Dear Collegiate Class of 2011:

You may be thinking that, having completed 12 years of school already, that you're finally entering the last four years of your education and are poised to finally enter "the real world."

How wrong you are.

The next four years of college are only the beginning of a lifetime of learning. It's anticipated that you will change jobs as many as 18 times by the time you reach age 40, and you will have as many as five to eight different careers in your lifetime, two of which don't even exist today.

So you understand we'd be doing you a disservice by just handing you a set of books and information, ensuring that you've digested it, and sending you out into the world four years later, stamped as a completed work.

The information you learn today is critically important -- the foundation for all that will follow. But what will follow is vast: wave upon wave of additional facts, findings, innovations, advances and new wrinkles. You'll need to not only know information, but know where information is to be found; how to analyze and synthesize information; how to communicate it -- in short, how to think critically, develop an informed opinion and act upon the basis of it.

These are skills of the broadest potential application, and once mastered they should provide you with the ability and confidence to develop new and creative solutions to the world's great technical and social problems.

But still, we'll encourage you to reach further, because social problems -- even technical ones -- should not be solved by mere technicians. They should be solved by citizens, and thus the context in which we educate is one in which values are examined and created, and -- we hope -- the spirit of true citizenship is fostered.

For the reader of Shakespeare, that means more than simply reading King Lear and remembering, vaguely, that it's about an old guy and the headache he encounters when he decides to carve up his kingdom among his daughters. It means recognizing that the Shakespearean sensibility is about finding the universal in the specific and the sublime in the everyday; that the strife that can tear apart a family over issues of inheritance and succession is mirrored by the wars that tear apart countries, and that each reflects a human impulse toward greed and chaos.
For the computer scientist, it means not merely an immersion in the technology of today, but an understanding that in most instances, the best technology is that which is accessible and transparent, and which can be used in the service of learning. So let's say you're designing new software, and you come up with an application that lets you compress audio or video files to a very small size without losing any quality. That's great -- that's the Holy Grail in that particular field -- but if your software costs thousands of dollars or can't be made available for all platforms, then you're excluding potential users. And unless you're producing for a very narrow scientific audience, then the value of your work is limited, and its beauty is lost.

Unlike those who have gone before you, you will not automatically possess, simply by virtue of being products of an American institution of higher learning, status as the most desirable commodity in the world's pool of highly skilled professionals. It will not be a given that you are the best trained or most qualified. You will have to prove your worth as past generations have never had to do, and the competition will be both fierce and formidable.

You can see why it may take a little more than four years to get this right, Class of 2011. But that's why we're going to prepare you not just for your first job, but for a lifetime of learning, work and service.

I wish all the best. Good luck.

Joseph S. Brosnan, Ed.D.

© 2007 Patriot News Company. Provided by ProQuest Information and Learning. All rights reserved.