freshmen we embarked on a new journey, one that would dramatically shape our lives forever. And yet it is on this very court that this journey seemingly comes to an end. I remember the excitement and anticipation we shared meeting new people and forging friendships that will last a lifetime. I also remember exchanging our life experiences and building our hopes and expectations for the future.

Since then we have never looked back, soaring at incredible heights and accomplishing our heart desires. We have taken courses that have challenged how we think, changed how we eat, changed how we spend our money, and if you're pre-med how much we sleep. While some of us have stuck to our initial paths, others have over the years changed our goals. Regardless of the route, we are all here today holding our heads high.

It is astonishing how fast the world can change. In just 3.5 years of being here, we have been fortunate enough to watch Austin College, and indeed the world, transform in emphatic ways. We saw AC take the nation by storm as the number one school to study abroad, an achievement that many of us took advantage of in order to learn firsthand about life abroad. We have also watched the school increase in diversity. Just the other day I was part of a debate that compared which cities between Sherman, Texas; Sao Paulo, Brazil; Lagos, Nigeria; and Kingston, Jamaica, knew how to party. Quite the scholarly conversation one would expect of students of caliber at AC, but yet the type of conversations that bridge cultural differences. And who can forget the change at the helm where we said goodbye to President Emeritus Oscar Page and welcomed the First Lady President of Austin College, Marjorie Hass. This was a truly bittersweet moment as we bid farewell to a legend, but ushered in a new and exciting era. It thus seemed fitting that as Austin College celebrated the inauguration of its first Lady President, the world also watched as President Obama became the first black President of the United States.

In spite of these changes the college has never dwindled on its primary focus the students. Whether it was writing a letter of recommendation or making a cup of coffee or even just listening to you talk, the unrelenting dedication and sacrifice shown by faculty and staff has often gone beyond the call of duty. And for that we are forever indebted to this institution. None of us will be able to truly pay Austin College back because what we have received is of incalculable

value. The classes we've taken, the friends we've made, and the experiences we've shared are but a few of the gifts we will take into the world.

The daunting reality is today we go into a world reeling from poverty, a world devastated by natural disasters, and a world consumed by war. Most importantly, we go into a world that needs our help. I had the privilege several months ago to attend a conference where the keynote speaker of the event was retired General Romeo Dallaire of the UN Peacekeeping Mission in the Rwandan Genocide. Of the many words of wisdom he articulated from his experience, the ones that stuck vividly in my mind came in the form of a question: "Are we more human than others?" A simple yet disturbing question when you view it in the context of the world we live in today.

The world can ill afford to turn its back on itself as it did with Rwanda. While we may be geographically separated, we all share innate ideals such as love, hard work, justice, and good health. The simple fact is, the world is small, so small that we cannot ignore how much we need each other. Thus as individuals who have shown determination and hard work, individuals who have the vision and capacity to prompt change, we must take advantage by extending our experiences in a meaningful way to the world. Like soldiers in a war we have been armed with the ultimate arsenal, that is education; the onus is on us is to decide how to use it.

And even yet many of us would not be where we are today were it not for the support, love, and sacrifice we have received from our families and friends. Looking back now I remember my anxiety starting a new life away from home. Things were not always smooth sailing and there were times of struggle. But what kept us going was that we never felt alone in our struggles; there always seemed to be someone who empathized with us. Although my family was miles away, their support never dwindled. They made me who I am from the words they said. So as we pick up our diploma, we will know that we gave absolutely everything but also that so much more has been given to us.

Today marks for us the pinnacle of pride, the end of an era, the beginning of a new adventure, the hope for a future, or the continuation of something. Whatever this day means to you, cherish it for it is truly a milestone worth remembering. This memento that we will walk away with today is more than just a statement of education, but a testament of perseverance sacrifice—and most of all memories of a truly invaluable and unforgettable experience.

To the Class of 2011, each and every one of you can hold your head high today, because what you have achieved is no easy feat. You did not achieve what you did today by walking behind someone's shadow but by creating your own. Therefore, always strive to be yourself.

I will be sad to leave Austin College because I leave behind friends whom I consider to be family. But I refuse to look at this as a chapter closed in our lives but one that will remain open for many years to come. Words cannot express how honored and privileged I am to speak on your behalf today. All those painstaking hours at the American embassy, the sad feelings of leaving family behind, were all worth it for moments like these.

If there is anything you can take away from a liberal arts education it is that we must not rest on our laurels. The entities in life that elevate us are the very entities that can also bring us down. This dynamically changing world leaves no room for complacency. As stated by a one Laurence Peter, "A man doesn't know what he knows until he knows what he doesn't know." There are

times in life when you have to step out of your comfort zone in order to realize your capabilities but also to come to the realization that you are part of something bigger than yourself. I would like to leave you with a short story:

The story is about a little wave, bobbing along in the ocean, having a grand old time. He's enjoying the wind and the fresh air—until he notices the other waves in front of him, crashing against the shore.

'My God, this is terrible,' the wave says. 'Look what's going to happen to me!'

Then along comes another wave. It sees the first wave, looking grim, and it says to him, 'Why do you look so sad?'

The first wave says, 'You don't understand! We're all going to crash!'

All of us waves are going to be nothing! Isn't it terrible?'

The second wave says, 'No, you don't understand. You're not a wave, you're part of the ocean.'

I hope you can all find your ocean. May God bless you all in your future endeavors.