



THIEL COLLEGE
Office of the President

President's Opening Convocation Address
Thursday, August 27, 2026 @ 11:30 am
Susan Traverso, President

Good morning, Tomcats!

It is such a pleasure to be here with you this morning.

Thank you, Cooper, for your leadership of SGA — and to the entire SGA leadership team, thank you for serving your classmates and strengthening this College. You set the tone for what engaged student leadership looks like at Thiel.

And a warm welcome to Dean VB. It is wonderful to have you at Thiel. Your enthusiasm and positive energy are already making a difference, and I look forward to supporting you as you advocate for our students in your role as Dean of Students.

New students...Welcome!

This is it. Your first official event as a member of the Thiel College community.

Take a deep breath. Look around.

You're here.

You've just started a brand-new chapter. And with it comes a lot of new:

- New classes.
- New friends.

- New opportunities.
- New challenges.

For some of you, that's exciting. For others, it's... a little overwhelming. Both are normal reactions to being in a new environment.

What matters is this: you made the brave decision to be here. You stepped onto The Tomcat Way.

Here's how it works:

- First — you *explore*. Try things. Take classes outside your comfort zone. Join a club or a team.
- Then — you *envision*. Start to see where you're headed — your goals, your passions, your people.
- Next — you *lead*. Step up. Make a difference here.
- Finally — you *launch*. Leave Thiel ready to shape the world.

Right now, you're at the very start. You don't have to know your major. You don't have to have your life plan locked in.

All you have to do is show up — curious, open, and willing to try.

Now, let's talk about what it took to get here.

Not everyone gets this chance. People believed in you — your family, your teachers, your coaches, our alumni — and *you* worked hard to earn it.

That's worth remembering.

Take the time to express gratitude to those who helped you get here. And as you get to know the faculty and staff at Thiel, you will find new people who will support and encourage you along the way. Don't wait until graduation to thank them. Show your gratitude as they walk with you on the Tomcat Way.

The title of my remarks today is *Promises to Keep*.

As you embark on the Tomcat Way, I want to ask you to make some promises — to yourself and to this community.

First, promise to be open to new ideas and experiences. Show curiosity. Explore. When you feel yourself wanting to stay comfortable in the way you've always thought or believed, push yourself to consider the world in a new and different way.

Likewise, when you find yourself wanting to hang around only with people like yourself — with your same interests — push yourself to connect with those who are different. Be open and curious about their ideas and life experiences.

Second, promise to be kind — to others and to yourself. This doesn't mean you have to agree with everyone, but it does mean you must respect one another. Think about it: when you experience kindness from others, it brings joy, doesn't it? Show that same kindness to others — and be kind to yourself, too. Don't get down on yourself over things that don't matter. Step into that space of joy and kindness. You'll find a lot of it at Thiel. Our students relish being in a place so different from high school in its kindness and respect for others.

Third, promise to work hard — in your classes, on the playing field, on the stage, and in your clubs and organizations. There are so many opportunities in college,

but you have to work hard to take advantage of them. Being casual, unengaged, or indifferent doesn't work here. It might have worked in high school, but it will not work in college. To be successful and get the most out of Thiel, you'll need to show up, engage, and deliver what is asked of you. I know you can do it.

Now... just as I'm asking you to keep promises, the College has promises to keep as well.

First, Thiel promises to invest in you. The scholarships you received to attend are just the beginning of our investment. Thiel will provide talented faculty and a dynamic curriculum to help you learn. Activities, campus organizations, teams, travel, and special events are all here to support and engage you. Students who are engaged in college learn more — and find greater success.

Second, we promise to support you in finding that success. We will nudge you when you are struggling, and we will push you when you need to try harder. And this support won't just be about academics — it will be about your personal growth and development. We will walk alongside you as you make important decisions about your major, your involvement on campus, your career path, your ethics, and your values — how you want to live your life.

Third, we promise to create a campus environment that inspires interaction and connection. Whether in the Spence Center lobby or in our newly renovated outdoor courtyard, we want you to feel inspired, comfortable, and ready to spark conversation and make friends. We will not only design spaces to create an engaging campus — we will intentionally design *experiences* in those spaces that

nurture engagement, foster interaction, and inspire reflection and a sense of belonging.

And how exciting it will be, over this next year, to watch the construction of the new Olympus Athletic and Recreation Center. This new building will give not just our student-athletes, but *all* Thiel students, more space for wellness, activity, and re-creation — making ourselves new through re-creation.

And so today is a day when we think about the promises we are making — *your* promises to be open, to be kind, and to work hard — and the *College's* promises to invest in you, to support you, and to create an engaging living and learning environment on our campus.

Keeping those promise will return us again to Passavant Center for graduation.

In only a short number of years, I look forward to seeing you back here — in your cap and gown — walking across this stage.

Your name will be in the Commencement Program.

You'll be called forward. Your name will be announced.

Your friends and family will be cheering.

Your faculty will be watching with pride at all you've accomplished.

And you will receive your Thiel degree.

That's the vision I want you to hold onto — especially on the tough days.

We promise that the College will invest in you and support you as you realize your vision of graduating. You promise to be open to learning, to engage with kindness in the Thiel community, and to work hard.

Together, we can make your *dream* of graduating from Thiel a reality. (And there is a difference, isn't there, between a wish and a dream — a wish is something you hope for; a dream is something you commit to and work toward.)

Our journey together began when you first inquired about joining the Thiel community, when you first stepped onto this campus. Now, as members of this community, you are on the Tomcat Way and you are moving forward.

So welcome to Thiel.

Welcome to The Tomcat Way.

Let's get started.

Let's go, Tomcats!