

LEARNING FOR LIVING; LIVING FOR LEARNING
Remarks for 71st Annual Commencement
By Dr. L. Donald Shields
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Ladies and gentlemen of the graduating class, families and friends, and members of our University community:

Commencement is a joyous time at the university. For our extended University family--our graduates, parents and spouses, our faculty, staff, alumni and trustees--it is a time of celebration, of renewal and reassurance. In recent months, a number of members of our campus community have suggested that we do even more than in the past to focus this day on those being graduated and on their very significant achievements. We have attempted to achieve this goal both in this program as well as in the individual school and college ceremonies to be held this afternoon and this evening.

In developing my remarks for this morning's ceremony, I canvassed my university associates, faculty members, the academic deans and our vice presidents, asking each for recollections of commencement addresses from their own graduations. The amazing thing is that no one could remember what was said at his or her commencement, nor in many cases not even recall who the speaker may have been. Now I take all of this to be important clues regarding the gravity and consequence of my assignment today.

As I consider my thoughts, I am reminded of some of the interesting and special characteristics of the graduating class of 1986.

In musical tastes, in addition to Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Ravel and Stravinsky, this year's graduating class seems to enjoy the musical masterpieces of Springsteen and Collins, Phill Collins that is. What a diversity of cultural interests!

You also like to vary your university dining pleasures with cuisine from such exotic establishments as Snuffers, Chili's, Wok 'N Roll, Campisi's, Domino's and LSD, also knows as Lone Star Doughnuts.

I also note that there's a renewed sense of special patriotism with our students active support of a facility named the National Guard Armory. In addition, you also seem to appreciate old fashioned establishments like the Ice House. And believe it or not, there's even an interest in a warehouse, the Yale Warehouse.

With this limited and selected profile of some student interests, I would like to move on to more serious

observations about commencement and about learning for living, and living for learning.

I should note that providing commencement remarks for our University truly is an awesome and humbling experience. As I look across this happy and anxious gathering, I am keenly aware that I am the very last obstacle between you and your diplomas, between you and the realization of dreams that you and your families have cherished for years -- the very last obstacle.

I also realize that I am now the University's last hope, that is its final opportunity to teach you whatever important lessons you may not have learned in your SMU experience. Please rest assured, however, that I am not up to that task--at least not in these few minutes.

With all of this said, however, a commencement gathering certainly is a happy gathering to address, and this is because today's ceremony is so charged with satisfaction and joy, and relief and high aspirations for the future.

To each of you, on behalf of our University, its faculty, staff and trustees, I bring sincere congratulations. We have worked with you these last years, seen your struggles and triumphs, and now we are delighted to share in your happiness in fulfilling this very significant goal in your lives. We wish you the very best upon your commencement from Southern Methodist University.

You are indeed a select group. The United States is by far the best educated nation in the world. Yet, fewer than half of our young people in this nation attend college. Fewer than half of those actually graduate. And, I would remind you, only a small percentage of those graduates have the privilege which you have enjoyed in attending a selective, private institution of higher learning.

University study also most often represents a family commitment, and a family undertaking. And to those of you who are parents of our honored graduates, their spouses, and in some cases, their children, we offer our congratulations and best wishes upon what is truly a family achievement.

To our graduating students, I also want to convey the appreciation of our campus community. You have been highly valued members of our academic community. You have worked diligently in your assigned tasks. You have brought many honors and recognitions to us in your own achievements. You have contributed in many important ways to the student life of our campus and to the lives of your friends and associates. Many of you have offered exciting and stimulating challenges to the members of our faculty in the classroom and laboratory--acts requiring courage and

intellect on your part, but offering our faculty one of the great rewards of teaching: the reward of gifted and involved students. And many of you have made life a little more interesting and challenging for those of us in the administration. That also is as it should be. Our views need to be challenged too, and we value the care and concern for SMU, your University, which you have expressed in your opinions, your actions, and in your recommendations for constructive change.

