



Remarks
2010 Commencement Exercises
Mott Community College

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Association of Community College Trustees

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Congratulations, graduates!

This is a momentous day. Forever cherish and celebrate this moment. A college degree is a significant and extremely valuable asset in today's complex world.

Let's also congratulate your families and friends. Their support and encouragement helped make this day possible.

I want to thank the Mott Board of Trustees - especially my "lifetime friend" Board Chair Lenore Croudy and ACCT Secretary-Treasurer Celia Turner – as well as President Richard Shaink for the honor of inviting me to speak at this important milestone, your commencement.

The term "commencement" means a "beginning." You have begun your ascent up the career ladder. Enjoy today's well-deserved

praise and hard-won acclaim, but remember the next step on the ladder still awaits you.

Nineteenth Century Biologist Thomas Henry Huxley once observed:

*The rung of a ladder was never meant to rest upon,
but only to hold a man's foot long enough to enable him to put the other somewhat higher.*

How many more rungs do you plan to climb?

And what should you know before you step up to the next rung?

As I thought about what to say to you today, I reflected on my own climb up the ladder, and lessons learned along the way.

These can be succinctly summed up:

“Be prepared to learn everything you can; know your passion; understand what makes you truly happy; and be entrepreneurial in all that you do.”

Let’s talk about preparation first.

I commend you for your desire to seek the best preparation for success in our increasingly interdependent and complex world. I suspect that’s what led you to MCC. You made a very wise decision.

Preparation for learning is the key to whatever you do in this world. It’s been said “luck” is “when preparation meets opportunity.”

Be prepared through learning, so when a new opportunity approaches you can recognize and seize it.

I remember Mr. Young, my 10th Grade Biology teacher. On the very first day of class, surrounded by dozens of specimen jars, Mr. Young said: “If you fall asleep in my class, you wake up in a jar.”

At the time, I didn't fully appreciate Mr. Young's warning. But I learned that he was alerting us to pay attention and to be prepared – ready to embrace learning. Not just in his biology class, but all the classes and situations throughout life's journey.

If you're not prepared to learn, not ready to seize opportunity when it presents itself, you could end up in a jar – isolated, unable to take advantage of life's potential. What's worse, you could be left behind in a world that rewards those who are not afraid to take a chance when opportunities present themselves.

So always be prepared to embrace new or unfamiliar, and sometimes uncomfortable, situations – do not shy away, do not be dissuaded or intimidated. Grab hold and make the most of them whenever you can.

Next, do you know what your true passion is?

*We may affirm absolutely,
that nothing great in the world
has been accomplished without passion.*

Those are the words of German Philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

Hegel tells us that without passion, achievement is impossible. Passion is the fuel that propels us forward and lifts us to greater heights. Passion lights the way and reveals our inner selves.

You've heard the old cliché: "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there."

Let your passion reveal the way forward, even—and perhaps especially—if it compels you to take the road "less traveled by," as American poet Robert Frost famously penned.

In my experience, the road less traveled leads to exciting new opportunities to express oneself and leave an indelible mark on the world for others to see.

Harness your passion as a motivating and inspiring force in all that you do and for all those you encounter.

Focus on activities where you can affect others profoundly. Be agents for change. Be inspirational. Forge new pathways for others to follow.

Next, do you understand what brings true happiness?

About a year ago, *The Atlantic Monthly* featured an article entitled “What Makes Us Happy.”

The article focused on an unprecedented study of Harvard men and found one thing in particular contributes to happiness – family and friends.

Not fame, not fortune, not even good health, but family and friends - those relationships developed and nurtured throughout a lifetime.

Look around you now. Surrounding you are family and friends who give you focus and the inner grounding to take on whatever life throws at you.

Keep family and friends close as you move on to life’s next set of challenges.

Never forget those who bring happiness and satisfaction to your life. The dividends they

bring will help to sustain you through life's journey.

Lastly, be entrepreneurial in all you do. Being entrepreneurial is being creative, acting upon well thought-out plans, assessing and taking risks, and being accountable for those risks and outcomes.

Entrepreneurship is the thread that has bound up the nation's tapestry and led us to greatness. Entrepreneurs and risk-takers helped transform our nation from an agrarian confederation of states to an industrialized superpower that redefined what was possible in the world.

With the newly "flattened" world economy brought about by broadband technologies that power laptop computers to smart phones to iPods, iPads, Nooks and Kindles, people and communities are now seamlessly joined across the globe.

Entrepreneurs today, neither adhere to national boundaries nor are constrained by them. Such is the transformative power of Broadband.

In short, the entrepreneurial spirit is more free to express itself today than at any other time in human history.

By embracing the entrepreneurial spirit, you will find the next rung on the ladder and accelerate your climb to ever-higher levels of achievement.

As you reach greater heights, so too will our nation, and we will be ready to take on any and all challenges that await us in this century.

But before I leave this podium and the real celebrations begin, I must ask a favor of you, and that is this - be a lifelong advocate for community colleges and especially your new *alma mater*, Mott Community College.

The term *alma mater* derives from Latin, and literally means “fostering mother.”

What an appropriate metaphor for community colleges, because there is no more life-bringing and nurturing institution in American higher education today.

Community colleges are uniquely American institutions. They are by far the most innovative and responsive institutions to be found anywhere in our educational system.

You have experienced first-hand, community-college faculty who are second to none when it comes to providing student-centered learning and fostering student success regardless of personal circumstance. Their work has only one purpose: to prepare you for this moment and for the great moments to come later on in your life.

Celebrate your experience here at Mott. Consider coming back from time to time, whether to teach or take an opportunity to learn something new. Bring a friend or family member, and stay in touch with the faculty and administration.

Spread the word about the power of community colleges at large. Help others understand that community colleges put “wings on dreams.”

A community college put wings on Dr. J. Craig Venter’s dreams.

Dr. Venter returned to the States after serving his country in Vietnam, but was deemed unqualified for admission to university. So he went to San Mateo Community College in California instead.

Dr. Venter went on to become the first individual to map the human genome, which, as you can imagine, changed the course of science and history. Dr. Venter literally wrote the book on the subject—a book entitled *A Life Decoded: My Genome: My Life*.

Dreamers like Lt. Colonel Eileen Collins, the first female space shuttle commander, earned her wings through the community college.

In 1999, she commanded the space shuttle Columbia mission that deployed the Chandra X-Ray Observatory. Collins attended Corning Community College in New York State.

And it was a community college that set Vice Admiral Richard Carmona's dreams in motion.

Of Puerto Rican descent, Dr. Carmona grew up in Harlem, and was a decorated soldier in Vietnam. But it was Bronx Community College in New York that gave Dr. Carmona his wings to go on and become the 17th Surgeon General of the United States.

Failing to advocate for community colleges like Mott would mean that fewer students like Dr. Venter, Lt. Colonel Collins, and Vice Admiral Carmona, and you who graduate today, would have an opportunity to gain a foothold in the new economy.

Through your advocacy, we can focus the nation on the miracle that is the community college system and help lift our nation to ever greater heights.

So, be prepared to embrace opportunities to further your learning, so that you're ready to seize opportunity when it calls you.

Know that your passion will sustain, inspire and lift you and those around you, even if circumstances seem daunting.

Remember your family and friends – they are your support pillars and the true source of happiness.

Be entrepreneurial and embrace change. Be a light to guide others.

What you take away from this special place and time, and how and where you apply what you have learned, will make all the difference in your life and those you touch.

Congratulations for your achievements, for your wise decision to place your faith in the community college, and for honoring the Mott Community College administration and faculty through your accomplishments.

I wish you every success in the future.

Thank you and may God bless you.