

REMARKS

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UNIVERSITY OF GUAM COMMENCEMENT

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Buenas tatdes yan hafa adai todos hamyo- hafa adai

Manggaige hit pa'go para ta silebra yan onra i manmagraduha pa'go na ha'ane, kannai ha' tres sientos, para ta rekognisa i minappot yan suppotasion i familian-niha, parehu ha' manaina, asagua, atungo' yan famagu'on, yan para ta hatsa i banderan i unibetsidat i tano'-ta Guahan yan para ta aksepta i grasian Yu'os yan i kannai i Saina-ta gi todun i kinalamten-ta guini gi hilo' tano'

We are here to celebrate the achievements of almost 300 graduates on this beautiful island afternoon, to recognize the support and contributions of their families, their parents, spouses, friends and children and to raise again (hatsa i banderan i Unibetsidat) the flag of our University of Guam and to accept the blessings of God and the hand of our lord in everything we do on earth.

To the class of 2014 and all the other classes: you are the subject of one of the great debates about the meaning and purpose of your experience. It isn't about whether you will find a profession or even how well prepared you are although those issues are significant. It is about how we fund a university whether the degree you receive today is a public good or a personal good. We know it feels good, we know it is a good degree from a great university, but is that degree, these diplomas up here; do they represent a public good or a personal good.

It is an important question because if you are tempted to say it is all about you and your success and that it is more a personal good- then why should the public pay for your education? If on the other hand, we want to say that the diploma is a public good- then the public should be paying for some, maybe a little more or maybe for most of your education—depending upon how much good your diploma will do for the rest of us.

The safe answer is to say that it is both a public and a personal good, but you have to mean it when you look at the Guam taxpayers who made this great institution possible through the support of the Guam Legislature and the Government of Guam, the federal government who paid for the student financial aid for most of you courtesy of millions of American taxpayers that we will never meet and for the island governments that gave you some scholarships and the parents, families and relatives that helped you with expenses. Your diploma is an individual achievement because it has your name on it, but it certainly is the result of a collaborative endeavor and the effort of many including families, professors, policy makers and the general public. Unfortunately, their names aren't on the diploma, although perhaps you should see their faces when you look at the diploma for a dozen times or more over the next few days.

Like other human beings we can only think in terms of our personal experience. It is our internal voice that we listen to the most, it is our individual experience that shapes our attitudes, it is how we see ourselves that captures most of our vision.

We like to think of our individuality. In fact, universities celebrate self-expression and our strong personal stance on issues of the day. If you feel strongly about the military buildup, climate change, the minimum wage, gay marriage and even if you don't, universities develop your ability to articulate a point of view, defend it with evidence and present it in public in oral and written form and with the latest form of informational technology. We want to draw your attention to your unique attributes, but we must remember the irony of human existence as expressed by the anthropologist Margaret Mead. She told us, "Always remember that you are absolutely unique, just like everybody else."

It is the tension between our individuality and our participation in society in collaborative projects that reflects the kind of tension that is part of the discussion of whether your university education is a personal or public good. If we only think about personal gain, is that fulfilling our obligation to turn our diploma into a public good?

But it is a healthy tension; the kind that is never fully resolved, but always part of our personal portfolio as a member of an island society, as a practicing professional, as a citizen of a nation and as a participant in an increasingly globalized world.

At universities everywhere around the world, students are told to find their passion and to find themselves. I endorse that advice, but I also think passion and self-discovery have to be expanded to include others as well.

We must find our individual passion while we recognize our responsibility to others. Passion without responsibility is like the air going out of a balloon- it seems powerful until it is spent and the balloon just lays on the floor after a burst of energy and an unpredictable voyage. Our passion as educated members of the community must be guided and it must be purposeful.

We must discover others as much as we discover ourselves. The mark of a truly educated person is not the person who found himself at a university, as A. Armstrong tells us, “If you don’t know who you are, a university is a very expensive place to find out.” Mahatma Ghandi’s advice for nation builders is most appropriate in these times of great challenges, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

But this must begin by setting off the spark that is within each of us, by teaching us the values of service and sacrifice and public responsibility which a collaborative effort like earning a university degree symbolizes. The University of Guam has an excellent and supportive faculty and staff which helped you navigate this process in your chosen discipline. It may seem natural to some disciplines like nursing, teaching and social work. But the values of service and public responsibility are equally meaningful if they are infused into business administration, accounting, biology or mathematics. Some can even argue that an economist with a social conscience may be worth twice as much as someone from one of the so-called helping professions.

In your time here, you have had the opportunity to become a different person; an empowered individual. This could have begun with an English literature class and Shakespeare, who tells us via Hamlet:

This above all -- to thine own self be true.
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou shalt can not then be false to any man.

For those of you who forgot your Shakespeare, there is always Dr. Seuss:

Be who you are and say what you feel because those whose mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind."

In a few minutes you will take your diploma that represents your individuality, the compilation of skills and abilities which you can apply as recommended by Shakespeare or Dr. Seuss. But also remember that these diplomas represent a relationship between you and Dr. Underwood (both of our names are on this document- neither Shakespeare or Dr. Seuss is on the diploma), between you and the future, between the society that made this institution possible and their investment in you. If you think of the diploma as just a vehicle to a job, your education isn't complete. If you think of the diploma as a mark of your personal accomplishment, your education isn't finished. If you think of the diploma as a pathway to fortune, then your education is not yet done.

Education, a good education is meant to teach you something beyond yourself. You are supposed to think about others, other societies, the human condition of the customer you sell something to, the patient you serve and even the person standing on the on the traffic median with a homemade sign asking for money, you are supposed to think about service, think about wrong doing and right doing, you don't just have quick opinions, you have informed opinions that consider the consequences to others- you think about contributions- and recognize that you will be better remembered if you gave to others much more than you took from them.

Today, we will have comments from three individuals who are symbolic of this institutional responsibility. We will hear from a valedictorian whose mother is a

custodian at the University of Guam; the personal embodiment of the collaborative effort that brought him to this stage; we will hear from and honor an entertainer who sang in several island languages and who made the effort to bridge social and ethnic differences through song and culture; we will hear from an island leader of international stature who has placed natural resources and the lives of his people ahead of quick profits and of course we will hear from the UOG Class of 2014-291 strong; loud, boisterous, confident, good looking, bunitu, gefpa'go, maganda, guapu, guapa, lingan (Pohnpeian), kato (Kosraean), klebokel (Palauan), ready to meet the world, eager to make the difference, proud of their island roots, conscious of their responsibility to others, Tritons through and true, and all the time shouting Biba UOG; Biba UOG; Biba UOG