

Arts and Sciences: Choose Your Own Adventure

Bethany Benson and Matthew Powell

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Hello, freshmen, faculty, staff, and President Troha. Welcome to Juniata College! Together, Dr. Matthew Powell, a scientist, and I, Bethany Benson, an artist, are honored to speak to you, Juniata's incoming class of 2017.

By a show of hands, how many of you are familiar with the children's book series Choose Your Own Adventure? For those of you who are unfamiliar with the concept, everyone who reads one of these books begins on the same page—page 1. As the reader progresses, the story comes to a section where a crucial decision must be made before the story continues. As with any decision, the outcomes are many. The bottom line is that the outcome of the story is in the hands of the reader—the participant, not the author. In many ways, this concept is analogous to the college selection process. I can tell you that you have made a great choice for the development of your own individual stories by choosing Juniata College. Personalized POEs, astounding study-abroad experiences, and an intricate and unique student body are yours to investigate at Juniata.

Matthew Powell: This is a special place. Welcome! It's a place full of new choices to make, new adventures to have, new pages to turn. It's a place where you can choose a career and spend time learning it and practicing it, so that your life's work can make a difference in the world. It's a place where you can not just learn what to learn, but how to learn. It's a place to be inspired, to forge friendships, loves, and values. It's a place to have fun. It's a home base of support while you explore the world and become a global citizen.

Bethany Benson: An education from Juniata means many things, but, above all, it means freedom and choice. It's a place where you are empowered to keep choosing your adventure. You may have chosen Juniata because of a particular interest or talent. You may have chosen Juniata because of the flexibility the curriculum allows. You may have chosen Juniata because you had the opportunity to meet and engage with a faculty member or a coach that inspired you.

Powell: Whatever pathway you took to get to this page of your story, it has led you to a new page, with new choices. And having gotten here, you might be wondering what the next step is, what choices you'll make now.

Benson: So now what? Here you sit, eager, anxious, nervous, and hungry—have you seen the new Baker? Holy cow—you guys are lucky! Physical hunger aside, consider the possibilities that lie before you. New friends, new mentors, new hang-outs, new—well, you’ve got to figure some of that out for yourself. Unexpected turns will titillate, twist, and torment you, but you, as Juniata students, will flourish because of the support you will gain from your peers, your instructors, and the community that can be found in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. While enrolled at Juniata, you are not encouraged to think outside of the box, you are expected to do so!

Powell: One of your next big decisions will be which POE to choose. The best POE, I think it goes without saying, is one of the sciences. You choose this adventure because you’re excited to learn how the world works. Excited to test hypotheses. Excited to culture bacteria, synthesize compounds, identify rocks and birds and trees.

Benson: Actually, some of the most dynamic POEs are in the arts. You're excited to be in an environment that allows your creativity to flow—one that encourages you to challenge and be challenged. Art courses require you to physically interact with materials and increase your mastery of skill sets. You find yourself balanced when working in one of the studios, engaged in the manipulation of media to communicate big ideas.

Powell: You’re here to work in a lab and out in the field, gather data, make graphs, experiment, and analyze. Ready to sport safety glasses, a lab coat, and closed toe shoes. Ready to mess with everyone’s head in the psychology lab. Ready to gross everyone out at dinner by talking about what you dissected that day.

Benson: No, no, no, you’re here to plunge into a project that you aren’t sure how you will complete – you allow the work to inform you. You desire critical feedback and would rather talk about your shortcomings than your successes. Think about it. Almost everything—every bottle of shampoo, every test tube, every microphone, musical instrument, television, video game, and cereal box—has been designed. This is our visual culture, and it would not be possible without artists!

Powell: Sure, but the major problems of today’s society require a scientific understanding of the world. Like global warming, energy costs and resource wars, advances in technology, and ways of collecting and using big data.

Benson: And how has that information been distributed through time? Science has only been part of the human story. Illustrations stand side by side with the big data. Cave paintings and Venus figurines directly impact our understanding of human civilization, back to the ice age—sorry, Matt, the Late Pleistocene. These are basic examples of how art has shaped our understanding of human existence.

Powell: Look at the successes of science: We know the structure of the solar system. We understand gravity. We know why there are earthquakes and volcanoes.

Benson: We engage an audience. We see and generate beauty. We seek truths that cannot be put into words.

Powell: Science has photographed the outer limits of our universe.

