

All hail the Class of 2008. My most heartfelt, deepest congratulations on this glorious day. Seeing you all live, work, strive and create together this year has been truly inspirational. To your families and friends, I welcome you too, to join in celebrating their extraordinary accomplishments.

On commencement day, college presidents are wont to give far reaching speeches about the challenges in the outside world that you all will face and conquer, peppered with sage nuggets of advice gleaned from years of experience. There are many virtues in such orations, and in fact, some, like Issaac Sharpless' 1888 invocation to "preach truth" become timeless signposts that guide not just today's graduates but generations to follow, as well.

But I think that you, the graduates of the Haverford College Class of 2008, do not really need such words of advice. You are all too aware of the problems that await you in the outside world, from reviving the effectiveness of American democracy to fighting for universal human rights to developing scientific wisdom for the service and sustenance of man and the planet. After all, you have been shaping your studies, your travels, your extracurricular social entrepreneurial ventures and your planned career arcs with just these hard issues, and lifelong opportunities, in mind. I do not need to tell you what lies ahead.

What I would like to do, instead, is to remind you of what you each of you has already accomplished during your days here at Haverford College, because these accomplishments are important, and because they will truly empower you to achieving your goals from the moment you accept your diplomas. First, you have worked really, really hard. Not only have you studied broadly, but you have studied deeply. By designing, researching and creating senior theses projects, you have gone from a state of fairly abject ignorance to a level of both mastery and leading a field forward to a point where it has never been before, and where no one else has been before. Now that you've done this, you know that in whatever quandary of uncertainty or confusion you find yourself in the future, you have the ability, the skills, experience, and confidence to define the problem in a way that is meaningful to you, to learn what you need to clarify the puzzle, and put the pieces together from a variety of powerful interpretive frameworks so that you can move forward effectively and creatively. By studying and creating in this way, you have given yourself an extraordinary gift, and it will keep on giving.

Second, you have conducted your academic work bolstered by the power of the Honor Code. It's likely that 4 years ago you saw the Code as a noble virtue. But now, having lived the Code ever more comfortably and naturally over time, I hope you realize that it is that, and more. You have developed academic and personal integrity into an Aristotelian habit of practical wisdom that will serve you well. By relying completely on your own thoughts, work, discoveries and insights, you have well-earned confidence that what you know, you know, and that what you believe, you know why you believe it. This sense of calm comfort will resonate throughout every judgment and decision you make in your careers and your lives.

Finally, and most importantly of all, you have lived and worked among a Community of true friends and colleagues, each of whom has diverse backgrounds and opinions, but who all believe in the possibility of a common good. You have become extremely practiced in listening as much as talking, and to finding common ground in disputes that at first appear intractable. At one level, this has been wonderful because, as the result of living in this way, you now have true, lifelong friends. This itself is a jewel to be cherished. But this ability to listen and communicate is also an invaluable skill that is absolutely the foundation for effective leadership. By validating the worth of every individual in a conversation, finding shared agreement in a volatile conceptual landscape, and then using that foundation as the basis on which the whole group can move forward, you simultaneously create community and lead that community into effective action. As you graduate from Haverford College today, know that by the very act of having lived in and through this Community, you are now both embraced by lifelong friends and empowered by the leadership skills that you will naturally carry into every community that you enter and seek to enrich.

So, armed with the power of your acute scholarly achievements, the simplicity and integrity of the Honor Code, and the wisdom of searching for the points of common humanity between yourself and others, you are now fully prepared to go forth to find your life's work. May you find pleasure and joy at every step along the way, may you find yourselves in supportive communities such as the one you now depart, and please, come back often, to visit. Members of the Class of 2008, I salute you.