
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

**COLUMBIAN COLLEGE
OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**

**Dean Peg Barratt
Celebration Speech
May 15, 2010**

In 1821 Columbian College was all there was, and **you** are carrying that line forward! CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR GRADUATES!

Congratulations as well to the others gathered here today: the parents and families and friends—whose support and guidance were a big part of bringing this day to pass—and our dedicated faculty, whose commitment to creating an engaged learning environment has helped launch our graduates.

We come together to celebrate, as a community, the culmination of years of hard work to earn your degree from the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences. Tomorrow is your Commencement, your beginning—and what a special day it will be with First Lady Michelle Obama as the keynote speaker!—but today is the day to give special recognition to our smaller community of Arts and Sciences graduates who are at the core of the University experience and, I believe, the heart and soul of what makes GW great.

We come together to celebrate students like:

- Andi Israel who conducted research on D.C.'s homeless as a Gamow Undergraduate Research Fellow. Like so many of our students, Andi volunteered and used what she learned as the basis for her research. She will present her findings at the 2010 Urban Affairs Association Conference in Honolulu. Congratulations Andi!
- There's also Iraq war veteran Brian Hawthorne who organized and became president of the GW Veterans Organization, a student advocacy group that is building a community for student veterans and raising awareness of veterans' issues. Brian served as legislative director of the Student Veterans of America and testified before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs. Congratulations!
- And Thomas Richards, a Phi Beta Kappa honors student with majors in music and political science. Thomas sang professionally this year with the Washington National Opera and has been invited to a young artists program in Germany. He's also been accepted for graduate study in voice by six music schools, including Juilliard and Yale!

- And there's Luther Rice Undergraduate Research Fellow Francesca Greggs who developed her own major in Visual Communications, conducted extensive research abroad, began a graphic and website design company, and successfully completed a photo-documentary on Muslim immigration in Ireland. All in four years!

Like you, these talented individuals are among the undergraduate and graduate students who make up the CCAS Class of 2010, and we applaud each of you for a **Job Well Done!**

My goal as dean is a simple one: to provide you the breadth and depth of a strong liberal arts education within an engaged and challenging learning environment. But our success as an institution cannot be measured solely by the GPAs of our students or the number of academic awards received. It is also measured by what happens next in your lives, how you will take what you've learned and, in the years ahead, use it as springboard for contributing meaningful solutions in your community and the world beyond.

With that in mind, I look at the accomplishments of the graduates who have preceded you as an affirmation of our success. Indeed, their achievements continue to make us proud. Among them are

- Vincent Gray, who is president of the D.C. City Council (and now running for Mayor!) and is a tireless champion for innovative public policy initiatives on behalf of people with developmental disabilities;
- Mark Warner, a former governor of Virginia and now an active legislator representing Virginia in the Senate;
- Kerry Washington, a critically-acclaimed actress of stage and screen whose credits include the movies *Ray* and *Last King of Scotland* and the current Broadway production of *Race*;
- John Crews, a forensic geneticist whose work takes him to battle-weary countries for on-site DNA analysis and identification of war victims—noble work that is helping to bring much-needed closure to so many grieving families;
- Ellen Zane, a Speech and Hearing Sciences graduate, who is now President and CEO of Tufts Medical Center; and
- Randy Levine, a Political Science and Speech Communication alum who is President of the New York Yankees.

Based on their accomplishments, as I look out on you, Dr. Seuss comes to mind: “Oh, The Places You’ll Go!”

It all begins here, though, within our labs, classrooms, art studios, libraries, and lecture halls. **We’ve encouraged each of you to think big, act boldly, and change lives.** Indeed, I’m continually amazed at the fascinating, enlightening, and just downright fun things that happen here.

For example:

- Chemistry students created a massive Periodic Table of Elements—not in the classroom but on blocked-off H Street . . . their learning tool of choice? Chalk – you remember Chalk-In!
- Anthropology Professor Chet Sherwood and his students learned a lot about the evolution of the human brain by examining the brains of tigers, and elephants, and monkeys (oh my!).
- Graduate student Jonah Choiniere was the senior author of a *Science* article describing a new species of dinosaur that **he got to name**.
This dinosaur is important because it is the oldest and most primitive member of a strange group of dinosaurs that evolved short, muscular arms with a single large claw.

- Through field trips that trace the city’s water supply from source to sludge, Environmental Studies students “flushed out” D.C.—not exactly a day in the park!
- Speech and Hearing Professor Francys Subiaul’s research on imitation in humans and primates is providing new insight on why children with autism have trouble acquiring knowledge through imitation.
- Professor Cayo Gamber’s writing class worked with the Holocaust Museum to learn more about children who perished by examining scattered diaries and scribbles in book margins and on paper scraps.
- And, Professor Elizabeth Davis’ comparative management class spent 10 days in Romania and Albania to study emergent markets – and Dracula.

Because of our location in the heart of the nation’s capital, you’ve had access to some of the most prestigious institutions in the nation: Some of you have benefited from our 100-year partnership with the Smithsonian or worked with a 400-year-old book at the Folger Shakespeare Library; others have studied the life and times of George Washington himself at his home nearby. You have participated in study abroad, in theater productions, in independent study research projects; you have studied at the Library of

Congress, you were challenged by your professors and classmates to think and consider things outside of your comfort zone; and you have established lasting friendships.

The relationship between faculty and students makes a unique, personal impression and has created memories for each of you. It may have begun in a small Dean's seminar, the first class in your major, your thesis research, or in a class you never really wanted to take, but loved anyway. Each of you has a special connection to GW through your professors who have watched you grow with pride.

Just as with my arts and sciences background, your background from the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences will give you a strong advantage: You will have our international reputation behind you, and you have the skills, foundation and experiences to be intellectually nimble as you adapt to the rapidly changing world.

Remember to draw on your experiences and relationships at GW to help you through challenges. And, please, keep in touch. As a GW alum, I have returned as Dean, Senator Warner returned to help us announce Yellow

Ribbon Scholarships for post 9/11 veterans, Ellen Zane and Randy Levine have returned to serve on the Board of Trustees.

Stop by on the way to your office on the Hill, stop by when you come to perform at the Kennedy Center, stop by when you come to review scientific proposals at the National Science Foundation. Stop by when you bring your grandchildren to see the cherry blossoms. Send me a note about your first publication. Let me know when you get a promotion. If you are in town, join our young alumni events, and look for alumni events in cities around the world. Come visit your professors and friends on alumni weekend.

Columbian College of Arts and Sciences will always be ready to welcome you back!

I look to you, with anticipation and pride, for **innovations, creativity, discovery, leadership, and service**. Congratulations and all the best!