

Fall Commencement Address 2017
Dr. Steven A. Scott, Pittsburg State University
December 15, 2017

Good evening...it is my sincere pleasure to welcome you to the campus of Pittsburg State University. What an exciting day this is for our graduates, their families, and indeed, the university. Thank all of you for joining us this evening for this important and well-deserved celebration.

From prospective student visits, to rumble, to move in day, to family day...we love to see families on campus.

We know you've been an important part of these graduates' journeys. I hope your interactions with Pitt State have been good for you. They've certainly been good for us.

We also hope you'll continue to be a part of Gorilla nation wherever you are. Thank you so much for your support and encouragement of tonight's graduates. I hope that you'll feel a sense of ownership and pride as your graduate walks across this stage. You deserve to...

And graduates...I trust you are enjoying this long-anticipated day and moment. For one thing, it's nice to have homework, exams, quizzes, and projects behind you...at least for a while. We trust this is not the end of your formal learning experiences.

You've earned something that you'll carry with you throughout your life...a degree from Pittsburg State University. It will open doors; help you make connections; and sustain you during good, and most importantly, in challenging times.

Tonight is the perfect opportunity to look back on the time, energy, sweat, and effort that has led to this accomplishment as well as looking forward to the opportunities that lie ahead.

Before I offer a few words of wisdom, I too want to thank our faculty and staff for the critical role they have played in the lives of these graduates. At my inauguration in October of 2009, I noted the importance of faculty in the academy.

I quoted Mark Hopkins, an American educator in the 1800s, who observed that "an ideal college is Mark Hopkins on one end of a log, and a student on the other." that is still true today, with Mark Hopkins represented by our outstanding faculty and staff who are sitting behind you and the log has been updated with modern classrooms and laboratories, blue Ethernet cables and Wi-Fi connections.

Even so, it's still that one-on-one relationship that leads to learning and growth and ultimately to a transformation. Thank you faculty and staff for investing in these graduates and helping make tonight possible.

Now, for a few words of wisdom. It's hard to believe, but tonight marks my 49th and 50th commencement ceremonies as the president of Pittsburg State University.

Honestly, that's hard to believe. While my remarks have varied from semester to semester, my unwavering and enduring love of this event has not.

I'm as excited about this commencement as I was the very first one.

As I look back on my comments over the years, I've quoted an eclectic group of authors, philosophers, and notable individuals, including Steve Jobs, Mohammed Ali, Coach Pat Summitt, Mark Twain, Martin Luther King, Jr., Yogi Berra, Bill Clinton, and even lyrics from the Broadway show... 'Wicked.'

Tonight I thought I'd cite the wisdom of our very own graduates.

Over the past few ceremonies we've captured some of the bits of advice that are revealed on Pitt State graduate's mortar boards.

Here goes...

Some are about the experience just completed:

- Just did it (*grad who now works at Nike*)

- There's beauty in the struggle.
- Fueled by coffee.
- Nevertheless, she persisted
- Thanks, mom and dad, for giving me the world.
- She turned her can'ts into cans and her dreams into plans.

Some are about what comes next:

- Can I take a nap now?
- Next stop: grad school
- We're all stories in the end. I'm making mine a good one.
- Story to be continued.
- Holy cow (from a future DVM)

Some are about making a difference:

- I teach. What's your superpower?
- It takes a big heart to help shape little minds.

Some offer advice about life:

- Never grow up
- In it for the outcome, not the income
- Be greater than average (a mathematical formula)
- Believe there is good (social work graduate)
- We have to be the women we want our daughters to be.

And, of course, there's one that sums it all up.

- Oagaag (from one of our marketing majors)

Speaking of our very own graduates and drawing inspiration from them...I want to tell you about a graduate I met at last week's cording ceremony for veterans who are finishing their degrees tonight.

He grew up in a small town in Haiti until his father, who had enlisted and started a career in the U.S. Army, brought him to America, at the age of 17, to live with his family. His name is Clyvens Exantus. Well, let me correct that.

As of this morning, he is Second Lieutenant Clyvens Exantus, and he graduated earlier this evening with his Bachelor of Arts degree in political science.

Clyvens journey to this moment, began 2,000-miles away in Haiti with stops in Maryland, Virginia and Fort Riley.

His humble beginnings did not dampen his aspirations. In fact, they fueled them. He understood the opportunities an education could provide. And, with his father as an example, grew to love the culture and fundamental freedoms we enjoy as Americans.

It's why he joined the military. As he put it, "I want to earn my spot."

Clyvens' story may have started in a different location but it's one that is familiar to many of us who grew up in small towns.

It's one of opportunity, of determination, and of a desire to make this world a

better place.

At this time, I'd like Clyvens and his mother, Marlie Jackie Exantus, to stand so that we may congratulate him on his success and wish him well in his future.

In closing, I've got a final couple of thoughts on what might help you be successful in your life, and it's a message for all of us gathered here this evening.

Have you heard of Lori Mckenna? She's a very successful Nashville songwriter who, as often is the case, captures amazing truths and messages in her songs. She has written number one hits and received many accolades for her work, including CMA awards and a Grammy or two.

Just a few weeks ago she performed on the stage at the Bicknell center with three other songwriters. It was an extraordinary evening. Lori sang her work..."Be humble and kind."

Yes, she wrote that, and of course, Tim McGraw is the artist most people would connect to it.

As I listened to her that night, I thought, what a powerful message that is. And it's particularly relevant tonight.

The lyrics include the line..."I know you got mountains to climb, but always stay humble and kind."

It really does fit the moment...and how about this part...

"When the dreams you're dreamin' come to you;

When the work you put in is realized

Let yourself feel the pride but

Always stay humble and kind."

And finally, "when you get where you're goin' don't forget turn back around help the next one in line always stay humble and kind."

I don't think I could ever craft more succinct and powerful words than those to offer you tonight. They are words that uniquely fit what it means to be a gorilla. Always be humble and kind.

With that, and with your own words of wisdom, I congratulate you on attaining your degree and wish each of you the very best.

Let's give the Class of December 2017 a round of applause.

-Pitt State-