

Ohio
Wesleyan
University

OWU PRESIDENT ROCK JONES COMMENCEMENT REMARKS

Sunday, May 10, 2015

2015 COMMENCEMENT REMARKS

**Rock Jones, President of Ohio Wesleyan University
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Dr. Milligan, Provost Stinemetz, Mr. Haygood, members of the faculty, family and friends of our graduates, and most importantly, members of the Ohio Wesleyan University Class of 2015, welcome to the glorious occasion of this Commencement. We are honored by your presence, and we are thrilled by the accomplishments of each member of this graduating class.

Graduates, this is your day. Today we acknowledge the remarkable achievements of your undergraduate career. We look back just a few short years to the day when you enrolled at OWU, and we marvel at what you have accomplished, how you have grown, and the directions your lives have taken as a result of your short time here.

On this campus you've benefitted from the rigor and discipline of a classical liberal arts education, complimented by robust opportunities to connect classroom learning with practical real world experience. You've been enriched by an array of co-curricular experiences that have challenged your assumptions, clarified your values, and expanded your capacities as a human being. You are not the same people who arrived here four years ago.

Today you join a small and highly privileged group of individuals who have the benefit of and bear the marks of a liberal education. Many people today question the value of a liberal arts education. I question the value of a society that lacks the benefit of liberally educated human beings. Our society depends on you to take full advantage of this rare qualification.

Today I challenge you to accept the responsibility that accompanies this privilege, to be the best person you can be, to do the most good you can do, and to compliment your life of work with a life of service to the common good and appreciation for truth and beauty in the many and various forms in which they appear.

We gather today in front of Merrick Hall. This glorious building opened in 1873 and will reopen this summer following 30 years of inactivity. It bears the name of one of our university's founders, Frederick Merrick. Merrick was instrumental in the development of our charter in 1842. The charter stated that "the University is forever to be conducted on the most liberal principles (a liberal arts university), accessible to all religious denominations (an institution that values diversity), and designed for the benefit of our citizens in general (an education that serves the common good)."

Those founding values – a commitment to a liberal arts education, an understanding of the value of diversity, and a devotion to public service – provide the foundation of the education you have received here. You will carry that foundation with you always.

Your professors here have taught you the methods and content of the discipline or disciplines which have been your major fields of study. But the more important benefits of your education here are in the ways your mind has been expanded, your conscience has been stimulated, your values have been honed, and your soul has been nourished. You have learned to think critically and analytically. You have learned to communicate articulately and persuasively – to write well and speak clearly. At the same time, you have learned to listen deeply to other points of view. You have learned the value of exploring complex issues from multiple perspectives.

You have learned the importance of knowing and understanding people whose life circumstances and life experiences are vastly different from your own. You have developed the capacity for empathy. You have learned to work well with others, knowing that the complex problems your generation inherits will be solved not in silos of individual and narrow-minded thinking, but in dynamic collaborations of individuals with richly varied perspectives. You've learned to value diversity as the source of rich beauty and deep understanding.

You have learned in the classroom, in the laboratory, in the studio, on the stage, on the playing field, in the chapel, in the residence hall, in the library, and in conversation on the JAY.

You have learned on campus, and you have learned in the far corners of the earth. Summer Science, New York Arts, travel learning, mission trips, TiPiTs, internships near and far, service learning at nearby schools and in distant developing countries all have contributed to who you are today.

Now you stand on the threshold of a future that we cannot fully comprehend. What we can affirm today is that you are ready to make your place in that future. The diplomatic skills required to negotiate a lasting peace on a planet so threatened by violence and hatred are skills that emerge from the education you have attained. The solutions to global climate change, a growing water crisis, and world hunger require the skills and capacities that accompany a liberal arts education.

And you will be one up on other graduates because of the benefit of a campus that explored each of these issues in depth in a Sagan National Colloquium during your time here. In a world where intolerance runs rampant, you understand that creative expression, the free exchange of ideas, and intellectual freedom are the currencies that improve the quality of human life, strengthen the fiber of human societies, and lead to innovations that make the world a better, healthier, more just and more secure place.

As OWU alumni, you have the benefits of an education offered to a very small proportion of the global population. You are in elite company. I congratulate you on the milestone achievements of this day. But I remind you that this day is not so much about celebrating what has been accomplished as it is about looking forward to the responsibility you will carry and the obligations you will fulfill.

You are ready to accept those responsibilities. Idealism permeates this campus. Embrace it. Never, never let it die. You will make a difference in the world in ways none of us can imagine today.

This is the point where I normally congratulate the parents among us. You have spent the past two decades of your lives helping make this day possible. This is your day as well. Today, unlike other years, I speak as one of you. In that context, I am even more aware of the impact of the teaching faculty and the dedicated staff on our sons and daughters who are today's graduates. I have seen the impact personally and up close in ways that become obvious from the perspective of a parent, with a nuance and power not so easily seen from any other point of view. To our faculty and staff, from all of the families of these graduates, thank you, thank you, thank you.

Graduates, 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."

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

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