

Commencement Remarks

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Good morning! I stand before you today as both a proud Skidmore College alum and an enthusiastic member of the Skidmore faculty.

It has been 30 years since I earned the right to stroll across this stage, shake hands with then Skidmore President Joseph Palamountain, and receive my Skidmore diploma. (Well, actually there was this small matter of unpaid parking tickets, but once they were settled I received my diploma.) Thirty years. That's a decade before cell phones. Ask your parents about that. Long before lol, yolo and emogies, before our responses were limited to 140 characters. We didn't even have caller ID.

If I only knew how to use my iPhone 5, this would be the perfect time for a selfie. Then I could put it on my Facebook page. I'd tweet it and post it to Instagram for all of you to see. Well, the truth is I don't actually know how to do any of those things, but I suppose I could get my 11-year-old son to help me.

But in all seriousness, trust me when I tell you that it is a wonderful walk across this stage. It is the realization of a goal that started before you even arrived on the Skidmore campus and the culmination of an experience you will remember the rest of your lives.

So enjoy it and **dig** yourselves. You have earned it. You will now and forever be a Skidmore College graduate and that is a worthy accomplishment. Well done and welcome to the family.

As you prepare to move forward from Skidmore and begin to explore the myriad options and opportunities that your hard work has earned you, always remember that with those options and opportunities comes responsibility.

Pay it forward, go back into the cave and help someone else come out into the light. Or as former Skidmore President David Porter remarked, "Windows were opened for us; we in turn must open windows for others."

But before the true celebration begins, let's chat for a few minutes.

As you look around you today, on both sides of the stage, you see fellow graduates, professors, trustees, parents, everyone in the building for that matter. Understand that not one of us has gotten here on our own. We all have had help.

They say, "It takes a village to raise a child." I know my wife and I would whole-heartedly agree with that sentiment. If it takes a village to raise a child, I would suggest it certainly takes more than a village to educate one.

So as you consider your own transformative educational journey, take a moment to think about and appreciate all of the people who have helped you along the way. Be it a parent or grandparent, uncle or aunt, sibling, friend, teacher or coach, anyone who has been part of the

process, and say, "Thank you." Remember they made a conscious choice to help and support you and that effort deserves to be appreciated and recognized.

I personally would like to thank Sheldon Solomon, who has been helping me since he became my academic advisor in 1980, and Crystal Moore, who offered me my first teaching opportunity at Skidmore ten years ago, for helping me along my journey. I would not be here today if not for them.

We here at Skidmore are firm believers in creative thought. Creative thought matters. We pride ourselves on this philosophy. Creative thought is a wonderful place to begin the process, but unless we follow up our creative thoughts with creative engagement and action we will have missed a great opportunity.

In the Social Work Program, we stress the goal of taking an idea from conception and seeing it through to implementation, putting theory into practice if you will. This is in direct support of one of Lucy Scribner's original missions of the college, 'words to action. Without the action of engagement to implement those creative thoughts, there is little progress. It is our actions that allow us to move forward.

Be engaged. Take action.

One of the most difficult challenges we face is simultaneously one of our most profound learning opportunities: The Active Engagement of Difference. As you move forward on your journey, I would encourage you to seek out difference and embrace it. Engage it. Make this a life-long mission.

Engaging in difference is simply a willingness to listen, learn and explore someone else's thoughts and ideas. Our ability to listen will allow the discussions to continue and raise our own level of awareness.

There are always multiple sides to every issue or discussion. It is in your best interest to understand more than your own view. You don't have to agree, but the broader your understanding, the better able you are to communicate and engage.

Remember it is harder to hate something that you understand. As we deepen our collective level of understanding and raise our awareness, we decrease our fears. You cannot be socially responsible until you are socially aware. Active engagement is at the center of most progressive ideas, successful organizations and meaningful social movements.

Remember: Life is not a spectator sport. We must engage our passions. For the realization of dreams does not occur through passive acceptance, but rather passionate engagement.

We have been waiting for you with great anticipation. Welcome to your next great opportunity. The future is here for all of us, but the day is most certainly yours.

I wish you the courage to seize the opportunities before you and realize your dreams. For now celebrate, appreciate and engage, and remember to always, always, wear your sun block.