Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen, Schreiner Faculty, students, and friends. I could not be more honored and excited to be here today to talk with you, it is truly a privilege plus I get to miss a few days of work. I have not been back to the Schreiner Campus since I graduated back in 2008. Being here today, seeing all the new faces and changes to the campus made me realize I really should get out more often. I would not be here today if it was not for the phone call I received a few months ago. When I first picked up the phone I thought to myself, "did I miss a tuition payment or did I forget to return a school book?" Luckily it was neither, I was invited here today to speak to you about "the art of battling giants" and finding the courage to face adversity. As it turned out, I had one last reading assignment, so here are my giants...

My first giant started for me back in 2004 when I ventured from Southern California to the Big state of Texas to get my degree in mathematics and to be a member of the SU women's basketball team. Living away from family, a new environment and college life are all things you have to adjust to plus I had to learn how to incorporate the term "y'all" in my every day conversations. Did you know that SU woman's basketball team held a longstanding record? It was the NCAA All-Time consecutive game losing streak. For three straight years the Schreiner women's basketball team lost 83 games in a row. We lost 83, 83 games without winning! Yes I know you all are thinking that is pretty impressive. You are probably wondering why
play basketball for Schreiner? I thought Schreiner was a great academic school located on a beautiful campus. I wanted to play basketball and have the opportunity to make a positive impact in a small school instead of just being another number in a large school. I am sure that the win-loss ratio turned away some who were considering coming to this school to play basketball. It was actually a reason I wanted to come to this school. I figure, there are two ways of viewing this situation, either you will be a part of a losing team, or the view I held, I will be a part of a team who can overcome adversity and triumph together. As I began the journey and we started practicing together I felt very small when we looked at our upcoming game schedule. I felt like David staring up at Goliath.

If we look back at the story of David and Goliath, we encounter an example of what happens when ordinary people confront giants and are victorious: David the underdog, was a young shepherd of small stature, no armor, no combat training, and the only weapon he had was a sling and some stones. Goliath, the powerhouse, was literally a giant. He stood above all others and when he went into battle he always walked away and his enemy was always slain. He was a seasoned warrior with superior armor, sword and shield. With all reasonable odds against him, powered by courage and faith David defeated Goliath. Now that is the story. Is the plot the only important part? I think not. I believe that the lesson to be learned comes from trying to step into David's sandals. Imagine that your small country is at war and at the
brink of defeat. Imagine that all of your warriors have been challenged by your enemy's greatest warrior and that all of your soldiers are so afraid that they will not show their face. Your name is David and you are from that country, you do not know war, but you speak up and accept the challenge. When you speak up everybody laughs at you, they dismiss you and tell you to go away. Ask yourself, what would make you do this? Standing up for what you believe in? Feeling destined to be great? Wanting a challenge? To me the most important lesson to be learned is, that the choice you make when you are face-to-face with the giant will define you. That you commit to the challenge ahead, even when you are scared and unsure. How you believe in yourself and trust that you are good enough. That is what I take away from this story, of David looking up at a giant and not backing down. Channeling the courage and example of David, the SU women's basketball team had to fight a giant that seemed ten times bigger; just imagine us playing against what seemed to be WNBA players. The number of games won or lost was irrelevant, but the opportunity to be on a team with individuals all fighting for the same goal and mission was what made the challenge worth it for me. Critics were all around us, but the community and SU family never lost hope in our abilities even if we lost by double digits, which was often, but this made us even more determined to beat the giant.

Unfortunately to some of the individuals on the team, winning seemed insurmountable, they lost faith in being victorious and gave up. I never
defined us as "losers." No matter how bad we lost, we continued as a team to take steps forward and have faith and courage in our ability to win. Are you wondering how we broke the losing streak? How we finally defeated this giant? Well, it was not magic, it was not a rain dance, and it was not lucky underwear; trust me I went through several pairs that season. It was our last game of the season and we had one last shot to break our losing streak. We got out there, played our hearts out, played together, had a great game, and won. When the final buzzer rang, I looked up and the score was 75 to 69. It was an awesome feeling ending the season on a high note and knowing we had created an unforgettable mark on Schreiner because we broke the streak and defeated the giant. We had made so much progress from the first game of the season to the end; there was no way I was going to give up. Throughout the rest of my time at Schreiner, the women's basketball team went on to win even more games and the other teams had to bring their A game and fans had a little more suspense. We were a team whose character was built by adversity and that experience made us the strong individuals we are today. We stood face-to-face with a giant and walked away triumphantly. In the last six years members from the team have successfully completed their master degrees, became successful lawyers, teachers, coaches, and have promising military careers. What we went through the previous 83 games was hard, difficult, embarrassing and taxing, but the thought crosses my mind. Goliath is remembered as a fallen giant, David the victor. Can you imagine being the team that we beat on that
fateful night? As we were celebrating, the other team had to contemplate losing to the worst team in recent history!

