

Chancellor Gulliam, Provost Dunn, Distinguished Guests, Parents, and of course Graduates

Greetings

I feel very honored to be here this morning having been asked to share some thoughts with you at a most significant time.

A university graduation ceremony always occupies a central place in people's memories. You will always recall and experience this day as it is right now, no matter what other events occur in your life. Never let go of the feeling of accomplishment you have today. Embrace this experience, it is truly significant.

It is really a humbling experience, being asked to speak at a graduation ceremony. It naturally assumes I will have something to say that is worth hearing. Whether-or-not that is the case, I will leave up to you. Sitting there, rest assured I will attempt to follow the direction of my undergraduate public speaking professor, something I have never forgotten – Be Brief, Be Brilliant, and Be Gone.

The pomp and circumstance of this ceremony has great meaning. You are moving from novice to professional. Your academic credentials place you among an elite cadre of individuals. If not already, you will soon be called upon to begin working on some of the world's most wicked problems. And, the world needs your enthusiasm and idealism now.

Some of you may be feeling a bit anxious about your future. Asking yourself has it all been worth it? Will I be a success, however that is measured? Will I get a job? Will I be able to pay back my student loans? Will I have to live in parents' basement forever? Sure, these are important questions. And, the good news is, it will all work out.

But the most important and personal question anyone can ask is: How will I change the world?

We look at the world, and the world looks back. The world is waiting for you to act in it, and on it.

In a very short while you will be designated graduates, with all the rights and privileges thereto appertaining. For the next few minutes, I invite you to put aside those rights and privileges to think about the responsibilities you will soon assume and how they intersect with your passion, your purpose.

I thought here I should try and inspire, share some pithy insights gained over a career about responsibilities and passion. Every potential comment I wrote down fell far short of the mark. Bumper sticker sayings are not appropriate for what is needed – people of action. But, as I was preparing my notes for today's talk, I looked at the bulletin board across from my office in McIver, and I realized you didn't need me to inspire you. On a board entitled: How will you change the world? Students wrote what they would do.

Treating everyone I come into contact with respect, because you never know someone's inner struggle.

By not being afraid to be different and real.

Speak out about the things that matter.

By treating each individual as a human being, and not a distant mechanical, unemotional robot.

By being mindful of what you put out in the universe.

By educating myself about the differences around me.

Seeing with new eyes.

So that's it. That's what I'm talking about. The students who shared these intentions are already well on their way. They are ready to make a difference. And they inspired me to think more deeply about what I will say to you today.

Throughout your academic career, you have probably spent a good amount of time looking for answers. I encourage you to now make the transition to **being** the answer. What is needed is action. We make the path by walking. Live in the questions. The answers are inside the questions, not outside.

The challenges facing us cannot wait for answers, they need people who will act, now, and in new ways. Einstein famously recognized we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking that got us into them. Think differently. Question everything. The world desperately needs new thinking, and people who will take responsibility for living and breathing our challenges until we can move them forward.

So what will you take responsibility for? And, where will you get the passion you'll need to stay the course?

The best I know to tell you is that your passion is what gets you up in the morning. It is what drives you. Passion makes it all worthwhile. It is a gift. You will know you've found your passion when it obsesses you. When no matter how tired or discouraged you are, you find the energy to keep going.

There will be a tomorrow, and it will be better or worse than today as a result of our action or inaction. No matter the path we choose; business, education, the arts, the sciences, health, the humanities, remaining passionate is critical. Because the opposite of passion is indifference. Be reminded of the words of Elie Weisel:

The opposite of love is not hate, its indifference.

The opposite of art is not ugliness, its indifference.

The opposite of faith is not heresy, its indifference.

And the opposite of life is not death, its indifference. Use your passion to push back against indifference to the world.

For sure, it's easy to get stuck in the details. But as the days, months, and years go by, I hope you'll come back to this day. I hope you'll remember the sense of pride and anticipation you feel today. Think big thoughts. Do not accept the world as it is. Use your passion as a way of creating a newer and more humane world. No task is too small. Recognize how important your individual life is, that no one else is you. Know that your genius is needed, there are no surplus people, all hands are required to build a better world.

