

Ohio
Wesleyan
University

OWU PRESIDENT ROCK JONES COMMENCEMENT REMARKS

Sunday, May 12, 2013

2013 COMMENCEMENT REMARKS

**Rock Jones, President of Ohio Wesleyan University
May 12, 2013**

Trustees, faculty, staff, parents, friends, and, most importantly, members of the Ohio Wesleyan University Class of 2013, welcome to the glorious occasion of these Commencement exercises.

Four years ago, in a few cases more and in some cases less, you chose to enroll at OWU, in part, because of your understanding of the value of a liberal arts education as the best preparation for a life of meaning, purpose, leadership, and prosperity.

Here at OWU, you have embraced and benefitted from a curriculum that challenged you to explore widely a variety of disciplines of knowledge, giving you a multitude of perspectives from which to address the complex issues awaiting your generation.

You mastered the content and methods of a particular discipline, plumbing the depths of what has been learned in the past, and, in many cases, conducting original research that allowed you already as an undergraduate to make a contribution to the scholarship in your chosen discipline.

You were challenged to develop capacities for critical and analytical thinking, to be persuasive in shaping and presenting an argument, to gain an appreciation for the arts, to understand the subtlety of nuance, to honor diversity, and to acknowledge the underlying values that give shape and meaning to your life.

Your education took root in the classroom, laboratory, performance hall, studio, athletic field, residence hall, Ham-Wil, library, and on the JAYwalk. You seized the opportunity to connect theory to practice and to take your education beyond the walls of the classroom and the boundaries of the campus. You traveled to Tanzania, India, Brazil, Ireland, China, Japan, and Bangladesh, just to name a few of the dozens of countries that helped shape your education.

You benefitted from faculty who challenged you, encouraged you, provoked you, cared for you, and held you to the highest standards. You were supported by staff who supported you in countless ways, and you came to know one another as friends and companions in relationships that will nourish you for the remainder of your life. You were encouraged by family members and friends who surround you today, filled with pride for what you have accomplished and for who you have become.

You have made an impact here at OWU. You brought energy and passion to sustainability efforts on campus. You played instrumental roles in the development of the Healthy Bishop Initiative. You helped envision the restored Stuyvesant Hall, and you brought the building back to life when you returned to live there this year.

You embraced the OWU Connection, and you proposed fascinating experiences supported by TiPiT grants, far exceeding our initial aspirations for the program. You won accolades for your research, for your creativity, and for your performances. You won championships and individual recognition in athletic competition. You welcomed Governor Romney and Mrs. Obama to Delaware. You created new spring break mission trips, and you answered the call to serve in amazing ways.

Four years ago, when we gathered in Gray Chapel for your matriculation convocation, I closed my remarks with these words:

When you walk out of this grand chapel tonight, you will be surrounded by historic trees that have graced this campus since the founding of this university. Their roots run deep. And their branches spread wide. Over the next four years, your roots here will go deep. In the 50 years that follow, your branches will spread wide. And when the Class of 2013 returns for its 50-year reunion in 2063, you will have your own stories to tell about the way your OWU roots have nourished your life and about the differences those roots have made for you and for those around you.

The parable of the Chinese Bamboo tree suggests that it takes a Chinese Bamboo tree four solid years after planting to finally break ground; that is, nothing appears to happen for four years after the seed is planted. Eventually a small bulb and a little shoot emerge, but all of the growth during the first four years is underground as the tree builds a deep, fibrous root structure. During the fifth year, the Chinese Bamboo tree grows up to 80 feet! All of that growth is above ground because the tree now has massive roots to support it.

There is something in that parable that is relevant tonight. The next four years offer you the opportunity to develop the deep, fibrous root structure that will nourish and sustain the remainder of your life.

I have the bamboo shoot that was given to one of you four years ago, and returned to me yesterday by the parents of Ryan Clark. Today, your roots at OWU run more deeply than you could have imagined four years ago. Now it is time for your branches to spread.

The recent release of the movie “42,” reminds us of the difference you can make as a result of your time here. In the spring of 1903, following an experience with an African American teammate while traveling in South Bend, Indiana, Branch Rickey made a commitment that somewhere, somehow, he would do something about racial injustice.

He did not know in 1903 that in 1947, against the advice of everyone else in major league baseball, he would partner with Jackie Robinson to break the color barrier in America’s pastime and help set the stage for the Civil Rights movement. But he knew the commitment he made at OWU, and he never forgot it.

As an OWU graduate, you have the benefits of an education offered to a very small proportion of the global population. You are in elite company. With those benefits come responsibilities. You are ready to accept those responsibilities. And with idealism that characterizes your class in such powerful ways, I know you, like Branch Rickey, will make a difference in the world in ways none of us can imagine today.

In the spring of 1850, a dispirited student at Emory & Henry College wrote in his diary this prayer about his education: “Oh Lord, teach me how to think, and how to choose.”¹

I can think of no better summary of the values of a liberal arts education such as the one you have received here. Here at OWU, you have learned to think deeply and to choose wisely.

You are ready, and the world is waiting. Congratulations and Godspeed.

1 “College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be,” by Andrew Delbanco, p. 15.