

Good Afternoon and congratulations on a job well *done*! I am proud to be a part of the graduating class of 2006!

I would also like to say Happy Mother's Day. In that spirit, let's have a round of applause for all the friends and family who have supported us throughout our college careers and have helped us get to where we are today.

I lived away from my family for three years while on campus in Mitchell Hall. One of the things I remember from that experience was the bulletin boards the RAs were responsible for decorating in the residence halls. Do you remember those? Most of their messages escape me except for one. I would like to share its contents with you this afternoon.

Suppose the Earth's population was shrunk to a village of 100 people with all the existing human ratios remaining the same. Of the hundred people, 60 would be from Asia, 14 from Africa, 12 from Europe, 8 from Latin America, 5 from the United States and Canada, and 1 from the South Pacific. 51 would be male, 49 would be female. 82 would be non-white; 18 white. 67 would be non-Christian; 33 would be Christian. 80 would live in substandard housing, 67 would be unable to read. 50 would be malnourished and 1 dying of starvation. 33 would be without access to a safe water supply. 39 would lack access to improved sanitation. 24 would not have any electricity (And of the 76 that do have electricity, most would only use it for light at night.) 7 people would have access to the internet. 1 would have a college education. 1 would have HIV. 5 would control 32% of the entire world's wealth; all 5 would be US citizens. Finally, 33 would be receiving—and attempting to live on—only 3% of the income of “the village.”

I had quite a reaction after reading that bulletin board. The first thing that I was drawn to was the distribution of technology. The scenario suggests that only 7% of us have access to the internet. That's a shocking statistic. I don't personally know anyone who doesn't own or at least have access to a computer.

It is also interesting to look at the geography of this scenario. Only five percent of all people are from the United States and Canada. The rest are citizens of other nations in the world. Speaking of other nations, the Center for International Studies at SCSU estimates that out of the 16,000 students enrolled, more than 900 of them are from foreign countries.

Did you have the opportunity to meet or become friends with an international student? I shared many meals in Garvey Commons where I was often the only U.S. citizen at a table of students from around the globe. I learned from them that receiving a college education from the United States is serious business. Often times extended family members will have to pool their resources together so one person can receive an education in the United States.

Only one person out of that village of 100 has a college education. We all are part of that representative one individual. I want you to think about the gift we have earned and are

about to receive. On a global scale, 99% of the people around us have not achieved the level of education that we now possess. From one perspective, receiving a degree from St. Cloud State University gives us the distinguished privilege and opportunity to be successful in the competitive workforce we are about to enter. I wish you all the best of luck as you apply to graduate schools and / or pursue your first professional job.

When you do finish your advanced degrees or land that first job, I want you all to stop and take a moment to reflect on the responsibility that you have been given. Consider both the rarity of your gifts and the uniqueness of your personality. Remember that you are the one person in that village of 100 who has a college education. Realize that you have an obligation to share what you have been given with others. After all, gifts effectively serve their purpose only when given away. Therefore, I encourage you to actively seek and pursue every opportunity to share your talents with the other 99 people in that village.

How do we develop our gifts throughout our careers so we have something of impact to share with others?

A new teacher asked a seasoned professor at a conference how to reach the students that seemed unreachable. How do you educate adolescents with wild behavior, poor attitudes, and a multitude of differences?

The professor smiled and said: You have to put your priorities in the right order. First, seek to love your students and then they will naturally want to learn from you.

This lesson applies to every field of study or discipline. How do we become successful business people, revolutionary scientists, inventive engineers, compassionate medical professionals, effective teachers, and creative artists? We become these things as we love those around us by placing their needs ahead of our own. We become successful when we share all that we have been given: the love from our family and friends, the knowledge we've gained from our college education, and the expertise we develop during our careers with those in our sphere of influence. If you start with love, I guarantee you will end in victory.

Congratulations class of 2006, class is dismissed!