

## Fall 2007 Commencement Remarks

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It is my pleasure to add my congratulations to those of your family and friends upon this joyous occasion marking the successful attainment of your degrees. But, as UNF's chief academic officer, on behalf of my faculty colleagues I cannot let you obtain your diplomas before I subject you to a few final words of professorial advice.

President Delaney already has singled out for attention those faculty with us this afternoon/evening for whom today also constitutes a graduation of sorts. Unlike those of you who are about to move with new degrees in hand into or further along your professional careers, my retiring colleagues are about to move in the opposite direction, from long and productive professional careers into a period of what I trust will be relaxation and unaccountability, no longer required to subscribe to the fiction that they are devoting 75% of their time to teaching, 20% to scholarship, and 5% to service, as if their effort could be so neatly partitioned and only added up to a mere 100%.

But knowing my faculty colleagues as I do, I fully suspect that none of them, perhaps especially those who are about to retire, ever will abandon his or her

most essential identity, which is not that of a professor but that of a student. Nor is this surprising to me since—as I can personally attest—each of them got into this business not, at least initially, because of a burning desire to teach, but as a result of a burning desire to learn.

I trust that all of you who are about to receive your degrees are deeply acquainted with the great works of Homer, the Iliad and the Odyssey. Permit me to remind you about them if they are not fresh in your memories. It is in the second of these two epic poems that Homer recounts the return of Odysseus to his home in Ithaka after the ten years of war recounted in the Iliad and a further ten years of adventure and misadventure recounted in the Odyssey. One would think that after such a long and arduous journey, marked throughout by a poignant yearning to be reunited with his wife Penelope and his son Telemachos, Odysseus would be content to stay put upon arriving home and vanquishing the suitors who had made life so miserable for his wife and son. But while Homer does not elaborate upon this part of Odysseus's life, he nevertheless provides a clear indication that the same curiosity which drove Odysseus to discover “what manner of man” was Polyphemous the Cyclops, and to strain to hear the song of the Sirens, would also drive Odysseus into further adventures among people whose ways are strange to him, right up to the time of his death far from home.

Ambivalent as he may have been to a pre-Christian, Greek hero, the medieval Italian poet Dante nevertheless captured Odysseus's character perfectly in his poem *The Divine Comedy*. He imagines Odysseus, at the end of his life, not at rest but instead leading his men over the horizon on one final adventure with the exhortation that "We were not born to live as brutes but to endlessly pursue virtue and knowledge."

To those of you who are eager to exchange your identity as student for that of graduate, my exhortation to you is to continue to embrace the example of your faculty mentors, not because of anything they taught you but because of their inexhaustible desire to learn. Like them, I encourage you to adopt as your motto the oft-repeated mantra that UNF stands for "U Never Finish" and thus to commit yourselves to remaining students, albeit with degrees in hand, for the rest of your lives.

Thank you and good luck.