



Welcome to Aquinas College,

First and foremost, I understand how processing the important transition from High School to College can be exciting and overwhelming at the same time. Don't worry. During Orientation, our Student Affairs team – staff, faculty, and student leaders alike -- will do everything we can to facilitate your adjustment to college life.

In the meantime, you may be asking yourself, "What can I do to prepare for the Fall?" We hope you will be thinking about how you can envision yourself as a successful College student, someone who takes responsibility for his or her own education. In order to facilitate this process, we are inviting you to spend time reading *This I Believe II*, edited by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman, our 2011 Common Reading book.

The AQ Common Reading Program reflects our belief that shared reading experiences create a rigorous academic environment grounded in communal acts of critical reading, reflection, and discussion. To further this goal, we have selected *This I Believe, II*, a text which models these values. The "This I Believe" project began in the 1950s, when Edward R. Murrow asked Americans from all walks of life to write about "the core values and beliefs that guide their daily lives." These essays were then broadcast on NPR. Revitalizing and updating the project, the editors assert "that the power of the *This I Believe* essay goes well beyond writing down one's belief. It is the *sharing* and *listening* that provide us opportunities to understand one another and respect beliefs that are different from our own." We believe that this type of critical reading and thinking is at the heart of a solid liberal arts education. To this end, as a First-Year student, you will have the opportunity to discuss the book during Orientation, write a "This I Believe" essay in your GE 101: Inquiry and Expression course, and participate in other themed programming on Campus. Reading the book is the first step.

While you may have been assigned "summer reading" in High School, this assignment is different. Our expectation is that you will not only read the book but will think deeply about what these essays suggest about how "average," and in some cases exceptional, Americans ground their values in everyday beliefs that give their lives meaning. Some essays may resonate with what you already think; however, others may challenge you to think about issues from a radically different perspective.

Use this reading time to reflect on your personal beliefs and to take seriously the challenges and opportunities presented by College academics. I hope you will see this as an opportunity to challenge yourself to read and think independently as your first step toward achieving academic success at Aquinas. Over the summer, take a minute to investigate the AQ Common Reading Experience website -- <http://www.aquinas.edu/reading/> -- where you can follow the links and read essays written by other Aquinas community members including students, faculty, and staff members. Reading these essays provides a glimpse into the unique and vibrant community that you are about to join.

I look forward to meeting you and your family on campus. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy reading *This I Believe, II* and have a great summer.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jennifer R. Dawson
Associate Dean of Student Affairs