

SUNY COMMENCEMENT

WILLIAM S. WOODSIDE

SINCE THIS IS A UNIVERSITY, A PLACE WHERE  
IDEAS AND THE EXPRESSION OF THOSE IDEAS IS  
PARAMOUNT, I KNOW HOW COMMITTED YOU MUST  
BE TO SUCH TANGIBLE SYMBOLS OF OUR NATION  
AS THE CONSTITUTION, THE BILL OF RIGHTS  
AND FREE SPEECH.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT ARRANGEMENTS YOU HAVE  
MADE TO HAVE SOMEONE TALK ABOUT THE  
CONSTITUTION AND THE BILL OF RIGHTS.....,  
BUT I JUST FOUND OUT THAT I AM THE GUY WHO  
WAS INVITED HERE TO GIVE THE FREE SPEECH.

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BUT YOU ARE IN LUCK, BECAUSE WHEN I ASKED  
PRESIDENT GREBSTEIN WHAT I SHOULD TALK  
ABOUT, HE SAID: TALK ABOUT FIVE MINUTES.

THAT MAY BE FOUR MINUTES AND THIRTY  
SECONDS TOO LONG FOR SOME OF YOU ON THIS  
VERY SPECIAL DAY.

BUT THAT'S NOT TOO STEEP A PRICE TO PAY  
FOR A FREE SPEECH.

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HONORARY DEGREES ARE REALLY  
SOMETHING. You NEVER GO TO CLASS. You  
NEVER WRITE A PAPER. AND YOU WIND UP  
WITH A DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS. IT'S THE  
BEST OF BOTH WORLDS, AND I THINK I WOULD  
HAVE SOLD MY SOUL TO HAVE BEEN IN THIS  
POSITION WHEN I WAS 20 YEARS OLD AND IN  
YOUR SHOES.

A DEGREE FROM SUNY PURCHASE, THOUGH, HAS  
SPECIAL MEANING BECAUSE IN MY OPINION SUNY  
PURCHASE IS A SPECIAL INSTITUTION.

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I HAVE WORKED CLOSELY WITH THIS UNIVERSITY FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW. WE HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN A JOINT PROGRAM THAT HAS PROVIDED CRITICAL SERVICES AND ASSISTANCE TO THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS OF WESTCHESTER COUNTY. AS I HAVE WATCHED THIS PROGRAM DEVELOP I HAVE LEARNED WHAT IT IS THAT MAKES SUNY PURCHASE SO REMARKABLE.

SUNY PURCHASE IS AN INSTITUTION THAT, IN ADDITION TO BEING CONCERNED WITH THE EDUCATION OF ITS STUDENTS, IS CONCERNED WITH THE NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES AND THE WORLD AT LARGE.

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THIS INSTITUTION HAS FORSAKEN WHAT MY  
GENERATION USED TO CALL "THE IVORY TOWER"  
WITHOUT FORSAKING ITS ACADEMIC STANDARDS.  
IT IS AN INSTITUTION THAT LOOKS BEYOND ITS  
GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARIES TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE  
NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY.

SUNY PURCHASE HAS MUCH TO OFFER, BOTH  
INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM.

I HOPE YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO  
LEARN IN BOTH ENVIRONMENTS.

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IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS, YOU ARE GOING TO  
PURSUE YOUR OWN AMBITIONS AND DREAMS. You  
ARE GOING TO START SHAPING YOUR OWN  
FUTURES. THESE WILL BE TERRIFIC YEARS.  
AFTER ALL THE PREPARATION, YOU WILL AT  
LAST SE OUT ON YOUR OWN, DISCOVERING WHAT  
IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU, WHAT WORKS FOR YOU,  
WHO YOU REALLY ARE, WHAT YOU REALLY WANT.

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AS YOU ENGAGE IN THIS PROCESS, I HOPE YOU ALSO WILL FIND SOME TIME TO DO SOMETHING EVERY NOW AND THEN THAT WILL BENEFIT SOMEONE ELSE. IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE SENSATIONAL. IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE ALL-CONSUMING. JUST FIND A DAY EVERY NOW AND THEN TO GIVE SOME HELP TO A GROUP, AN ORGANIZATION, OR SOME PEOPLE WHO YOU THINK CAN USE A HELPING HAND.

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SUNY CO ▶ ENCEMENT

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PERHAPS YOU WILL FIND, AS OTHERS BEFORE  
YOU, THAT OUR SOCIETY FUNCTIONS BEST WHEN  
WE LOOK BEYOND OUR OWN PERSONAL WELL-BEING  
AND FOCUS ON THE WELL-BEING OF THE LARGER  
COMMUNITY.

END OF SERMON.

NOW....EVERY COMMENCEMENT SPEECH I HAVE  
HEARD ENDS WITH THE SPEAKER URGING THE  
GRADUATING CLASS TO GO OUT THE DOOR AND  
BUILD A BETTER TOMORROW FOR THEMSELVES AND  
THE GENERATIONS TO FOLLOW.

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SUNY

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BUT THE GRADUATING CLASS JUST WANTS  
TO GO OUT THE DOOR. PERIOD.

BY NOW, YOU HAVE HAD ENOUGH  
LECTURES TELLING YOU HOW TO GET A  
JOB, HOW TOUGH THE WORLD IS, THE  
IMPORTANCE OF

SELF-RESPECT, PRIDE AND SELF-  
RELIANCE. AND IF YOU DON'T KNOW  
BY NOW THAT THE

WORLD RESTS ON YOUR SHOULDERS, YOU  
HAVEN'T BEEN LISTENING FOR THE LAST  
FOUR YEARS.

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THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE TOLD YOU THIS, MYSELF  
INCLUDED, THINK YOU SHOULD TAKE LIFE  
SERIOUSLY. WE THINK YOU SHOULD TAKE YOUR  
OPPORTUNITIES SERIOUSLY. AND WE ARE  
RIGHT -- UP TO A POINT.

SO LET ME GIVE YOU THE FLIP SIDE OF THAT  
TUNE. IT'S CALLED: DON'T TAKE LIFE TOO  
SERIOUSLY.

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BE SERIOUS, YES. BE RESPONSIBLE, YES. BE  
CARING YES. BUT DON'T FORGET TO HAVE FUN  
ALONG THE WAY, TO ENJOY LIFE AND LAUGH AT  
ALL THE SCREW-UPS AND SCREWBALLS YOU WILL  
ENCOUNTER.

TAKE IT FROM SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN AROUND  
AWHILE: A SENSE OF HUMOR CAN HELP TO MAKE  
THE WHOLE JOURNEY MORE FULFILLING AND  
WORTHWHILE.

THANK YOU AND GOOD LUCK.

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