Benson: Art shapes monumental change in our comprehension of life and humanity.

Powell: We discovered atoms, DNA, electricity, oxygen, engines, and evolution!

Benson: Da Vinci's anatomical studies, Muybridge's *Horse In Motion* photographs, Andy Goldsworthy's environmental art!

Powell: Scientists explained gravity and figured out that microorganisms cause disease. We discovered Neanderthals and trilobites!

Benson: Aesthetics are necessary to human beings. We decorate our homes, our yards, and our bodies to define ourselves as individuals. Art impacts our lives daily!

Powell: [overlapping] At its core, science is about discovering how the world works, using data and logical reasoning. The work of science uncovers the very order and structure of nature by making and testing predictions. And the sciences are integral to the advancement of medicine, technology, and economics.

Scientists ask the big questions and supply answers about complex systems. Social sciences, natural sciences, any empirical study, all of it is founded on detailed observations of the world. And then theories are constructed around those observations. But science isn't just the dry accumulation of facts. Skill, creativity, and passion drive the scientist.

Benson: [overlapping] At its core, art is expressive. From the Lascaux cave paintings to the performances of modern artists, the common thread is the communication of ideas reached through a confluence of aesthetics, perspective, and creativity. Artists generate reaction through the manipulation of ideas, materials, and participation.

Artists ask the big questions and supply answers through a non-traditional lens. Landscapes, architecture, botanical illustrations, photography—these are detailed observations of the world that have increased our understanding of ancient cultures, life, and humanity. Skill, creativity, and passion drive the artist, who seeks ways to question authority, making an underdog perspective become pervasive.

Powell: Wait, scientists question authority. They replace the old theories, and over time we gain a new and better understanding of the world.

Benson: Artists do the same thing. And they discover beauty in the world and provide a platform for various perspectives to unite through an object.

Powell: Scientists discover beauty in the world around them, too, as they explore it. And their work improves the human condition.

Benson: Artists also explore. They investigate design principles, materials, and aesthetic theories to improve the human condition. So, scientists must work in collaboration, like artists, sharing results and ideas through publications, conferences, and conversation.

Powell: Right, artists work in collaboration, too, with other artists and other disciplines. Art requires participation from others. So, really what we're saying is that art and science—

Benson: —aren't totally different things. Artists can learn from science—

Powell: —and scientists can learn from art. Science, art, business, communication, languages, politics, everything—we're all just trying to understand the same world, with each other.

Benson: That sounds rather liberal for a scientist, but, when put that way, I have to concur. Today's culture depends on the knowledge and study of various disciplines to reach answers, communicate ideas, and work toward the collective future of ourselves and our species. At Juniata, your choices, your adventure will be multi-faceted.

Powell: So all those special things about Juniata aren't really what make it special here. There are other small colleges, in small towns, with bright students, offering the same majors. And it's great that there are all these different adventures to choose here. But what makes Juniata special is that regardless of how different our adventures might be, all of us have landed here on the same page, together right now, as a community. And no other community will tell the same story, because no other community has the same unique combination of us that exists right now. Juniata is special because it has you. And we are enriched and magnified by having you here.

Benson: The family you develop at Juniata will stick with you for life. As you progress beyond the walls of this institution, the people with whom you have forged relationships want you to succeed. In your career, in your personal lives, in the development of your future families—wherever these adventures may lead you, the education you receive from Juniata will be a foundation that is strengthened by the diversity of the classes you take, the people you meet, and the experiences you have, both in Huntingdon and at our many study abroad sites.

Powell: Good families are made of people who like spending time with each other and are interested in each person. They want to learn about each other and not just themselves. Here we ask you to take courses whose purpose is not just to prepare you for an interesting and engaging career, but to prepare you for an interesting and engaging life—a life with others. That's what we mean by a liberal arts curriculum at a liberal arts college. It's what families do.

Benson: You might not always enjoy your sister's dance recital or your brother's soccer game, but you go anyway because it's what bonds you. It makes you part of a family. With this in mind, each of you should have some kind of deep encounter with science...and public speaking...

Powell: ...and a deep encounter with art.

Benson: The real strength of this is that when we learn from each other, we can do unique and amazing things here.

Powell: Not as an individual adventure, but as a collective adventure.

Both: An adventure that no one else can have, because no one else in the world has the same combination of us.

Benson: The

Powell: End.