
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

COLUMBIAN COLLEGE
OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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GRADUATION SPEECH
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Good afternoon, faculty, parents, families and friends, and special greeting to you, the graduating class of 2009.

All of us gather here today to celebrate, as a community, the sleepless nights studying, the endless hours of research and the many cups of caffeine that culminated in you earning a degree from Columbian College of Arts and Sciences.

Many stand behind you in this accomplishment and now celebrate with you, both in person and from a distance.

The traditional graduation ceremony wishes you well as you begin your journey into a world of discovery, and embark toward great accomplishments.

But we already know that you have been accomplishing great things all during your years here.

As Dean of the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, I have been astounded by how much you and your professors have discovered and created in just this last year. These discoveries will have significance well into the future.

- What would it be like to work at Biblical “Armageddon?” 13 of the 20 archaeology majors who are graduating here today have dug at Megiddo in Israel – biblical Armageddon – with Professor Eric Cline, including Kyle Leonard and Adam Prins who participated twice. Students dug at a site that has been excavated for more than 100 years, and contains the remains of 30 cities and decisive battles over more than 6,000 years.
- Where do our immigrants come from and how have they fared here? Abdul Rahmin’s Dean’s Seminar on migration led him to become a geography major. With support from a Shapiro Fellowship, he will conduct field research in Bangladesh on the effects of immigration.
- For her Masters thesis, History student Whitney Tarella completed one of the most exhaustive demographic analyses of early Italian immigrants ever undertaken, disproving the generally held belief that immigrants fared poorly in the South due to employment competition from ex-slaves. Her research showed that the Italian community in New Orleans was probably more prosperous than in other American cities.
- What is next on the energy horizon? *Planet Forward*, the Web and TV brainchild of School of Media and Public Affairs Professor and Emmy Award-winning CNN veteran Frank Sesno is an engaging combination of students, citizens, and experts making their case for what they think about the nation’s energy future. Our students were involved in developing and editing Web content and in producing the television show which was taped in front of a live audience, including some of you, and aired nationwide on PBS.

- What was the land like here in the DC area? In fact, Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains were the long ago site of volcanic explosions. Prof. of Geology, Richard Tollo was last year's DC Professor of the Year. Along with sophomore Alley Rubin and seniors Maureen Logan and Chris Perendo, he spent the summer mapping a four hundred square mile section of the Jefferson National Forest to study this large volcano and its lava flows.
- Where does our students' work reach? Columbian College of Arts and Sciences student Nicole Welsh was the first undergraduate student to present at the national Tony Morrison Societies bi-annual conference. She revised a paper that she had prepared in class that looked in detail at Tony Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. When Michelle Obama was visiting a shelter in DC, she ran into our Art Therapy student who passed on a picture of President Obama, drawn by one of her clients. I like to think of them discussing Art Therapy, GW, and the artist over dinner that night.
- Your faculty are experts: Political Science Prof. Sarah Binder recently provided commentary on National Public Radio; Kathryn Newcomer, Associate Director of the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration, briefed President Obama's transition team about government management issues, and Biology Professor Jim Clark was featured in National Geographic.

This is only a sampling of the accomplishments that take place virtually every day. Just imagine what the future holds!

You have discovered new worlds through lab sciences, humanities, literature, languages, performing arts, social sciences and more, and through that, you have discovered yourselves. You have partnered with some of the most prestigious institutions in the nation: Some of you have benefited from our 100-year partnership with the Smithsonian or worked with a 400-year-old book at the Folger Shakespeare Library; others have studied the life and times of George Washington himself at his home nearby.

Many had the chance to hear Pulitzer Prize winning author Edward P. Jones read and discuss his work as the Wang Visiting Professor in Contemporary English Literature. You have interned on the Hill and in D.C.'s most prestigious non-profits; you have participated in study abroad, in theater productions, in independent study research projects; you have done service learning and volunteer work within the greater Washington, D.C., community; you have studied at the Library of Congress, you were challenged by your professors and classmates to think and consider things outside of your comfort zone; and have established lasting friendships.

The relationship between faculty and students makes a unique, personal impression and has created a memory for each of you. It may have begun in a small Dean's seminar, the first class in your major, your thesis research, or in a class you never really wanted to take, but loved anyway. Each of you has a special connection to GW through your professors who have watched you grow with pride.

As a first-year student, I also took a Dean's seminar with Prof. Bea Whiting, studying children's games in various ethnic Boston neighborhoods. I volunteered at Head Start and as a tutor. Later, I chose to do research on children's development.

In my senior research class, I worked closely with Prof. Phillips, using game theory to examine processes of choice and strategy, and I later went on to study psychology in graduate school.

I was amazed when my advisor, Prof. Ellen Strommen, nominated me for a senior women's honor society and an academic honor society. I particularly thank her recognition of my leadership, as I am now in a leadership position.

Just as with my arts and sciences background, your background from Columbia College of Arts and Sciences will give you a strong advantage: You will have our international reputation behind you, and you have the skills, foundation and experiences to be intellectually nimble as you adapt to the rapidly changing world.

Let me tell you about some of the Columbia College of Arts and Sciences alumni you are joining: Economics graduate John Safer will receive an honorary degree this weekend, particularly noting his international reputation as an artist. Speech and Hearing Sciences graduate Ellen Zane is now President and CEO of Tufts Medical Center. Actress Kerry Washington uses her psychology and sociology courses to inform her acting. Political Science alum U.S. Senator Mark Warner is the newest GW alum elected to the 111th U.S. Congress, joining 14 GW incumbents. Political Science and Speech Communication alum Randy Levine is President of the New York Yankees. There really is no telling where your degree will take you! I look to you for innovations, creativity, discovery, leadership, and service.

Remember to draw on your experiences and relationships at GW to help you through challenges. And, please, keep in touch. As a GW alum I have returned as Dean, Senator Warner returned to help us announce Yellow Ribbon Scholarships for post 9/11 veterans, Ellen Zane has returned to be on the advisory board of the Columbia College, and Randy Levine has returned to serve on the Board of Trustees.

Stop by on the way to your office on the Hill, stop by when you come to perform at the Kennedy Center, stop by when you come to review scientific proposals at the National Science Foundation. Stop by when you bring your grandchildren to see the cherry blossoms. Send me a note about your first publication. Let me know when you get a promotion. If you are in town, join our young alumni events, and look for alumni events in cities around the world. Come visit your professors and friends on alumni weekend. Columbia College of Arts and Sciences will always be ready to welcome you back!

Remember, I look to you for innovations, creativity, discovery, leadership, and service.

Congratulations and all the best!