

As our graduating seniors know, right after spring break I sent out an email asking them for guidance on my remarks this morning, as I have for the past 8 years. You ~~have~~ answered with thoughtfulness, reflection and introspection, and I thank you all for the trust you demonstrated by sharing your aspirations and your fears with me.

The most common theme is what I call “graduating senior angst,” which is to be expected. “What is it like out there, and how do you – or I – know I’m ready for it?” As one of you put it so poignantly, “many of us are anxious about the coming months. . .we are unsure where our lives are heading next. This is the first time in our lives where we may not know where we’ll be in 3 months, which can be scary.”

Most of you have been in school for at least 16 years, your college years have entailed a huge expenditure of time, energy and resources, and you’re about to take a *giant* step into the next phase of your lives.

So I want to respond to your concerns about jobs and careers in two ways: I want to acknowledge their validity and share some information that I hope you’ll find encouraging, and I want to suggest – boldly, but without diminishing the importance of your worries – my hope that you’ll also think about something else much bigger, and – ultimately – more important.

On the first point, I’d like you to find some considerable encouragement in the following two pieces of information:

- 1) For the Drake University Class of 2010, graduating last May in the midst of a global economic crisis, 96% of them had graduate school acceptances or job placements *in their career fields* within 6 months of graduation. With encouraging signs about economic recovery (such as 244,000 new jobs created in the U.S. in April), I expect your experience to be at least that good.
- 2) More important, from my perspective, is that as Drake graduates you are exactly what the nation’s employers tell us they’re looking for. A study by Hart Research Associates conducted for the Association of American Colleges & Universities 18 months ago showed that employers in all sectors and of all sizes are looking for graduates with *exactly* the intellectual skills, habits of mind, perspectives, knowledge and abilities that we identify – and measure – as the learning outcomes of a Drake University education. They are looking for more Drake graduates!

But now my second point. Most of America’s private colleges and universities founded before the 20th century were created by various religious congregations, and the college president was an ordained

minister. At commencement, the president would deliver an address of moral and spiritual instruction to the graduates. Drake's tradition in the early years was for the president to deliver that "sermon" at a baccalaureate ceremony, with only brief remarks at commencement. The June 1889 issue of the *Delphic* at Drake described George Carpenter's remarks as "a few words of kindly advice and warning."

I'd like to be presumptuous enough to draw on that tradition with a few words of "kindly advice" (no warnings....and I'm not a minister), and while recognizing and valuing the legitimacy and importance of your concerns about job and career, express my hope that you will also focus on something much bigger.

You have much more of your life ahead of you than behind you; I have more of my life behind me than ahead of me, and I can tell you that when I look back I do not measure it by job titles, salary or prestige. My metric is *whether or not it mattered that I was here* – that I wasn't just a 97-year waste of molecules (yes, I'm planning to live a long time!)

Human beings have an innate quest, a need to ask – and answer – some really big questions. For many they might be considered *spiritual questions*. In a fascinating book called *Cultivating the Spirit* based on an 8-year research study of the spiritual and religious lies (those can be two different things) of America's undergraduates, Lena and Sandy Astin and Jennifer Lindholm write:

...spirituality has to do with the values that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we came from, our beliefs about why we are here – the meaning and the purpose that we see in our work and our life – and our sense of connectedness to one another and to the world around us.

I hope that your experience here at Drake has helped you to at least begin to answer those questions for yourself – but I would like to be even more presumptuous and suggest that the answer to the "meaning and the purpose in your work and life is that *it is to matter – in a positive way – that you were here*. That your life has to have *meaning*. That something or someone is better because of you – one individual, a group, an organization, a community, our country, the world. That you left a footprint that made things better. You can certainly do that in your job and your career as well as in your personal life – but it has to be a conscious, deliberate goal to which you are passionately committed.

This coming Tuesday, I leave for two weeks in Tanzania with the Drake football team and my two sons. We are going to collaborate with an all-star team from Mexico to engage in service projects for 5 days, play the

first American-style collegiate football game on the continent of Africa, and climb Mt. Kilimanjaro together. I have been reluctant to even mention that trip this morning because today is about *you* and about celebrating all that *you* have done, about celebrating who *you* are.

But the more I thought about it, and the more I asked friends for a reality check (students, faculty and staff), it became clear that the trip is a compelling metaphor for what I've been talking about. I've been asked repeatedly over the past few months why I'm going on the trip—sometimes by people who think I'm out of my mind (and I'm happy to prove them right). But I *know* why we're *all* going: we're going because we never have. We're going because we've never helped build a wing on an orphanage in a developing country. We're going because many of us have never climbed a mountain—certainly not one this high. We're going because almost all of us have never been in Africa, which means we are incomplete as human beings—we are missing an essential part of the human experience that can help make us whole. We are going because it will enhance our “connectedness to the world around us.” We are going because we will share the experience among ourselves, and with our friends from Mexico, of having our worlds explode wide open. And I personally am also going because I can't wait to share the experience with my sons.

For me personally, even though I've spent time in roughly 30 countries around the globe, this trip will widen my world. It will deepen my world. It will make my world more complex, more rich, more nuanced, both more understandable and more mysterious. But those consequences are *not* ultimately for my *personal* benefit or gain (although I will benefit immensely)—they're *what all that will enable me to do*. For over four decades, I have been in a profession that gives me the opportunity to make a difference, *to make it matter that I was here*: I am a teacher, I am a mentor. My purpose is to help others realize their dreams. In my current position as the president of this wonderful institution, I have a powerful responsibility to demonstrate with my words and deeds to all of our constituencies, internal and external, what Drake is and what we the Drake community aspire to be. I have to be able to *live* who we are, to *live* our expectations of our students. I have an even more powerful responsibility to do everything that I can—along with everyone who serves Drake—to ensure that Drake *is* what our students and faculty expected when they came to Drake—that they can find their dreams and live them. If this trip and all that it entails lives up to my expectations, it will make me better able to serve—and in doing so it will give my life even more meaning; it will *matter even more* that I was here, that there was a purpose for me because of what I will be able to do for others. What I am

trying to convey to you is that looking for ways to give one's life meaning in ways that matter is a life-long quest.

So let me return to the mountain as metaphor: my hope for you is that you find your own mountains to climb, that the prospect of climbing them makes you both joyful and nervous (if it doesn't make you nervous, it's not going to stretch your world). That you will find that your time at Drake prepared you wonderfully for the climb; that your journey to and up the mountain expands your world and intensifies your connectedness to the fabric of humanity. That when you reach the top of the mountain you realize that you have been given a gift that will enhance your ability to make things better, *to make it matter that you were here*. I hope also that you realize that if you fail to make it all the way up the mountain, you've grown in important ways through the aspiration, the preparation, and the journey that you did take and you've learned what it will take to do it again. The mountain will always be there.

I thank you all for becoming members of the Drake University family. We are very, very proud of *who* you are, what you are capable of doing, and the ways in which you will make it matter that you were here.

Congratulations!