In Malcolm Gladwell's book David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants, he said, "Courage is not something that you already have that makes you brave when the tough times start. Courage is what you earn when you've been through the tough times and you discover they aren't so tough after all." As you go through life, you will experience adversity and disadvantages that make you feel like giving up or you have been defeated. Recall the story I mentioned about David and Goliath, David had several disadvantages; his small size, lack of a battle weapon, no armor, no battle experience, and no support from others. However, David was successful because he utilized his advantages of agility and speed, faith and courage to defeat Goliath. Mr. Gladwell also said: "The same qualities that give giants their strength could create flipside of great weakness." Being an underdog changes people in ways we may miss and fail to appreciate. It can produce opportunities and make the impossible seem possible. For every difficult hardship life throws at you, you'll learn skills everyone else will wish they had. I love the saying, "If it was easy, everybody would do it." If you always have it good you will not appreciate good times. If you have to work hard for something you will appreciate it. If you are given it, you will not value it. As my time came to an end at Schreiner, I learned that each obstacle and challenge I had faced helped shape my character, taught me
perseverance, and showed me that with faith and courage you can overcome even the unthinkable. I feel sad that others may never know the sweet taste of a victory hard won. I feel blessed that I was part of the slaying of this giant.

I took the next step forward in battling giants and dedicated myself to serving my Country by becoming an Officer in the United States Marine Corps. My journey to become an Officer has been one of my giants. But I have come to learn that giants are not only all around you, they can be within you as well. An Officer is the leader of the unit, the one whose decisions can make the mission successful, or get someone killed. Some believe that you are born a leader, I strongly disagree. Leadership has 3 elements, first - a task required, second - a group of people that need to accomplish the task, third - a person who is responsible for the accomplishment of the task and the welfare of the group. Leadership is not complicated, it is easy. Now saying it is easy does not mean that it does not require all of your mental and physical capabilities or that it does not require effort. I would venture to say that most things are easy; all they require are effort and dedication. Being responsible for a mission and the Marines assigned under you is the most stressful experience ever. But, it is not difficult. I was not born a leader, I was made one. A Leader must be trusted by their subordinates that they will take care of them and be there with them the whole way. It is easy but it requires all you have. And in return I
learned through experience The Marine Corps' 14 leadership traits and 11 leadership principles. Qualities of thought and action that we as Marines must demonstrate in our daily interactions enabling us to lead with honor, on the battlefield and in the community. My experiences at Schreiner helped develop several of these traits and principles that the Marine Corps believes in and desires. Furthermore, they have helped me be successful in defeating giants in my Marine Corps career.

In 2012, I found myself face to face with my biggest giant to that point—my deployment to Afghanistan. I was scared when I got on that airplane to leave for Afghanistan. I wondered if I would ever walk on American soil again. I wondered if I would ever see my mom and dad again. If I came back would I be injured? Would I be different, would war change me? I had no idea what would come, but I knew that I had the best training ever; I had my teammates by my side and the honor of America to uphold. My team was responsible for an area near the Iran border. We were strangers to the local Afghans, coming into their village to help fight alongside of them. Our mission was complex; it was an unfamiliar environment where the enemy was trying to kill us and on a daily basis we had to balance mission accomplishment and still bring our Marines and Soldiers home safe. But we knew we had to persevere in order to help the people stand up on their own and live a better life. We had bad days where sometimes it seemed as if some were losing hope in our ability to defeat the giant. However, I never
stopped believing in the team and that enabled me to lead everyone through 9 months of ups, downs, losses, and wins. By stepping up to this giant I was able to help create a school for the local children and open a women’s health clinic. Seeing the excitement and curiosity of the children going to school on the first day is a gift I will never forget. Having a local villager come and thank us for the medical care and facility that helped them, that "thank you" I do not think I'll get again. Through our courage, faith, and commitment to the mission at hand, we left the battlefield successfully and the people of the local village were better positioned to battle their own giant.

You will face giants in life. You will, whether you want to or not. It is not required that you take the step to battle the giant, you can run away, you can hide and not answer the call. I can attest that the skills you will develop here at Schreiner will help you build a solid foundation to be able to face that adversity when it does happen. Hopefully that foundation will give you the courage to take the first step and seek out challenges. Taking a step forward is easy, it is no more difficult if you are by yourself or if there is a giant standing in front of you. I challenge you to be like David and take that initial step and keep moving forward. I challenge you to take YOUR step when you are scared like I did to get on that plane to war and unknown. For the payment of inaction is nothing, but the reward of the challenge is accomplishment. In closing, I would like to thank you all for coming here
today and listening to my story. Schreiner has a special place in my heart because through my experiences it has made me the person I am today. I wish you all well and I hope that your battle with giants will be successful.