

**FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY
COMMENCEMENT**

GRADUATE CEREMONY

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

Valedictory Speaker

Robert J. Morton, Jr.

To the parents, family, and friends of the graduates, as well as the faculty, administration, and friends of Fairfield University, and most importantly, to those present who will be receiving graduate degrees today, I welcome you to the first graduate school commencement at Fairfield University. Thank you for giving me the honor and opportunity to speak to you on this special day.

Due to the uniqueness of Fairfield's graduate programs, this day can mean different things to different people. For some of us, this day marks the end of 5 or more years of continuous study on this campus between undergraduate and graduate studies. Others have spent less time here, but are undoubtedly better for it. Each individual school within the University offers a distinct graduate education, yet they all are founded on the same Jesuit ideals.

For the Dolan School of Business graduates, you are now entering the world outside of academia, with one, or, for the very lucky among us, more degrees in hand. Those degrees are from an already respected institution that is steadily climbing the rankings of the top business schools in the country. As you build your career, it is important to remember where your success started, especially at times when your moral fortitude will be tested.

For those in the Graduate School of Education and Allied Professions, the degree you receive today is the next step in what will be a long and rewarding career, as you are now eligible for licensure in many areas of education and counseling. You are the envy of your vocation, as your education is rooted in the five hundred year old Jesuit tradition of education.

For those in the graduate programs offered in the College of Arts and Sciences and School of Engineering, you have shown a deep passion for the cultivation of knowledge in the academic pursuit that ignites your mind and soul, from the humanities to electrical engineering.

And for those in the well-respected School of Nursing, today marks the end of a very rigorous and challenging road. The reputation of your school was marked by the accomplishments of those who came before you. The outstanding faculty of the Nursing School has certainly prepared you to continue that tradition.

Graduates, we all came to this beautiful campus for different reasons. Some of us received our undergraduate degrees here and were aware of the strength and passion of the Fairfield faculty. We had experienced the devotion of the faculty and wanted to continue to reap the benefits of teachers who care so deeply for the academic and professional well-being of their students. I challenge anyone to find a group of academics who want their students to succeed as much as the Fairfield faculty do.

There are those here today who came to Fairfield because it was within commuting distance of their home or work. While initially you may have come here for the convenience and reputation of the University, you certainly are leaving with much more.

Regardless of the reasons why we came here, we are leaving better for the experience and with a common bond. A hallmark of Jesuit education is the sharing of knowledge to enhance learning. This is especially apparent in Fairfield's graduate programs, where those coming back to school with a wealth of professional and real-world experience share a classroom with more recent graduates. Some of these graduates have been previously immersed and schooled in the Ignatian pedagogy. This blend of academic and experiential knowledge creates an environment in which every student benefits.

Personally, I am a veteran of nine years of Fairfield Jesuit education. Four years at Fairfield Prep, four years as an undergraduate at Fairfield U., and finally one year to earn a Master's Degree in Accounting at the University's Charles F. Dolan School of Business. These experiences have certainly left me and my parents a little lighter in the wallet. However, I leave this campus with a mind full of knowledge and a heart full of memories. For that, I have many people to thank – my parents for providing me with the best education available, the faculty for instilling a passion for learning, and my fellow graduates, many of whom started as

my peers and leave today as my friends. As St. Ignatius implored his fellow Jesuits, I am ready to “go set the world aflame.” I am certain you all feel the same.

But what of this world we are entering? Many contend that these are uncertain times; I contend that these times are more certain than not. It is certain that people like ourselves are needed now more than ever. Upon close examination of the Fairfield graduate programs, one will find the answer to our nation’s economic troubles. Our economy, long held to be the global gold standard, has crumbled due to the weight of greed, entitlement, and excess. Graduates from the Dolan School of Business are receiving degrees today that are rooted in ethics and morality that will transcend the classroom into the workplace. Fairfield business graduates have not solely been taught the debits and credits of accounting, nor just the importance of a well diversified portfolio; rather, students have had discussions about the consequences of potential actions taken in ethical situations – not only for them, but for all those affected by their decisions. The debate of how to apply Christian, and specifically Ignatian, teaching in the business disciplines has long been discussed in academia. The faculty of the Dolan School of Business have certainly achieved this goal by producing well-rounded professionals who understand the impact of their decisions on their fellow man.

