

## **Spring Commencement Address 2017**

**Dr. Steven A. Scott, Pittsburg State University**

**May 12, 2017**

Good evening. Welcome to the campus of Pittsburg State University.

What a great turnout of graduates, families, faculty, staff, and guests who have joined us this evening.

Your participation in this ceremony is important to the university and these graduates. I hope you enjoy this special time and your visit to our campus.

It is especially gratifying to welcome our half-century class back to campus. Graduates of the class of 1967 are seated on the floor with their fellow gorillas.

Would these alumni please stand so that we may recognize you?

Welcome home. We're proud to be able to call you gorillas.

Families, I particularly want to thank you for being with us this evening, and for your ongoing support of our graduates.

Your interest in them; your encouragement of them; has made a difference. I hope, you too, feel a sense of ownership in the degrees being awarded.

It's almost impossible to see this event as anything other than a highly anticipated moment.

As I prepared my remarks, I thought about the many journeys that have led to this time together.

The hopes and dreams of our graduates, as well as their pride, are reflected in the many handshakes, hugs, smiles, and even laughter that have taken place today.

This is a joyful and significant moment in the life of each graduate.

This is a moment that has been earned.

It is a moment that should be relished.

Recently, at a banquet recognizing graduate student accomplishments as well as successful undergraduate research, Dr. Alice Sagehorn noted how few people in the world achieve a college degree.

As you heard, only a third of our nation's citizens ever earn a college degree. But were you aware that college graduates make up less than 5% of the world's population?

Does that make you feel special? It should. It really should.

What you have accomplished is noteworthy for both you and for your university.

Graduates, you are joining the ranks of a very special group of people. You will not only be known as college graduates, some of you with advanced degrees, but you will also be able to call yourselves Pittsburg State University alumni.

That group is even more special.

As a Pitt State graduate myself, and as president of the university, I welcome you to our ranks and congratulate you on a job well done.

I'm proud of what you've achieved. So are your families, professors, and the many staff members of this university.

We're proud of you. And, if you'll allow us, we're also proud of ourselves. We're proud of the roles we have played in helping you along the way.

Of course, that leads me to note and recognize our amazing faculty and staff.

Thank you for the work you do on behalf of our students, and thank you for sharing this moment with them.

Faculty are committed to their academic disciplines. They bring a deep, deep knowledge and passion for those disciplines to their roles.

But they also bring an equal commitment to their students and it shows. For that, I am extremely appreciative.

My remarks at each commencement have proven to be unique and somewhat anticipated. If not for the content, then certainly for the length.

As I usually do, I'll keep them to a minimum. I want our focus to remain on our graduates so that we may read each name, shake each hand, and share this stage with each of you for that special moment of celebration.

That's why we're here.

However, in such a tumultuous time, I can't help but make a few comments about the world in which we live and the context within which these new graduates will apply what they have learned while at Pittsburg State University.

I don't know if you realize it, you have been too busy studying for and preparing for tests, but during this, your final semester, the apple iPhone turned 10.

Just think, you are the last generation to ever know a world without smartphones. The last generation to truly understand the wonderful conveniences they deliver and the many distractions they create.

It's hard to believe how quickly this innovation has profoundly changed our lives; in business, recreation, social interaction, sports, news, and of course selfies. The list goes on and on.

It makes you wonder what is being created now that will so dramatically impact our lives over the next 10 years.

Will you be able to adapt to it? Adjust your career to the obstacles and opportunities that will emerge?

In articles about the iPhone's anniversary, people observed how powerful a device it was compared to the computers NASA used to send man to the moon.

Estimates vary widely, but generally, experts believe the iPhone 6 is as much as 40 million times more powerful than the computer that directed the flight operations onboard the Apollo spacecraft that carried our astronauts to the moon.

One author even noted, "You wouldn't be wrong in saying an iPhone could be used to guide 120 million Apollo era spacecraft to the moon, all at the same time."

The question then becomes, what kind of power might *you* hold in your hands in 10 years.

And most importantly, will you be ready?

Our hope is that you have not only mastered the areas we asked you to, but you've established yourself as someone who knows how to learn and is committed to learning.

This degree clearly is not your final opportunity to learn. In so many ways, it's a launching pad (if you'll forgive the metaphor) for more learning and more personal growth.

Much of that will be self-learning.

We anticipate that of you. More importantly, you should expect that of yourself because your future employer certainly will.

It seems each generation questions whether those who follow are up to the task of leading our institutions, corporations, non-profits, and, of course, our governments.

I'm fortunate to be in this role because I can see the exceptional talent that is on the way. I have great confidence that the next generation of learners and leaders will be ready.

What gives me such confidence?

You do.

Look at the difference you've made to Pittsburg State University.

Just think about a few weeks ago when more than 1,000 of you gathered to serve the community in what's known as the "big event."

Consider the successes we've enjoyed during your time here. The accomplishments of our athletic teams, Enactus, our Gorilla peer education group, the Baja team, and countless other efforts by Greeks, SGA and the more than 150 university clubs and organizations.

You've demonstrated excellence and achievement.

What's more, you've left the university and this community better than you found it.

I'm excited to see where your future efforts lead. To see the next big thing; the next major disruption; the next new perspective; the next innovative solution to a persistent problem left unsolved by previous generations.

Graduates, you and your contemporaries around the world will no doubt make great things happen.

You *will* advance and improve the human experience and condition. I am fully confident of that.

Equipped with a degree from Pittsburg State University and the values instilled in you by your families and mentors, I believe your life will be full of many more successful moments like this.

I'll end with a simple quote from Garrison Keillor, of the *Prairie Home Companion*, "be well, do good, and keep in touch."

With that, let's congratulate and give our best wishes to the class of 2017.

-Pitt State-