

Graduating into the Village of One Hundred

Undergraduate Commencement
Sunday, June 14, 2009
KeyArena

Welcome students, families, faculty and friends to the 2009 Undergraduate Commencement of Seattle University in KeyArena. This is our first commencement in this Arena. Just as we are winners today in the achievement of our graduating students, so also we plan to be winners as Seattle U Redhawks on this our home court.

Students, welcome to your commencement. I am quite sure the first time I had the chance four or five years ago to welcome you I used my trademark example of the “Village of 100”. In Jesuit education, there is a saying which in Latin goes, “Repetitio est mater studiorum”, which means “Repetition is the mother of learning”. So for one last time, here goes.

THE WORLD AS AVILLAGE OF 100

(Based on David J. Smith, If the World Were a Village, 2007)

60	Asians
12	Europeans
5	U. S. A.
8	Latin Americans
14	Africans
51	Males
49	Females
18	White
33	Christians
67	Unable to read
24	No electricity
50	Malnourished
33	Without clean drinking water
82	Experienced war, or been in prison, or been tortured or suffered famine
75	Have a meal in the refrigerator and have shoes and a bed and roof overhead
50	Able to go to church, mosque, synagogue, temple without fear of arrest or harassment
7	Access to the internet
5	Own 32% of the village's wealth
1	With a college degree

The village in the past:

1000 BC	1
500 BC	2
1 AD	3
1000	5
1500	8
1650	10
1800	17
1900	32
2007	100

The village in the future

2100	200
2150	250

I say the same thing today even more truly on this day of your graduation, the day you attain that college degree which only one in a hundred has. You are the one in a hundred today so know the gift you have received, accept it, be grateful to God for it, enjoy it, treasure it, be enriched in your life by it. But also if you are now officially the one in a hundred, know equally that it must be true from any viewpoint but especially from the viewpoint of God that you must use your degree to serve, to love, to support your ninety-nine brothers and sisters in your global village. May your degree be shared with all, part of what you bring to the banquet of the shared meal of the whole village.

In reflecting on your class in particular, more than I believe is true for any other graduating class, I think the world itself has changed more since you first heard that example and that you too have changed more than other graduates because of this. Let me explain.

Since you started college, the population of the world itself has grown by 253,365,000 persons and the population of the United States has grown by 8,500,000. So there are new people in the village. It is more wonderfully diverse. China and India have come to the fore; Africa is making itself more known; the Middle East demands several seats at the table.

In the year you began your college studies, 679 US military personnel were killed in Iraq. So far in the year you are graduating 21 have been killed in Iraq. The war has shifted elsewhere, but other wars and genocides particularly in Africa continue to go on. The village is not less violent just less focused in one neighborhood while the violence in other neighborhoods where we do not dare tread continue to be ignored.

Just in the four years of your college education, you and your classmates have taken on and accepted and have committed yourselves to what you see as the greatest and most urgent cause anywhere and of any time, the cause of ecological sustainability, of environmental justice, of the very survival of the planet and of humanity. It is in these years, not before, that global warming and carbon footprints and a green economy have become fully recognized more by you than by your elders. You are committed to a green village.

Perhaps the biggest change in your world, your village, in these university years has been the fact that these have been the years of the rise, the campaign, the election, and the amazingly dynamic first months of the presidency of a man—almost unknown when you started as freshmen—named Barack Obama. Perhaps he has not yet changed the world, the village, but he—together with his loving, glamorous, and candid wife Michelle and their daughters in the White House—have changed its hopes, its opening in friendship, and the role of America in the village as a partner. We really don't place all of our hopes in one man, we place all of our hopes in all of you and of the other villagers for whom he is a sign of their hopes, their friendship, their partnership.

The world has changed in these few years by the geometrical progression in the predominance and utility and new applications of technology so that how you are connected with the persons of the village, how you learn from and communicate with one another, how you create and think is simply different. I don't know if it's a wired or a wireless village, but I do know it is not the world of just four or five years ago.

The world of your commencement day is a much less secure world than the day of your entrance into college. For all of our advancement, progress, and new technology, you are part of a world that has been humbled by an economic crisis which has shown the fragility of our systems and the false promises and often greed of our economic leaders. The entire village—including you as you know so well—but especially the poorer neighborhoods are shaky, more anxious, more needy, more suffering.

What I want to say very clearly to you is that if the world has changed as much in these years as I've outlined—more I believe in sum than for any college generation—then I also believe even more firmly that you have changed more than any other and that are quite ready even eager for this world. The world has not passed you by. You have changed with it.

- You know, experience, and feel on your pulse your global citizenship, your oneness with your world's brothers and sisters as no other college students have.
- You are committed to peace, to non-violence, to dialogue, to justice and the elimination of poverty for the sake of peace.
- You are ready and eager and skilled to take on the challenges of a sustainable world. That's your cause.
- You rival Barack Obama in your hope and in your own intelligence as a match to his being so smart and so listening a president.

- You know the way forward in technology and innovations and you are not disconcerted by the fact that you will be the builders of a new and more sound economy; an economy for the whole village.

If you could be the person you were when you started college and you met the person you are now, I think first of all you would not recognize him or her; but that you would be impressed and have confidence in that older person, and would very much like her or him.

Know that your family and friends, your faculty and mentors were glad when you came to Seattle U and we are impressed with you today and like who you have become. I for one like and have confidence in you, and am glad to be a citizen of your village. You'll find me always there in some corner of your village one with you, praying for you and for the other 99 of our brothers and sisters.