

Opening Convocation Remarks

Dayna Oscherwitz

The poet Rumi once wrote: “Two there are who are never satisfied, the lover of the world and the lover of knowledge.” This quote seems to contrast knowledge, both intellectual and spiritual knowledge, and an interest in the world. Thus, Rumi appears to suggest that the path to knowledge involves turning away from the world.

Sufism, however, which informs Rumi’s writing, is built around non-dualities and not dichotomies, and it does not accept that there exists a division between the physical and the spiritual, nor does it regard knowledge as separate from the world. Sufism holds, in fact, that the physical world and the spiritual realm touch one another, and it also holds that the only path to enlightenment is a path through the world. Therefore, I would suggest that the real meaning of Rumi’s quote is that those who choose knowledge over the world, or the world over knowledge, fail to understand that these two things are inseparable, and that to try to pursue one without the other is to fail.

This afternoon, you take your first steps into the SMU community. This is a place where knowledge and the world are deeply intertwined. As you begin your journey, I would urge you to remember Rumi’s words and to pursue knowledge, not for the sake of a grade or a requirement or a future paycheck, but for the sake of expanding self-knowledge and becoming closer to the world. Take courses in history, or literature, or religious studies, master a second or third language, study abroad. Moreover, don’t be satisfied with knowledge, look for ways to act upon the world, get involved in the SMU community or the City of Dallas, do an internship or an engaged learning project, participate in alternative Spring Break. If you start and continue your time at SMU in pursuit of knowledge of self and the world, you will leave here as an integrated person, a World Changer, ready for the challenges that the world will inevitably bring you. On behalf of the faculty, I wish you success on your journey to becoming world changers. Know that we are here to guide and support you. And we, like those in Rumi’s quote will not be satisfied until we see your pursuit of knowledge lead you, four years from now, into the world to fulfill your destiny as Mustangs!