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Remarks

Skidmore College 101st Commencement

May 19, 2012

Good morning. Families, friends, the Skidmore faculty, administration and the Board of Trustees, and our distinguished degree recipients, please join me in congratulating the 101st graduating class at Skidmore College, the Class of 2012!

Over the past few days, I have become even more convinced that the last four years at Skidmore have come to pass too quickly. Far too quickly for me to fully contextualize all the great moments in a brief talk, but I'll attempt to do my best to draw attention to some of the highlights.

I know for a fact that for the Class, last week marked the end of taking courses, making presentations, taking exams, and writing papers at Skidmore. Also, this week was the penultimate time to enjoy exciting activities such as Fun Day, dining hall meals, college formal dances, and graduation at Skidmore. Many might think that our story book on Skidmore College, called the *Legendary Class of Skidmore: Class of 2012*, is in its final chapter and it will soon slowly conclude either, today, in about 2 hours after we walk off stage with a diploma, or officially, tomorrow morning when Residential Life eventually forces us out of our rooms in Northwoods! Following these two occasions, some of you may be inclined to think that your Skidmore book will fully conclude. However, I am going to take my time this morning to remind you that this book is forever open for your formation and inscription. And may I say that I both hope and believe that this book will often be dominated by college daydreams, Class of 2012 reunions, alumni donation communications, and...maybe...just maybe... stories of the matriculation of your own children to Skidmore!

Although four years have elapsed quickly, each of us has written distinct chapters within this book about our experiences at college.

- Perhaps it is filled with humor because you are in the shoes of Nathaniel Moore and your world is forever funny, causing you to be part of almost all the comedy groups on campus; or

- Maybe it is punctuated by stories of your adventures inside caves with a headlamp and a rock hammer in search of stalagmites for geoscience because you are Logan Brenner; or
- It is possible that you are in an unending state of Zen and happiness through stress reduction techniques because you are Chris Lord and Sam Leibenhaut and you are working on mediation and Fight Week; or
- Perchance you are caught in an unending cycle of planning and executing various SGA related events throughout campus because you are Rohini Alamgir and Raiza Nazareth; or finally,
- Possibly it is dominated by a student-athlete juggling act, because you are Brian Lowry and who, from season to season, juggled basketball, baseball and academics.

Despite how highly individualistic each of the 627 chapters have become, the next chapters of our book may justly be called, “Creative Thought Matters: Create the Future.” Today, I'd like to share a little more about why I think our Skidmore book remains open for your authorship and just how your Skidmore education and experiences will always be with you.

Our mentors here at Skidmore have shown us that time always transforms youth into wisdom; it's often later in life when you have time to reflect upon past life lessons that you fully comprehend that every day should be cherished and lived to the fullest. Each of us has grown in different and significant ways from September of 2008 to May of 2012, but I am confident that we each recall that in some ways our First-Year was characterized by excitement, novelty, fright, and naivety; ...Sophomore year was filled with exploration, comfort, youth, and identification; ...Junior year came with focus, difficulty, responsibility, and tenure; ...and lastly, Senior year, has compiled feelings of uncertainty, confidence, nostalgia, happiness and sadness. The combination of emotions realized during our years of college will be revealed in our final experiences today at Skidmore and in our lives beyond. The way in which we learn to deal with these experiences and emotions will shape our approaches to the problem solving we must do each and every day.

I believe that throughout life, you will find a symbol, an action, or physical change that signifies changes in time, knowledge, and life's gifts. During our career at Skidmore, the one identifiable symbolic item which I saw that represented incremental changes within the collective union of our Class was the yearly movement of our class banner on the third floor of Case Center. I am talking about the banner which every one of you signed during our first day of orientation on September 7th 2008 ...Oh and for those of you who missed out on signing the banner, you are fully included because you have signed the Skidmore honor code enough times that you are fully a part of this world!.. With every