In your years here, whether you are graduating with a bachelor's, master's, or a doctoral degree, you have seen a changing university--a university that has become a bit more rigorous, yet which offers ever more opportunities to an increasingly talented and diverse student body. As with any institution that is moving and growing in the quality of what it does, we have had our controversies and our challenges. Yet, your investment of time, energy and resources at SMU has grown even while you have been here, and it will continue to grow even after you have left us for new challenges.

Some years ago, William Allen White observed that in education we are striving to teach youth not only to make a living, but also to make a life--and from that observation I want to offer to you a few final reflections from SMU, about your education here and about your future. All too soon now, the future will be upon you, and you will come to realize with the rest of us that there are no more incompletes, that there is no spring break, that Thanksgiving typically is a one-day Thursday holiday, and that the summer is pretty much like the rest of the year.

Many people are inclined to draw a very sharp distinction between life in the university and life in the so-called "real world" which is out there somewhere. To be sure, there are real differences. Yet, in the larger perspective, what you have been expected to do in order to earn your degree here is not different in kind from what you will be expected to do with the rest of your life.

We have expected you to learn. If you are an undergraduate, we have expected you to learn "something about everything" of crucial and lasting human value and experience, in our common educational experience and effective programs, and then we have expected you to learn "everything about something" of specified educational value in your major area of emphasis. For graduate and professional students, our expectations have been more specialized, of course.

But for all, we have expected you not only to learn, but perhaps most importantly, to learn how to learn, and to develop and to refine that most basic intellectual ability.

For the rest of your lives, in your professions and in your personal activities, you will be expected to learn, efficiently and effectively. Career counselors tell us that a college graduate in these times can expect to change careers entirely four or even five times during his or her adulthood. That is a staggering prospect, but it brings into the sharpest possible focus the value of an education that emphasizes liberal arts skills as well as liberal arts perspectives. Therefore, we have expected you to reason critically, to evaluate differing perspectives and to present your views clearly and persuasively in both written and oral forms. These are the skills and perspectives which you must have in order to meet the expectations of the real world, and in order to respond creatively to the increasingly complex social, economic, political, moral and technological challenges of the rapidly approaching 21st century.

We have expected you to work and to live productively with other people--roommates, fellow students, professors and others, many with backgrounds, beliefs and commitments very different from your own. We have expected you to be tolerant of others' views, to respect differing values and aspirations. We also have expected you to be a contributing member of our community, understanding your civic responsibilities and obligations as a member of this community--offering us the benefit of your involvement and leadership in our educational, scholarship, and community service endeavors. The "real world" for which you now are destined--your future families, and the future communities in which you live will expect no less.

Finally, we have expected you to value--to choose wisely among values, and also to recognize and honor the values upon which our academic community is founded. In the university, we have placed the highest value upon personal integrity, mutual respect, on tolerance for differing attitudes and convictions, on openness to evidence, clarity and courage in presenting one's views, and modesty in imposing these views upon others. Unfortunately, these values do not always prevail in the real world you are about to enter. But they are values toward which a free society such as ours always must strive. As an educated person, a university graduate, it will be your obligation to lead the way in this regard, and to help others to recognize and honor these values. In this regard, you have an obligation not to be among the terminal cool, as they were so vividly described by James Wharton, our Baccalaureate preacher last night.

It is a tradition for the President of the University to offer a charge to the graduating class. My charge to the Class of 1986 is this. As you have learned to live in your years with us, also live to learn in the years ahead. Whatever your major or specialization, from accounting to zoology, you have experienced moments of wonder, of

questioning the most basic issues of life, of experiencing the highest of human achievements in the arts, the humanities, the natural sciences and the social sciences. These moments of wonder, of deep questioning and of transforming experience are the most essential ingredients of true learning. If, amid the professional and personal lives which follow your days at SMU, you strive to renew and extend these moments, these queries, and these experiences, you will be humane, interesting, interested and constructively involved people. In this regard you also will do great honor to your University, and to the members of our community here who have cared so deeply for your educational and personal development. In living to learn, you will in fact have learned to live.