

Dr. Rankin's Charge

1 Start strong and fast at college. Go to every class your first semester, turn in your assignments on time, and commit right now to working hard that first year. If you do, you will be operating from a position of strength. If you don't, you will dig yourself a deep hole. Maybe with lots of hard work you will dig out of it. Maybe you won't. Why put yourself in such a miserable position? Start fast. Stay focused. Be committed to success from the outset.

2 Hang in there! Do not be surprised if your adjustment to college during the first semester is difficult emotionally or socially. You are well prepared academically and will do well if you apply yourself. But don't assume that you must be blissfully happy from the first day in college for it to be ok. Part of life is making it work when it doesn't feel so great. A verse from Romans in the Bible says, "We rejoice in suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." If you experience suffering, do not go it alone. Use every counselor, friend, text message, teammate, soul mate, sensitive stranger, and stuffed animal you can find to make it through. Build a support network of family, friends, and professionals to get through the suffering and onto the hope. Work to be happy too. Join clubs. Exercise. Enjoy a healthy social life. For some of us,

happiness comes naturally. For many of us, it is earned. Don't give up and don't be surprised next year if the happiness comes gradually. Remember, struggle and pain are not necessarily bad things if they prepare the way for better things ahead. Hang in there and stay hopeful!

3 Your are not smarter than the system. College is full of hoops and hurdles that you must jump through or over to graduate. If you think that deadlines and attendance policy requirements don't apply to you, but only to the slow learners and less gifted, get ready for an ice bucket dose of reality. Get ready for some frustrated professor or some angry registrar to teach you a lesson. My best advice is to follow the rules, read the syllabus, and do what they ask you to do. They don't care how smart you are if you don't do what they say.

4 Cherish and maintain the friendships you have made at GDS and those you will make in college. They will bring joy to your life. Texting,



Photo courtesy of The Gaston Gazette

Facebook, and whatever else is the most current, newfangled social media du jour let you stay connected. Stay connected to old friends. I don't know if the person with the most true friends wins in life, but his or her life is definitely the sweetest.

Finally, I end with the same invitation I give every year. I invite you to return to this area after you finish your education and begin your careers. We want you to go away now, but come back after your education is complete. Come back home to a place where everybody knows your name and you are part of a network of successful people who care about you and want you to join them in leading responsible, productive lives. Whether it is Gastonia, Lake Wylie, Shelby, Belmont, or Charlotte, this place is alive and we need your help extending and enlarging its vitality. The Charlotte region's economy is one of the strongest in the country. This is the land of opportunity. Come back home.