Welcome, families, parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters, guardians, and friends -- and most especially welcome to the new class of tigers, to the College of the Pacific graduates of 2017! My name is Rena Fraden, I am Dean of the College, the overseer of all academic departments and programs in the college, as well as the faculty who will teach and advise you. Like most of you, I am new to Pacific, this is my first orientation, and so I feel a very special connection to you as together we navigate the next four/few years and beyond. “Beyond” because you are now life long Pacific tigers, forever part of the alumni of Pacific who graduated over the past century and a half. As the oldest chartered institution of higher education in California, this College of arts and sciences is the foundation upon which the other undergraduate schools, in business, engineering, music, and education, as well as our graduate programs in law, pharmacy, and dentistry have been built, turning us into the University of the Pacific. All of those other schools are still dependent on us, the College of the Pacific, this liberal arts and sciences college, for its faculty and educational philosophy embedded here. The liberal arts philosophy is an ancient one: it is to learn both widely, deeply, and face to face. To become acquainted with the breadth of knowledge in the arts and sciences, to deeply investigate one branch of knowledge, and to do so face to face, in conversation with the wisest of teachers, and thus to be forever transformed by the experience.

Since arriving myself in Stockton in March of this year, along with becoming acquainted with the wineries and farmers markets of the region, the abundance of which is truly astonishing for someone who most recently arrived from the chilly northeast, I have had the great pleasure of discovering as much as I could about the faculty and academic programs here at the College, visiting labs and reading books by the faculty who will teach you, having as many face to face conversations as I could so that I might understand the lay of the land.

I will tell you just about one book I have just finished which I found fascinating – a book in two volumes, The Indianization of Lewis and Clark, by Professor William Swagerty of our history department, published last year in 2012. It tells the story of how in 1804, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark were sent by President Thomas Jefferson to find a way west by water, from St. Louis, up the Missouri River to the Columbia and on to the Pacific. Funded by the U.S. Government, this Corps of Discovery, as it was called, was made up of about thirty men, Anglo American, some products of mixed parentage – Indian and French/Spanish/Canadian -- and one Native American woman, Sacagawea, pregnant at the time, but who told her French husband who had been hired as part of the Corps that she wished to go with them because she wanted to see the Pacific Ocean. She too, then, was an explorer, intent on discovery and adventure. Sacagawea was a Shoshone, a western tribe, who had been kidnapped when she was young and brought further east to the Missouri River where she was living when Lewis and Clark came upon her and her husband. She was especially valuable because Lewis and Clark knew they would need a translator as they got further and further west and so they agreed to take her.

These army men, trappers, and traders, had no formal education; they were all self-taught in the ways of the wilderness. But Jefferson had Lewis live with him in the White House for two years
before he went on the trek and there Jefferson made sure Lewis had access to the best educated men at that time, doctors of medicine, botanists, and geographers to prepare him for the trip. Lewis always regretted the lack of a college education; he simply couldn’t afford it. And he was grateful for the education Jefferson provided him by putting him in touch with learned men. The western knowledge he brought with him to the west was indispensable. The careful maps he drew and the various plants and animals he described in his journal were models of western clarity. But Swagerty’s thesis is that this Corps of men would have never survived one winter, let alone two, without the help of Sacagawea and other Indians they met along the way. They were sheltered, shown what roots to eat and which to avoid, quite literally pointed in the right direction by the tribes they met, who knew what Lewis and Clark didn’t, that there was no river that would carry them up and over the Rockies, that the mountains were far higher and more dangerous than they had ever suspected. The fact that they survived – (and all but one of Corps survived and that man died from a ruptured appendix; he probably wouldn’t have been saved even were he in Washington D.C) -- was due to the fact that they jettisoned cultural norms and prejudices and adapted altogether to new circumstances: making moccasins and throwing away their uncomfortable and badly made leather army shoes. They learned by listening, accommodating, borrowing, and by doing so they transformed who they were and what this country was to become, for better and worse.

Founded less than fifty years after Lewis and Clark and the Corps made their trek, in 1851, the College of the Pacific situated in California would have been inconceivable to them in 1806. And yet the skills you need to navigate the modern world are not entirely different from those that Lewis and Clark needed to know. You must be open to new experiences; to be unafraid of what you will encounter; to be able to reflect on your experiences; to be nimble in speech and on paper; and, as a leader, always to watch out for others in your care. Lewis and Clark knew that the Shoshone language Sacagawea spoke would be useful to them. Should you learn Chinese or Spanish? A few words in each will no doubt help you and we can offer you both. Just as our faculty are engaged in discovery, writing books about the state of voting rights, discovering medical applications for certain kinds of drugs, creating graphic designs, documentaries, and screenplays, so too will you be given the chance to conduct original research, sift through various kinds of evidence, make original suggestions about a state of affairs, whether on a microscopic level or a global scale, and take up work locally or further abroad. In this college of arts and science made up of 160 faculty, there are at least 160 academic projects going on and I invite you to ask your professors what they are working on, to walk over to the bookstore or into my office and look at what our faculty have written.

We promise we will make you ready for the surprises you will certainly encounter in the next fifty years. For though we may know where the Rockies lie and how far high and wide they go, we can’t be sure which people we will be trading with in fifteen years, let alone fifty, or which languages it might be therefore necessary to learn.

It is a privilege for me to be here, to be part of your expedition. Congratulations to the families for your children’s successes; we know they wouldn’t be here without your support. And to the class of 2017 – may you safely risk and richly discover here at Pacific a new and wondrous land.

Rena Fraden