Brenda Brueggemann, Faculty Speaker, 2012 Convocation:

A Handshake

[Note: all boldfaced words will be signed—in ASL—as I speak]

Good morning! Here’s my offering to you: a huge, humble, honest, imaginative, and open WELCOME to Buckeye Nation.

Thank you, Provost Alutto, for that wonderful professional introduction. Let me begin with a more personal introduction:

I am a first generation college student—the first in my own family and the first, and only, of my grandmother’s nine grandchildren—to go to college. I grew up in a tiny rural western Kansas farm community on the Kansas-Colorado border. My grandparents were immigrants—Volga Germans, Mennonites, who came to the U.S. in the late 1910s to farm wheat. And there’s this too: for all intent and purposes—medically and socially—I am deaf.

I entered college in 1976 (so, yes, that would be 36 years ago!), at the University of Kansas, at the dawn of P.L. 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Law). Entering college with this new federal legislation at my back, however, I had no idea what it meant—not at large, not in principle, and definitely not even more specifically for me in my educational and public life. As I worked my way through college in the late 1970s, I was part of the first generation of “mainstreamed” deaf students, making up our survival and success as we went along. And then too: I finished my Ph.D. and took my first faculty position (here at The Ohio State University) in 1992. Now, I know this date
well because I began my faculty career when my son was 3 weeks old. And that son, Karl, is now a junior at OSU…. So my time here is easily marked by his very life: he will turn 20 in just about a week. Of course, another major piece of legislation was also just on the horizon in 1992: the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 had just been passed. And once again, as I set out on my new faculty life, I had no idea what that significant piece of legislation meant—not at large, not in principle, and definitely not more specifically for me in my daily work and public life. So I was, yet again, making it up as I went along.

But here is what I am NOT making up: this university-- this great place of offering, hugeness, humility, honesty, imagination, and openness—has been a place of deep and wide flourishing for me. It will be so for you as well. Of that, I have no doubts.

Now: I use TWO “American” languages, with varying degrees of fluency—English (the American version, even yes, the Kansas version now inflected with Ohio dialect), as well as American Sign Language, a language we offer, with considerable popularity, here at OSU with . It is in BOTH languages that I want to suggest some ways that you might maximize that flourishing for yourself…. And I ask you to perform these signs/words WITH me so that we might make, as it were, a kind of shared “hand-shake” to forge our flourishing here, together, for the next four (or more) years at The Ohio State University.

O: OFFER. Offer yourself. Serve. Volunteer. Give to greater goods. Find organizations, events, causes, and initiatives that need you… and you will end up finding that you also need them.
But also: take what is offered. And oh my—you are going to find those offerings nothing short of infinite here at Ohio State. Keep your eyes, soul, spirit, and heart open. So much can pour in. You can take so much from what is offered here. For example: always make a personal contact with your instructors. We have a world-class faculty here—and that includes world-class graduate students who may be serving as teaching assistants. Make good use of the office hours they offer.

H: here I have 3 signs, forming much like the 3 parts of the letter H: the “goalposts” horizontally and then the bridging piece, vertically:

Be HUGE

Be HUMBLE

And as a bridge between those two: Be HONEST.

When I asked the members of Sphinx, OSU’s Senior Honorary Society, for “words of wisdom” to offer in my remarks today, one of them said, simply: “Go Huge or Go Home.”

And I will humbly echo him: Be HUGE. The Ohio State University is huge itself (have you noticed?) It will not only allow for your hugeness but it will give it space, it will reward it. Take huge steps. Now.

Yet too: be HUMBLE, even in that hugeness. Humility is a grace.

And it is HONESTY—with yourself, with others—that will help bridge the space between HUGE and HUMBLE.

I: IMAGINATIVE. Be imaginative. Imagination is, at its core, yours—it issues from the I. Let it fly. This university will, if you will it, provide both wings and a runway for your imagination. So, Let it go. Let it be. Imagine.
O: OPEN. Open yourself. Some of you—not all of you—have arrived here thinking you know what your major or your professional goal is. And many of you come with a strong set of values, beliefs, and convictions that already make up your core. Gotta love conviction. I sure do. But still: be open. Use that conviction and that core to provide you a foundation. . . then open up and listen to other things that might call you. Most of all, be open to others—engage people who might be somewhat (or a lot) different from you but who also have so much to offer—they are huge, they are humble, they are honest and they are imaginative too.

So, here is our handshake again:

Offer.

Huge. Humble. Honest

Imaginative.

Open.

O-H-I-O.

This is the handshake I extend to you—as we—begin anew in August 2012 at The Ohio State University.