

Comments to the Graduating Class

University of Michigan-Dearborn

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Today I have an enjoyable task, to greet those of you in the graduating class (and your families) on behalf of the faculty. This is a pleasant assignment, not least because I know how committed the faculty were to seeing that you received a meaningful, quality education, and I know how pleased they are at your success. It is doubly pleasant because of the contribution you made to the educational process. For those of us who teach here, there is a reward in the type of students we encounter. Many of you have worked long hours to cover your educational expenses. You live in a real world and you bring that reality to the classroom. We faculty learn from you even as you learn from us.

Now I have done my duty. I have welcomed you. But if you are as bright as I know you are, you realize I am not ready to sit down. For a person at a microphone, with a captive audience and hair as gray as mine, it is inevitable that we think back to the time when we were in your place. My undergraduate institution is building a new library annex and asked that graduates send memories of the original building (and money, of course). In 1959 I came from a small town in Southern Illinois and had never even *imagined* a library like the new, four-story building at Southern Illinois University. One October evening I was going home after my late afternoon class and took a shortcut through that library. Near the exit door, as enticing as munchies in a supermarket checkout line, they had a Reading Room. I went in and began to browse. It was not long until I found Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, a discussion of his various cases. I had heard of Freud but had never actually read any of his writings. I don't remember how long I spent with that book or if I really missed my dinner at the dorm that night as I recall doing, but it was a mind-opening experience to encounter an entirely new way of looking at the world. Those few hours made me a different person.

So listen to the gray hair speak to you: Keep reading. Keep your minds open. Engage new ideas. Listen to people with whom you disagree. And consider the possibility that you might be wrong.

A second thought from a hoary head. (That means gray hair). Remember that there are people who did not have the opportunity that you had to get an education. For myself, I could never have gone to college if it were not for the scholarship programs that the state of Illinois had at the time. My dad was a coal miner without much left over at the end of the month. I was willing to work to help pay for my room and board, but the tuition was a problem. Those scholarships made my education possible. There are young people today who want to get an education but quite simply cannot afford it. In our new anti-tax age we tend to think ‘It’s my money and I want to keep it.’ The classic conservative sense of a “Common Weal” of shared interests is weakened. The state of Michigan has reduced its support for this institution from nearly 70% of our total budget when I arrived in 1973 to just over 25% today. In just the past two years, they have cut \$3.3 million out of our budget. I don’t have to tell you that we cover the deficits by raising tuition, and, sad to say, many good students are pushed aside. Just two weeks ago, Congress changed the rules for Pell Grants to exclude those with family income between \$35,000 and \$40,000, not exactly the well-to-do. That action dropped nearly 100,000 students from the eligibility list.

When you get more established than you are today, consider giving something back to the institution and to the society that helped prepare you for life. Don’t just walk away. Get involved in your community. Do more than is expected of you. Remember that there are problems that will never get solved and good things in life that will never get done unless you personally say, “If no one else will make this happen I am going to make it happen myself.”

Again I welcome you on behalf of the faculty, and congratulate you in advance for the achievements that will soon be acknowledged.

Thank you.