

## December 2019 Commencement remarks

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Graduates, parents, friends, and well-wishers: today's a big day! As the President of the SMU Faculty Senate, I (on behalf of my 700-plus colleagues) congratulate you and wish you well. I hope and trust that we have equipped you well for your next adventures in life. And today's as good a time as any to reflect on that equipment.

I've been reading about the "DIKW pyramid" proposed by some educators, economists, sociologists, and theorists. The pyramid's broadest and lowest level is a swirling ocean of Data; atop that, smaller but more focused, is Information—data that has been processed enough to be somewhat useful and meaningful. The next step up is Knowledge, in which we think *critically* about information and how we "know" things (what is true?), and assemble more complex structures of understanding and meaning. And the apex of the pyramid is Wisdom, where, if all goes well, all of the lower levels are synthesized into the most sophisticated and important questions of all: what is good, or right, or beautiful? Data is cheap; wisdom is priceless.

The DIKW model gives us opportunities to think about our own learning and thinking and growth. You might recognize in it some outlines of your education, or even your whole remembered life. You might look back at your younger selves and marvel at how far you have come since then. And you might even look back at some courses you dreaded or struggled in, and realize how they have contributed to your progress as a human being.

So if you are, say, an engineer, I hope that your education at SMU also introduced you--maybe against your will!--to the beauty and value of art and literature, and how those things can make you a fuller, wiser person. If you majored in philosophy, I hope you learned valuable things about economics and the natural world. Whatever your degree is in, I hope that you discovered other ideas and interests and loves along the way that will enhance the rest of your life in various ways. I hope, in short, that SMU did its job of filling you up and rounding you out as a thoughtful person ready to contribute to the world.

Congratulations to each and all of you. Now get out there and get busy.