

Much has been said about the “tools for success” and the “skills” we acquire in college. But we need to be very careful when we talk about those things, because their meanings can easily be confused with something they are not. We may fall into the habit of calling what we have experienced in college “skill acquisition” and “job preparation,” but these are not the things college has been for me. Obviously, each of us will take something different from our time here, so all I can honestly do is speak for what I've taken from it, what I've experienced. When I think back on learning about any subject I've taken, I was never focused on what I could put in my resume or what I could “sell” to future employers. Perhaps in learning those things I've become more “marketable,” but they have done so much more for me than that.

College for me has been a very human experience, an interaction between my professors, my classmates, and myself, a dialogue with understanding, appreciation, and compassion at its core. And I have fallen in love with that interaction, and I will miss it so much. The things that I've done while in college—both in class and out—have made me a better human being, hopefully more capable now of not only getting along with, but understanding and caring for people around me. It has broadened my view of the world and the way I think about the other views that fill it, and it has allowed me to better define my place within it. And most importantly, college has set in motion within me a strong desire to learn—not just about English or my interests, but about everything, everywhere. It has given me a curiosity that I am certain cannot be satisfied, perhaps not ever. I was talking with one of my professors who said that having a college degree basically means you have arrived at the very beginning of what it means to learn. And I think that's absolutely right. What I have been given is not a set of skills or a body of knowledge so much as a way of groping around in the darkness of the world, trying to figure out my place in it, what it all means, and what I can do to better contribute my fair share. It has not

given me an end product to bolster my credentials, but a process for moving forward from here.

So if by the “tools for success” we mean “a set of skills that will make us money and make us successful in the job world,” then I feel we have been short-sighted and narrow in our thinking, confining such a rich, broad set of human experiences—each unique to us as individuals—to such a limited scope, to what is essentially only one small part of our lives, a single aspect of our entire existence within this world.

But if by “tools for success” we mean “a better ability to interact with human beings around us,” “a deeper appreciation and understanding of the world we live in,” and “a desire to learn more, as much as we possibly can about everything we can,” then by all means we have the tools for success. And let us use those tools in every way we can at every possible opportunity.

Many have urged me to comment on the state of the economy and how we as graduates will play a role in it, so let me say this: I believe the situation we face is only the result of the same narrow thinking that calls college a “job-enhancing opportunity” or an exercise in “skill acquisition.” For this same thinking takes human beings—people like all of us sitting in this auditorium—and all of their concerns and needs, hopes and desires—essentially the very things that make them human—and places them behind profit margins, behind the concerns of businesses, behind greed. If there is any hope of removing ourselves from this situation—and it is indeed our task to remove ourselves, not anyone else's—it cannot come from the same thinking that got us where we are in the first place. Only a more thorough understanding and care for other people and their needs and concerns can possibly bring us out of such a mess, and it is through an enhanced way of thinking alone that we can realize a world worth living in not only for ourselves, not just “me,” but for everyone, for “we.” This is the task placed before us. So let us go forth from this day of celebration and put to use everything we have learned and

everything we will learn to the best of our ability to create a world worth living in for everyone.

Congratulations on everything you have done to get yourselves to this point, and I wish you the best of luck in all of your future endeavors.