Allow me to share a story that has guided my work, possibly you will find it useful. It speaks to how we see ourselves and what we do:

"A man came across three masons who were working at chipping chunks of granite from large blocks. The first seemed unhappy at his job, chipping away and frequently looking at his watch. When the man asked what it was that he was doing, the first mason responded, rather curtly, "I'm hammering this stupid rock, and I can't wait 'til 5 when I can go home."

"A second mason, seemingly more interested in his work, was hammering diligently and when asked what it was that he was doing, answered, "Well, I'm molding this block of rock so that it can be used with others to construct a wall. It's not bad work, but I'll sure be glad when it's done."

"A third mason was hammering at his block fervently, taking time to stand back and admire his efforts. He chipped off small pieces until he was satisfied that it was the best he could do. When he was questioned about his work he stopped, gazed skyward and proudly proclaimed, "I...am building a cathedral!"

"Three individuals, three different passions, all doing the same job."

Will you cut stone, or help build a cathedral?

To conclude, and to perhaps make this more real, allow me to share my passion, what moves me, what I've taken responsibility for. I am passionate about finding new ways of building peace in an ever conflicted world. Not an easy task, but I believe I have something to contribute. There are many paths to peace, and there are enough peace tasks for everyone. The path I chose was military service, and I proudly continue my work with the military by teaching at the U.S. Army War College and as a Senior Fellow with the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute. As Executive Director of the Joint Civil-Military Interaction Network, I am working to facilitate harmonious relations

between civil society and the military during peace operations, including humanitarian assistance and disaster response. As a faculty member in the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, I teach and research on Military Peace Leadership, Interagency Conflict Management, and the Role of Religion in Peace and Conflict.

My path to finding and living my purpose has included several twists and turns. There aren't many of us faculty members who had careers in the military, too. And your passion lies somewhere along your path. For me, my passion for peacebuilding started 43 years ago when I was honored to serve as a Sentinel of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. Everyday on my way to the Amphitheater Plaza, I would walk through the cemetery among the headstones to be reminded of the effects of failed diplomacy and war. The words on the 72 ton marble monument still remind me of the need to build peace: *Here Rests in Honored Glory an American Soldier Known But to God*. I can imagine no greater sacrifice than to die unknown fighting for a just cause, freedom. Though the three unknowns at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier are interred in ground that has been defined as the most sacred space in the country, they represent all unknowns. In Arlington National Cemetery alone there 1100. Though unknown, their sacrifice must never be forgotten. They must never be forgotten.

My time at Arlington National Cemetery led me to assume responsibility for peacebuilding, in my part of the world. My service in the Army includes service to the nation in two wars, with assignments throughout the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. I have experienced first-hand what happens when peace fails. I have knowledge of conflict as an enlisted soldier, Non-Commissioned Officer, and Regular Army Officer. I have been very fortunate to serve with many of our country's best individuals

Though I was a combat arms officer, I always viewed my mission, primarily, as an aspect of diplomacy and peacebuilding. Understanding that armed engagements make up only 20 percent of military operations and that working with populations is 80 percent of what soldiers do, we are in need of new, non-violent skills in the military. For this purpose, at the Army's Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, we developed the Military Education and Training in Conflict Analysis and Transformation Working Group. A collaboration that includes the Army, the United States Institute of Peace, and the Kroc Center for International Peace Development. As an Observer/Controller at the Army's National Training Center, I introduced the idea peace leadership, a concept that is now part of a Peace College design where civil society and the military will jointly study peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Many of us are investigating a new roles for the military in our rapidly changing world.

Peace work is everywhere, even in the military.

In my role as a professor, and through my engagement with the military, I passionately and unapologetically work for peace. It's not uncommon for people to be confused

about path – moving from being in the military to becoming an expert in peace – but as the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh says: veterans “have experience that makes them the light at the tip of the candle, illuminating the roots of war and the way to peace.” My underlying passion has always remained the same – I’m just living it out in a different way now.

Find your passion, take responsibility for positively changing a part of the world, and begin writing your biography, don’t let life simply happen to you.

No matter how you choose to contribute, you will find peacebuilding is no easy task. Others will try to get you to give up and give in – to accept the world as it is. Don’t. Peace work requires full time effort. There are no days off. Bob Marley sums up the need for committed peacebuilders well when he says, “The people who are trying to make this world worse are not taking the day off. Why should I?”

Thank you for your attention, and once again, congratulations on your very significant achievement. The world is waiting for you. Don’t disappoint.