For those graduates of the School of Engineering and the College of Arts & Sciences, your role in our future is crucial. Now more than ever do we need fresh minds and new ideas. It has become painfully apparent that the way things have been done is no longer acceptable, and the time to act is now. Environmental initiatives have taken on a new and long overdue priority; this country is in need of talented scientists and engineers to forge ahead in search of renewable energy resources. This campus has started several “green” initiatives, and perhaps you will find your calling in this exciting and necessary area.

The Graduate School of Education and Allied Professions will have an even more profound impact on this nation’s future. By dedicating your lives to education and counseling, you will be the foundation on which success will be laid. By earning a degree at Fairfield, you have effectively made an investment in our collective future, and for that, you should be commended. One of the premises upon which the Jesuits were founded was to spread knowledge to all the corners of the Earth; no matter where your career takes you or your heart leads you, may the Fairfield motto be your guide: “Per fidem ad plenam veritatem” –Through Faith, to the fullness of truth.

It is possible that graduate education exemplifies that motto more than does the education of our undergraduate counterparts. There is no doubt that we obtained a wealth of knowledge through our undergraduate studies. Yet we find ourselves here today, earning degrees that are evident of our passion for learning and for finding truth. Whatever we may have faith in, be it God, knowledge, ourselves, or our love for others, we have no doubt enhanced that faith in our pursuit of truth. That truth may have been found in a classroom, the library, deep in the pages of a textbook, or in a moment of reflection or prayer. I would like to take this opportunity to tell you where I found some truth in this outstanding tradition of Jesuit education.

Not fifteen minutes from this campus is the Burroughs Community Center located on Fairfield Avenue in Bridgeport. This center provides many services to the inner-city community, including after-school programs for at-risk youth, classes that will teach English to immigrants so that they may more easily obtain employment, and serving as a gathering place for Christian organizations to worship on Sundays. In addition to all this, Burroughs is also a VITA center. VITA stands for Volunteer Income Tax Assistance; its purpose is to provide tax preparation free of charge to those who otherwise would be unable to afford to have their tax returns prepared. There are thousands of locations within the United States that gather properly trained volunteers to lend a hand to those who need it most, and the Burroughs Center is one of them. Knowing my educational background and undoubtedly hoping that I had internalized the Jesuit ideals imparted to me at Fairfield, the director of the center asked if I was interested in participating in the program.

I cautiously agreed, hoping for the best but fearing the worst. On my first day at the Center, not only was I impressed at the quantity and quality of the volunteers, but also, I was surprised by the people who comprised those volunteers. I was met by two of my peers from the graduate accounting program. Over the course of the next two and a half months, we showed up every Sunday morning for several hours to prepare tax returns for the disadvantaged. This was done not for class credit or resume building. It was done because we had a knowledge that could be used to better the community in which we lived. As the Winter turned to Spring, I learned that we were not the only Fairfield students who were participating in this program. There were other students who were VITA volunteers at other locations within the area. I began to see my peers and myself in a new light – we were staying true to the Ignatian tradition, using our knowledge to improve the lives of others. Only now do I realize that we were improving ourselves as well.

No matter from what school you are graduating, we all have a monumental challenge in front of us. This nation has not seen times like these since the Great Depression. All of us have been touched in some way by recent economic events, some more profoundly than others; but if there is one thing that I have learned in the rather short amount of time I have lived thus far, it is that nothing is worth enduring if you are not willing to learn from it. We will recover, and we will be better for it. Look not at these times as a stumbling block or an impediment to your progress; rather, look to them as an opportunity for learning and a stepping stone for future success.

As you leave Fairfield's campus today, I want you to consider the tradition of each of the schools from which you graduated. The tradition in each school is unique, but they all carry a common vein: *cura personalis*, or care for the whole person. By this point, this phrase should not be new to any of us. Another ideal upon which the Ignatian pedagogy is built, our education did not merely improve our minds and expand our knowledge; it also taught us how to be better people by opening our hearts.

The Jesuits have many centuries-old expressions that effectively communicate their educational principles. In closing, there is one more that I would like to share with you. It is a maxim that perfectly blends three bedrocks of Ignatian tradition: Christianity, education, and resolve. It is a little more modern and I have referred to it time and time again whenever I needed guidance. "Work as if everything depended on you – but pray as if everything depended on God." I believe it wise to return to that saying whenever you're struggling to find an answer.

It's often said that at commencement ceremonies, no one ever remembers what the speaker talked about. I want to let you all know that while you may not remember me, this experience will stay with me for the rest of my life. Thank you, congratulations, and may God continue to bless Fairfield University.