

# Fairfield University's 2012 Graduate Student Address

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Father von Arx, members of the Board of Trustees, honored guests, distinguished faculty,

family, friends, and fellow graduates:

I wish you all a warm welcome as we gather together in celebration of Fairfield University's Graduate Commencement Ceremony. It is with honor that I stand before you this afternoon – a Fairfield University *student* who will celebrate with each of you today, and a *graduate* who will step out into the future with you tomorrow.

Today's occasion brings an air of nostalgia. In my family's Connecticut home sits my father's Fairfield University diploma from more than 30 years ago. Inscribed on its leaf is the honor my fellow graduates and I have been striving to achieve – specifically, a degree conferred to us by this Jesuit institution. I recall the days when my father would tell tales of his time at the University, all focused on one or two professors that influenced his experiences. Since then, several members of my family have graduated from Fairfield, with one more today. Yet there is an added reason to feel a sense of pride in this achievement.

Those sitting before me this afternoon each have a unique journey to share. Some, including myself, may have received their undergraduate degrees just one year ago and chose

Fairfield's graduate program as their next stepping-stone to success. Others may have garnered years of work experience before returning for their graduate degrees. Some of us may have chosen Fairfield for its Jesuit education, its close proximity to home, or its world-class faculty and staff. But setting our distinctions aside, today is a time of *celebration* for all of us – a *celebration* of academic achievement; a *celebration* of personal and spiritual growth; a *celebration* of the Jesuit tradition and its focus on the education of the whole person. As we call to mind our time devoted to Fairfield, we come to appreciate the *gifts* our Jesuit education has presented – the *gift* of knowledge, the *gift* of faith, the *gift* of personal and professional values – *gifts* that cannot be priced, but rather transcend the years we have committed to the University.

Today is also a time for *reflection* – *reflection* on our personal journeys rooted in this unique Jesuit tradition. I recall the time more than 15 years ago when I pulled on my first Fairfield University sweatshirt. I was about 7 years old at the time, and my parents would take my brother and me for a stroll along Fairfield's campus, trying to persuade us to one day attend my father's alma mater. I remember peering into Fairfield's magnificent stone structures, gazing at the students of **incomparable** intelligence and promise that these buildings housed. I grew up aspiring to one day be just like them – just like my father – holding that Jesuit degree in my

hands, knowing this institution transformed me into a confident, well-educated leader. I dreamt of turning this childhood Fairfield fantasy into an adult reality, a privilege enjoyed by a select group of Fairfield graduates. Fifteen years later, I pull on that same Fairfield sweatshirt, though much too small for me now, and have the honor of announcing, "I have achieved my dream." In a few moments, we will all hold that Jesuit degree in our hands, knowing we have reached our ambitions, the day we have been waiting for since we stepped foot inside Fairfield's classrooms.

Many of us may not be directly acquainted with the Ratio Studiorum, but it is the Jesuit manual of education that has shaped our learning both inside and outside the classroom. In it lays a statement that is vital to our Jesuit education. It states: "The development of the student's *intellectual capacity* is the school's most characteristic part. However, this development will be defective and even dangerous unless it is strengthened and completed by the training of the *will* and the formation of the *character*." One of my professors and mentors, Dr. Dawn Massey, a professor of accounting here at Fairfield, introduced me to this quote a few weeks ago. I shared with her the news that I failed to pass the third section of my accounting certification exam. The news crushed every ounce of confidence I had. To me, this failure meant that everything I had worked so hard to achieve was lost. Dr. Massey reminded me, however, that this was not failure,

but rather the Jesuit plan working in my favor. My *intellectual capacity* had already been *developed* in the years I spent searching for knowledge in the far corners of Fairfield's campus – for that was the University's *characteristic part*. But my will and character needed one more test before I left Fairfield. It is only in our moments of self-doubt and hesitation that our *will* to carry forward is *trained*. It is in these moments that we are humbled, and our *character* is *formed*.

What I realized during this time of self-reflection was that in the months leading to this moment of triumph, Fairfield has chiseled me – chiseled us – into the persons of character you see before you. In its molding, the University left its mark – its mark of an “education for an inspired life.” Fairfield has provided each of us with challenges to stretch our *intellectual capacity* and to cultivate our *character*. We have been inspired to have the courage, the confidence, and the conviction to stand strong in our self-merit. Our professors have equipped us with the knowledge and the tools to see the big picture and to refuse anyone the privilege of defeating our self-certainty. Our education is the ultimate possession – and no one can strip us of this. What we feed our minds and the power to utilize that knowledge is the common vein that connects all disciplines to the Jesuit education.

Thus, as we sit before this age-old, stone structure – a building full of rich Jesuit history and past alumni legacies – we envision what lies ahead. Generations of Fairfield graduates have come before us, and many more will certainly follow after us; but we are earning our degrees and leaping out into the world at a time when the economic climate is one of the most challenging in our nation's history. But as I stand here today, looking out over the hundreds of bright, poised individuals sitting before me, I feel a sense of hope – a hope that this next gifted generation of Fairfield scholars will make a difference in the future. The doors are now open for us to go out into the world and leave a mark on our respective professions:

For the graduates of the College of Arts and Sciences, it is your time to forge the way in science, medicine, and the humanities. The future needs your fresh, creative minds to pioneer new discoveries.

For the graduates of the Dolan School of Business, it is time for you to serve the business world as pillars of ethical leadership. It is your calling to instill integrity into the workplace, while standing at the intellectual forefront of your field.

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For the graduates of the School of Nursing, today is a momentous occasion. For the first time in the University's history, Fairfield will confer five doctoral degrees to students in the Doctor of Nursing Practice program. It is time for those of you who are earning the DNP and all other nursing graduates to fully share your knowledge with those who need your expertise the most.

For the graduates of the School of Engineering, you are ready to share your talent and intellect with the future. It is time to let your creative discipline and future designs construct themselves for all to appreciate.

For the graduates of the School of Education and Allied Professions, it is your time to support and inspire America's future. Some of you are called to educate our nation's youth, motivating them to strive for *the more* we have all quested to find. Others are called to counsel the most vulnerable populations in our midst. Tomorrow, you will begin laying the groundwork for future generations to build their success.

For all my fellow graduates, we are the life-long learners Fairfield has inspired us to be. We are the talented individuals the future awaits.

Upon entering Fairfield University, we were greeted with welcoming banners and smiling faces. These banners and faces beckoned us to educate the *whole person*; search for something *more*; become *men and women for others*. Today, on our Commencement day, we walk across Bellarmine Lawn one final time – again greeted with banners and smiling faces. But this time, the banners and faces say: “Congratulations. You have succeeded. You have educated your whole person; you have learned to be of service to others; your journey has kindled in you a spark – a passion for life and for learning – that will ignite the world.” Fairfield has set us on the path to success, but it is now our compelling responsibility –as *Men and Women for Others* searching for that something *more* – to make a difference in this world, to “set the world aflame” with that passionate spark.

As our graduate education comes to a close, we recall how our lives have been touched, molded, and influenced by the knowledge we gained and the friendships we established at this University. As we take our final steps across this stage, with years of hard work rolled into one scroll, we realize our promising futures that lie ahead. In speaking of what is to come in our lives, Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Life is a succession of lessons, which must be lived to be understood.” Thus, fellow graduates, I offer you a wish of good luck in the future lessons you

will live. In a few moments, we will switch our tassels in triumph – triumph that our eyes are now open, our hearts are now full, and our opportunity to make our lives *extraordinary* is upon us. Class of 2012, congratulations, good luck, and God bless. Thank you.

[ SMILE ]