successive year, our banner moved...and our little Skidmore world evolved, and more importantly, the ever changing world around us continued to grow at a shrinking pace... We entered college at a time of immense change -- a global recession and the election of the first African American President, Barak Obama. Today, we exit this great institution and into a world where there is still major financial market uncertainty due to the European Union debt crisis and the US is in the midst of another Presidential election campaign... Each year, as our banner moved, our perspectives on global initiatives also expanded critically and practically through class projects and experiences on study abroad programs, as well as volunteer initiatives in the Saratoga community and around the globe... At the same time, the College was also doing its own reflection on and expansion of its strategic goals for its own development as a community that embraces and supports intercultural learning and global citizenship. In many ways, we were learning about this together. In our world today, having global perspectives is crucial for understanding and participating in the environments we encounter every day - and our chapters will be filled with such action.

So, if I am speaking of writing our futures and you know either anything about me or commencement addresses, you know that what logically follows is the advice segment of this speech — so here it is.

- First, though, congratulations on getting through the easiest part of life...the future is now upon us.
- Secondly, following your Skidmore Career, live life for both your personal enjoyment and the betterment of the lives of the people around you—and I don't think these need to be diametrically opposed objectives. This is because I believe that everyone on this earth is interconnected in very complex ways. There are dynamic ties among the people in front of you, behind you, to the left and to the right, and everyone you have ever encountered or thought about. Try to avoid the life of solely living to work, working to earn, and earning to consume. There are far greater things to life than material possessions: the networks of family and friends that we foster today will fully sustain us through the worst of times, as well as the best. Be someone who chooses to do work that is enjoyable but also takes into consideration the lives of all those around us.
- Thirdly, as we leave Skidmore to embark on new journeys, I feel that a statement by my college basketball coach Joe Burke, at the conclusion of my Skidmore athletic career, captures some important aspects of life's experiences--especially the past four years at Skidmore College....He said, "All things inevitably come to an end.....the hardest thing in life is when great things come to an end." Please

take a moment to think about this under the context of the experiences shared with your fellow classmates at Skidmore.It isn't the end of your experiences but what you take from such experiences, is what will make your next actions most powerful.

- Fourthly, Nelson Mandela once said, "It is what we make out of what we have..... not what we are given, that separates one person from another." Ultimately what you do in life is what defines you. At Skidmore we have defined excellence in 627 different ways, so let's continue to take that excellence into the next phase of our lives.
- Lastly, time matters. Time is the most valuable commodity in life and with every experience, it either appreciates or depreciates. We don't know what time we have but we do know that we have some time. As they say before exams, "use your time wisely, you may begin.".... It is time to begin the next phase of our young and dynamic lives—use your talents and time wisely.

I know that you have listened to and have read many books in your life time, but I also know that your Skidmore story will never be finished. During my last Business Strategy class, my professor, Colleen Burke, said, "Life is like a crumpled piece of foil. There are no straight edges, but it is up to you to unravel it. You are the author, write your own life story and if you don't like it, rewrite it by assessing your mistakes and strategizing for future achievements."

I am deeply sorry that my voice is not as soothing and crisp like Morgan Freeman or James Earl Jones, but I tried. I do hope, however, that you listened to everything I said, and ...if you did zone out ... well, this is the most important thing I want to leave with you today: Our Skidmore stories are still unfinished... we have pages and pages yet to be written... We own the legacy, "We Da Best," and if we fully embrace this legacy, we will continue to stand by this motto many years to come. I, personally, can't wait to read and hear the rest of your Skidmore stories.

My final reminder to the Class of 2012 is that today is not just about us. Although you will get enough praise for graduating over the next few weeks, there are so many individuals who have made this day possible. So, please join me in thanking our families, friends, and the Skidmore administration, staff, and faculty for giving us the knowledge and experience.... guidance, mentorship and support,... as well as the confidence to write the collective 627 chapters in our book, the Legendary Class of Skidmore... Class of 2012!

I am forever grateful to have had this opportunity to serve you over the past four year and to experience Skidmore with you, the Class of 2012! Congratulations on all that you have accomplished.