

## Spring 2006 Convocation President Gillett's Address

Ladies and gentlemen, stage party, faculty, staff, and graduates. I join my colleagues in extending my personal congratulations to each of the graduates here today and to those who were not able to attend.

The President's address at convocation is the time where the College gives its final advice to the graduates as they go out to begin their new lives and start to achieve their dreams.

Today should be a day of hope, where each of you is feeling excited about all the possibilities for the future and where you can stop for a moment and smell the roses before heading out and facing the challenges that lie ahead. Much of what you have already accomplished is based on your own hard work, persistence, talent and focus assisted by your friends, family and supporters.

I think it is appropriate for us to say "thank you" to all of those individuals who, in their own unique ways, made sure that all of you were able to complete this academic journey. It is often said that *the future belongs to those who are not satisfied with the present and who are willing to strive for the required changes to achieve what they believe in.*

You are the leaders of tomorrow and, as such, much will be asked and expected of you. To get there, there are certain steps that will guide you on your journey:

- 1) Have a dream you want to achieve, regardless of the obstacles.
- 2) Be prepared to take whatever risks are necessary to reach that goal.
- 3) Be prepared to ignore the ridicule of others to get where you want to go.
- 4) Be prepared to rise above the challenge of the moment to get to a desired future.
- 5) Stand tall for what you believe in and see yourself as a winner in the game of life.

Your journey will be very different from previous generations. As life expectancy is much longer, the fixed retirement age of 65 is disappearing, multiple careers have become the norm, and the advances in technology are opening new vistas previously unheard of. You are the people who will do what others say could not be done. You are the people who will challenge conventional wisdom, follow your instincts and do things your way, rather than the so called "right way." You have already been given the seeds of knowledge, which must now be sown and cared for in order that you can, at some point, reap the harvest of your efforts. You will find, as you pursue your goals, that life tends to give you the test first and the lesson thereafter. Although you can't take the lesson over, the test, at least, has multiple choices.

Robert Frost in his poem, *The Road Less Traveled*, makes the point that sometimes you must choose to do things in ways never before tried for in doing so, you may find that your choice will make a real difference in the rest of your life.

As you set the benchmarks for your own journey of success, you should remember that, as Jim Collins says in his book, "greatness is a conscious choice." Values such as integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness are what make great leaders truly great. Each of you must look inside and establish your own personal, non-negotiable values.

You will find that circumstances and events are not always within your control, nor are the associated emotions or reactions of yourself or others. It is your goals, values, beliefs and actions which will ultimately determine the way in which you will respond and how others will view that response.

Be a constant learner and look at life as a never-ending learning journey, where you can, on a daily basis, embrace the knowledge opportunities that surround you.

Do not be afraid of the risks and sacrifices that will be required to get there, as it is your faith in yourself that will ultimately determine your success.

Faith and confidence go hand in hand. Employers are always looking for individuals who have and display a real sense of self confidence, as it has proven to be a real indicator of future employment success.

At convocation each year, I like to mention the poem, *If*, by Rudyard Kipling, which is often referred to as the poem which best describes how one can lead, gain self-confidence and react to difficult circumstances or events.

The poem has a total of four verses and begins with this verse:

*If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too;  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good nor talk too wise;*

As time goes on, each of you will learn that success is more than just making money. In planning for long-term career success and personal satisfaction, four things are very important:

- 1) Find work that you will love.
- 2) Find work that truly makes a difference.

- 3) Find a job where you can work with equally committed people.
- 4) Find ways to balance work, family and friends.

Although you may not believe this today, you will regret the things you have not done far more than the things you have done, so get out there and take some chances; do something that really scares you and share it with someone you love.

Our final words of advice for this evening are borrowed from one of the greatest leaders of our time, Sir Winston Churchill.

In a memorable graduation speech, he offered graduates three simple words of advice, which he believed would always ensure future success. Those three words were: “never give up.”

The fact that you are here tonight shows that you never gave up on the goal of graduating from college. It is my exhortation to you today that you also never give up as you set out to achieve the larger goals of life.

We look forward to hearing about your future successes and hope you remember this graduation ceremony as the time when you launched the next phase of your journey of learning and life.

Congratulations, once again, to all of the graduates on everything you have accomplished to date and we hope that you enjoy your celebrations with your family and friends.