

## Opening Convocation 2012 Remarks - Jana Burkhardt

Good morning and welcome to this year's Opening Convocation! It is truly my honor to welcome new first-year and transfer students to Catawba, and to say "welcome back" to sophomores, juniors and seniors.

I don't know about you, but something about Catawba feels different than the last time I was here. As I sat down to figure out just what was making me feel this way, I thought about all the things that are changing.

For example, have you seen the banners that have been placed on the back of Hoke Hall and the gym? They shout "welcome to Indian Territory!" I am looking forward to the continuing effort to make the appearance of the campus memorable to everyone who walks around our home.

Maybe you didn't notice the new banners, but I am sure you noticed the changes to Catawba's cafeteria. It's a truly remarkable transformation. I've heard students mention that it looks like "a five star hotel – and that the food tastes like it, too." I've overheard other students compliment how easy and wonderful the staff is to work with. Chartwells: we appreciate everything you have done to renovate the cafeteria and your on-going commitment to nourishing our bodies while we're here. You have provided the campus with a huge challenge to engage in improvements elsewhere and we can't thank you enough.

These are just a few of the changes that have taken place over the summer. All of these new and different things stemmed from the traditional Catawba passion for making Catawba better for the next generation of students. The passion hasn't changed, but there is a clearly revitalized energy among our students, staff and faculty members. Have you felt it?

This positive energy I have felt on campus in the last few weeks is rooted in the great opportunities that have been presented to each one of us. The opportunities have been created by President Lewis, and faculty and staff members. But the most important group that is making changes is you. Catawba's students have surprised many groups of people in the efforts they have made to improve the experiences here, both academically and socially. It is clear that we have a special place for Catawba in our hearts, and we want so many more people to feel the same way.

I am sure you have heard about the photography contest at this point, but in case you haven't ..... We will be adding a little bit of flair to the student center by adding your talents to the walls. Through September 16<sup>th</sup> we are encouraging students to submit timeless pictures that help illustrate Catawba pride. We are really excited to be able to display the students' work in all types of mediums. It will be your chance as students to make the student center look the way you want, by the photos you submit.

One of the other ventures that the students shaped is a unique type of scholarship. Students who are attending academic conferences understand how important learning outside of the classroom is, and networking with others outside of the Catawba circle. SGA will be awarding financial assistance for students going to academic conferences. These funds will help students with registration fees, travel expenses, and hotel costs. Applications can be found online. If your academic conference takes place

this semester, then the applications are due September 14<sup>th</sup>. I sincerely hope that many of you will want to travel to conferences to present your work, and I know faculty members will be happy to help you find venues at which to do this.

Both the photography contest and the travel funds were student-generated and student-led initiatives. We have the ability to make changes to Catawba for ourselves and for future generations. Let me urge you one more time to get involved in the campus life academically, socially, and physically. Even if you aren't ready to dive into a club or extracurricular, know that you can and do make a difference by simply putting your trash and recycling in the appropriate place, or bringing a suggestion or concern to the right person.

If we all work together we can build a reputation that will encourage people to come to Catawba for years to come. I am looking forward to a great year filled with making positive changes, and a strengthening of the Catawba family with all of its new members!

I would like to quickly take the time to introduce a few important members of the Student Government. The Executive Board is comprised of myself as president, Christian Crifasi as Vice President, Leah Constan-Tatos as Treasurer, and Justin Smith as Secretary. I would also like to introduce Madison Kennedy who is the chair of the special events committee, Joe Peterson who is the chair of the parking committee, DJ Colson who is the chair of the student issues committee, and Olivia Myers who is the chair of the food committee. While we will serve as your leaders, we cannot maintain the energy I've been talking about without your help. Please become active participants in the Catawba experience this year.