

FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT

GRADUATE CEREMONY

**May 17, 2009
3:00 p.m.**

Commencement Speaker

Dr. Mathy Mezey

What a wonderful day!

Graduates, family, friends and significant others, faculty, university administration – Thank you for this wonderful honor. And congratulations to the Fairfield University Graduate Class of 2009! It is such an honor to be here – and there is so much to celebrate. Graduates, today you have come together to recognize and celebrate the achievement of your academic goals. You have earned the right to pause, to push aside worries and concerns, and celebrate your extraordinary personal accomplishment in completing your degree. You have made many sacrifices to get to this day. And it is appropriate to savor the moment

Family, friends, faculty and staff - You too have a right to pause to acknowledge the contributions you have made to the graduation of this splendid Class of 2009 from Fairfield University' Graduate Schools. This is as much a celebration of your achievements as those of the graduates.

As you seize this moment, I want to take a few minutes to think about tomorrow and how you seize the moments that lie ahead.

I have here a copy of your diploma. It notes your degree by your school:

- Business
- Education and the Allied Professions in psychology and counseling
- Engineering
- Humanities (American studies, communication, mathematics)
- Nursing

I want to highlight 2 aspects of your graduate education from Fairfield University that should be but are not noted on your Diploma.

The first thing I want to highlight as something that is not but should be on your diploma is the “value added” of your Graduate Education as a Life Insurance Policy. To truly represent the full value of your graduate education, your Diploma should say that it is a premier Life Insurance Policy.

In fact, by virtue of completing a graduate degree, you have purchased close to the best life insurance policy in the world.

As a geriatric nurse I know a lot about insurance. I am often asked about life insurance, about health insurance, and about something you, students, know little about but which your family may be familiar with, and that is long-term care insurance (Digress briefly to say something about LTC insurance and introduce my family).

But let me get back to the life insurance policy you have just purchased. As a life insurance policy, with your graduate degree, you can expect to live to (on average) 82 years of age. Americans overall are living longer, but those who, like you, have earned a graduate degree, can expect to live substantially longer. In fact, education is the major factor in all of the recent gains in life expectancy that have happened in the US in recent years—And, unfortunately, lack of education is the major cause of a shortened life expectancy, and lack of education is the greatest cause of the growing disparity of life expectancy among Americans

As a life insurance policy, your graduate education will not only help you live longer, but it will also help keep you healthier throughout your life and into old age. As compared to people with less education, as you get older you can expect to have:

- Less heart disease
- Less cancer
- And better mental health

Thus, your graduate degree is truly an outstanding life insurance policy. It not only gives you a leg up in your chosen profession, it also gives you a leg up in how long and how well you will live. So... when a representative from Aetna or Prudential comes around to sell you life insurance, start by telling them you have already purchased the premier policy. But, of course, then talk to them about a secondary policy.

And now I want to touch on the second aspect of your graduate education that should be but is not noted on your Diploma. Because your diploma is not only a life insurance policy, it is also an IOU, representing a social obligation to society. I am not talking about the financial debt. Here I am talking about a social debt.

With your graduate degree, you are a scarce national resource. Of the close to 302 million people living in the US today, only 4.6% have a graduate degree. Let me give you an example of what this means. When you go to the new Yankee stadium for a game against the Boston Red Sox, look around. Of the 51,800 capacity crowd, you will be one of the only 2,600 attendees with a graduate degree. So as a scarce resource, you have earned an IOU, a social obligation to society.

How then will you go about meeting this obligation – paying down on this obligation? Well, you are fortunate that, by virtue of having attended Fairfield University, a Jesuit School with Jesuit values, your education has instilled in you the need to meet your social obligation to society. While a graduate student, you have been exposed to the University's Vision and Mission of social justice and global citizenship.

You have been fortunate to experience the nearly 500 year Jesuit vision of not only integrating the intellectual and spiritual, but also of the awareness that academic achievement brings with it a responsibility to serve. With a Jesuit and Catholic Mission at its core, Fairfield University has sought to help you examine your sense of calling and mission in both your personal life and in your career choices.

I am sure many of you are already engaged in volunteer activities that are helping pay down your social debt. Wikipedia defines volunteering as the practice of people working on behalf of others without being motivated by financial or material gain. Fairfield University has offered you a broad range of opportunities for volunteerism, for service and civic engagement while you have studied on campus.

But now, as you set out on your new graduate paths, how will you find ways to continue to pay down on your social obligation? This will not always be easy as you begin your new careers, especially perhaps in the climate of the current world:

- Economic uncertainty
- Requirements of new work responsibilities
- Pressures of new and ongoing relationships

- And bombardment from the media to “have a good time” and “think about *me*”

In seeking ways to pay back, however you are lucky to be graduating at this time. Because, in addition to your Jesuit education, the country is embracing a new sense of volunteerism. The Obama administration has proposed the largest, nationally-backed volunteer programs since AmeriCorps. Nationally, 42% of your peers of college graduates serve as volunteers

So here are a few thoughts for paying back your social obligation.

- First, make volunteering a lifetime habit. Don't wait until you have enough time or enough money. Start now, or if you are already engaged in volunteer activities, keep them up.!
- Second, look for opportunities to help your local community: not-for-profit agencies, schools, religious institutions
- Third, find volunteer activities that both do good and that give you pleasure.
- And last, don't be too timid to consider national and global service: Ameri Corps, the peace corps. As I speak with older people at the end of their lives, I find that they rarely regret the things they did, but are much more likely to regret the things that they didn't do.

So, in closing, I urge you to take advantage of the added value that your graduate degree can bring to your life. Take advantage of your education and take advantage of the added health and longevity that comes with your education. And I also urge you to establish a life long habit of meeting your social obligation to society.

And I leave you to ponder this quote from Sir Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of England during WWII: We make a living by what we get; We make a life by what we give.