

U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Antonio O. Garza Jr. gave SMU's 89th annual commencement address on May 15. Ambassador Garza, who assumed his current post in November 2002, is a native Texan and graduate of SMU's Dedman School of Law.

**Commencement Speech of
Ambassador Antonio O. Garza, Jr.
Southern Methodist University
May 15, 2004**

Thank you very much Chairman Ford, President Turner, SMU staff and faculty, distinguished guests, proud family members, and graduates. I'm honored by your invitation to speak with you on this special day.

Graduation speeches are a little tough. I can't honestly say I remember the one given at my college graduation or my own law school graduation here at SMU for that matter. Nor do I have any illusions that you'll remember much of this one. It's not a political speech, nor a reminder of the extraordinary challenges we face in the world today.

And I don't claim to have all the post-graduation answers for life. I learned my lesson a long time ago when I was tutoring a young boy in South Texas for his high school exit test. Raul and I crammed for weeks, and I mustered up all the advice I could give. After the exam, I found the boy and asked, "How did we do?" He just smiled at me and said, "Let me put it this way sir, you're not as smart as you think you are!"

So, I've been quite humble after that. But I think your graduating class has much less reason to be humble. This year SMU is awarding 2,013 degrees – a record high. You are going to be joining the ranks of some exceptional graduates.

You'll be calling Nobel-prize physicist James Cronin a fellow alum. Not to mention Academy-award winner Kathy Bates and First Lady Laura Bush. SMU grads bring creativity to every field imaginable and are certainly not easy acts to follow, but I have no doubt that the Class of 2004 is up to the challenge.

Just looking through "The Daily Campus" newsletter, I realized that you are already on your way. Three of your classmates have already started an urban retail company with designs aimed at social causes. Tri-Delts have raised money for the International Rescue Committee. A Mustang Marathon raised over \$70,000 for AIDs. And four Mustangs are heading to the NFL. These activities demonstrate that SMU students have the diversity, social awareness and drive to become tomorrow's great leaders.

And if you start to question your ability for greatness, remember the advice given by one of the greatest, Winston Churchill, in his famous graduation speech of just three powerful words: "Never give up."

The fact that you're sitting there today shows ...your parents... teachers... family... friends... and most importantly yourself...that you never gave up. You attended the classes. You sweated through the exams. You did it. As you receive your diploma today, remember...it's yours for a lifetime ...make

the most of it!

You have every right to enjoy the parties today. Pat yourself on the back and smile as everyone tells you how proud they are of you. They mean it. And keep smiling when the parties are over. Because they will end, but your life is just beginning.

You'll pack your bags. You'll say teary goodbyes to your friends. You may gladly stop eating bad Tex-Mex and drinking margaritas....or not. But then all of a sudden you'll start to realize that life is, unfortunately, not like college.

Many of you will be hit by the big – Who? What? Where? When? Why? – questions. Who's going to hire me? Why won't anyone hire me? When will I have my own place? Where will that place be? And perhaps the biggest of the "W"s ...What NOW?

These questions can be exciting and overwhelming at the same time. There are so many paths in front of you that choosing the right one may often seem beyond your control.

I remember staring at an application for the Peace Corps after I graduated, thinking "Should I, or shouldn't I?" It seemed like a great opportunity for travel and public service. But I never filled it out.

Yet in that strange way life works, I soon had another chance to serve my community and to travel to a number of countries as part of that job. And that was it. I was curious. I knew that I wasn't going to be in a law firm for the rest of my life. I knew that I wanted to travel and do so in a way that would allow me to continue in public service. So here I am as Ambassador to Mexico, doing something I never foresaw at my own graduation, living in a fascinating culture and still learning everyday.

I guess what I'm trying to say is don't be afraid to "pack your bags" again and again and again after you leave "the Bubble." If you don't, you are missing a chance to learn about others, their history and their culture. Sometimes those "others" are a world away, sometimes they are just across town, and sometimes getting out may mean leaving the comfort of a current job and setting off on your own.

Get out, explore a little, and get a better sense of what you believe in and why. You'll meet people who will confront you on things you'd previously taken for granted and perhaps even the way you look at the world and others.

Such challenges may make you feel a little more than anxious. But as one friend of mine's mom so indelicately put it: the best things in life often make you want to throw up before you do them. Know that those feelings are normal. You have to have faith that those are the times when you grow the most.

Longfellow once said, "When we walk to the edge of all the light we know and take the step into the darkness of the unknown, we must believe that one of two things will happen. There will be something solid for us to stand on or we will be taught to fly."

You are in a position to fly, to make of your life whatever you wish. I know I began by saying that I don't have the answers, but as you would expect of all graduation speakers, I am going to end by trying to impart some sage wisdom, well distilled over the years. So here it is... "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you might miss it." OK, that wasn't me, it was Ferris Bueller.

But his message is the same as mine: life passes much more quickly than you would ever imagine and you can't hit replay. So live it, live it hard, and live it in a way that allows you to find your purpose.... Because as the Chinese proverb suggests, a life filled with meaning, while seeming to pass quickly, is lived twice...once as you live it and the second time when you're older as you reflect on the wonderful memories of the things you've done and the people you've touched.

So there. That's it. Congratulations and God bless you!