

Baltimore Polytechnic Institute Class of 2010 Valedictory

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In preparing this speech, it struck me that it is perhaps the ultimate cruelty to all involved to force a graduate of a science and engineering school to speak in public. So I thought it would be appropriate to quote another such graduate—Dr. Wilmer Dehuff.

During his nearly forty years here as Director, he left us six words that we've heard every week for the last four years: *Freedom, Responsibility, Goodness, Mercy, Perseverance, and Achievement*. I doubt it ever occurred to him that these words should become a ritualistic chant—each of them has too much meaning to be lost in that type of obligatory dullness. For they are not just about how a student ought to conduct himself at Poly, they are about how we ought to carry ourselves as we go out into the wider world.

1. Freedom and responsibility are important concepts far beyond the legalistic sphere with which we too often associate them. As we have all heard before, they come together: for every freedom we have, there is the responsibility to exercise it wisely. We are here because we have the good fortune of aptitude, and with that a broad freedom to choose whether and what to learn. Yet we also have a responsibility that transcends rules to learn and to use the knowledge we gain for the betterment of society.

2. Goodness and mercy in many ways overlap with freedom and responsibility; all four demand of us social responsibility in our daily lives. That means caring for one another—not only for those we hold dear, but also for those whom we cannot stand. This is not to say that we should tightly fasten our lips when we are displeased; rather it is to say that it is more a reflection upon us than upon our supposed enemy when we subject someone to our disrespect. Yet social responsibility is much broader; it also involves showing courtesy and decency to those whom we hardly know.

3. Returning to the academic sphere, perseverance and achievement have a special relevance. They remind us that hard work is our responsibility, and that attaining our goals is as well—that our success is judged not only by our effort, but also by our output. This is especially important as we go off to college in a world that is anything but static. In our lifetimes, we are likely to face even more competition for good jobs than our parents' generation has, and we best prepare ourselves for a punishing job market by putting in the hard work college can reward. College will not force that upon us any more than Poly has tried to; one can always find an easy way to finagle a degree—but in doing so we waste our time rather than cheat the institution. As we go off to college, we have the opportunity to build our own success by using the foundation Poly has given us; but it falls upon us to persevere until we achieve.

4. Dr. Dehuff took the liberty of slowly expanding his list of words from two to six, and I submit that more than 50 years after his retirement, a seventh word would be appropriate for Poly: *curiosity*. In school—and that is where we have been for over a

decade, and where we will be for some years to come—curiosity is by far and away the best reason to work. It gives the direction that monetary drive cannot and the motivation that we rarely derive from parental pressure. And while it is an unforgiving master—it demands perseverance and achievement at every juncture—it is also a most pleasant one. Curiosity's central benefit is that we are *all* curious: we all want to know what is going on around us and why. To answer those questions takes a lot of work, but if we let curiosity take charge of our academic lives, it will lead us to the answers—and will help us enjoy the process of finding them. And it can do so with the best of intentions; it seeks to harm no one, and it is open to all ideas.

At the end of the day, we do not go to school to earn a degree. To spend four years at college simply out of a rabid desire to lay one's hands upon a piece of paper is a ludicrous waste of time and money. If we spend the time to go to school, it should be to satisfy our curiosity—to learn.

These seven words are worth remembering, not as mere relics of high school, but as guiding principles in our lives.

As we transition out of high school, it is also important to reflect upon how we got here and to thank those who made it possible. On behalf of our class, I'd like to thank our parents, who've stood by us not only at celebrations like this one, but also when our prospects were not so bright. And we all appreciate our most inspiring teachers. A few are particularly worthy of mention. For those of us lucky enough to have studied under

him, Dr. Goldenberg has been an exceptional teacher. Equally impressive has been Mrs. Parker, whose perseverance and dedication have been awesome, and whose extraordinary skill has shaped the English education each of us received. Our thoughts are with her, and we all hope to see her teaching again soon. And I know I speak for the better part of our school when I express my deep gratitude for Mr. Jutras' decade of service here. To many of us he is a dear friend and a spectacular teacher, but to this institution he has been nothing short of a loyal servant who has consistently put Poly before himself. He will be sorely missed.

Most of all, though, I think we owe one another a lot of the credit for making it here today. I know that my time in high school has been worthwhile not because of the heaps of homework—or stacks of folders—but because of the people I've spent time with: the classmates I've known for seven years since we nervously sat down next to one another in middle school; the students I met four years ago when we started here at Poly; and the others in our class and in the other grades who've shown up since. Thank you for being such wonderful friends.