

“Seize the Moments”

2005 Commencement Address

Good afternoon, candidates for degrees and certificates, families, friends, and guests. It is indeed my honor as President of this great institution to address you and this 2005 class that has already made WVUP history by being a graduating class numbering 284. Class of 2005, you have already made us proud by achieving this life-changing milestone. Family, friends, faculty and staff, I hope that I will voice some of your sentiments—some of your words of wisdom and encouragement in my brief message. I recognize that about this time of year, former graduates are asked if they remember the speaker for their graduation. Well, I care little that you remember that I spoke to you, but I do hope that you will remember at least some of my words to you today.

Excitement is in the air. Anticipation reigns as you take that final step to completion of certificates and/or degrees. We have been using phrases from the song, “One Moment in Time,” the theme for the college’s first inauguration since that momentous event, and I will use phrases from the song now in my remarks to you. This is for you “one moment in time.” You have “seized one moment in time” by graduating. You have overcome all manner of obstacles— schedule conflicts, job changes, job losses, family challenges, personal challenges—life. But, you have made it to this one moment in time. Now “make it shine.” Make this moment count in your life and the lives of others.

If you have already found employment or received a promotion that has been a career goal as you embarked upon this journey, then it is weighing heavily on your mind. If you been notified of your acceptance into the next degree program—bachelors or Master’s, or that you have been granted an interview for the job of your dream, then you are probably very anxious to prove yourself worthy. If you have not gotten the job or promotion or news of transfer to another institution, it **will** happen. These outcomes you ponder because they affect your economics—making a “good” living for family and/or yourself—living the dream. Economics is very important. But, do not underestimate the value and the power of happiness. Be sure to really be in the moment. Enjoy this step—this moment, then move to that next step, your job, your promotion, your next degree program,....enjoy each to the fullest. Find joy in the doing as well as in the results and/or products. And, be better than the frog at the bottom of the well who looks up and sees only the top of the well as a goal: look to the sky. In the words of poet, Langston Hughes, “reach up your hand and take a star.”

Yes, you have achieved this goal. Keep learning. Lifelong learning is the key to a longer, healthier, more satisfying and productive life. Exercise your mind. Learn something new at your job, at home, at your next college...every day. Study to be ready for the next goal. Study for the sake of your mental health. Come back to us for that next certificate

or degree or to take a class for your continuing education, or your next career step. Studies predict that there are at least five career changes in your future. You must continue to learn and be ready for change. In the 21st century, continuing learning (lifelong learning) has become an essential element for *doing* something in the world, for getting and applying new information and skills. Take all of the opportunities presented you to learn. A young man told me the other day that he was required to be advisor for a knitting club for a day: the young women giggled but he watched them intently. They asked if he knew that he was watching knitting. He replied, "yes." He informed them that it was an opportunity for him to learn a new skill. Continue to keep your mind very active: learn a new skill when the opportunity presents itself. Take the time to inquire and reflect about your life and experience. I attended a beautiful dinner for Jackson County Center graduates earlier this week where Professors Dorothy Cox and George Lamb allowed students entry into their reflections about their lives and their experiences. Both know the value of continuing to learn because as adults they returned to college and they started new careers. They are still engaged in continuous learning even as they retire from West Virginia University at Parkersburg. One could not help but deduce that it is their love of learning and their curiosity that has driven them in the choosing of careers. They are examples of continuous learning and continuous achievement; you can be also. Stay intellectually well. And a word of caution, step away from that television and read a book!

Continue to address your well-being beyond the intellectual realm to the physical. A piece of advice that I am sure you were not expecting today...Take care of your body. Ben Franklin wrote, "Don't wait until you are sick to value your health. To lengthen thy life, lessen thy meals." Campaigns are all around us as the importance of staying healthy becomes so very clear to our community, our state, and our nation. Bend that elbow for reasons other than to bring a mug or filled fork to your mouth. Lift those legs for reasons other than to make the reclining chair raise up a bit more easily. Do sit ups for reasons other than to get up from the sofa after a nap. It is important that you address your health. Eat well. Get rest. Exercise often. If you take care of your body, it will serve you well. A meaningful life and success in this world is dependent upon good physical and mental health. George Bernard Shaw wrote, "*Better keep yourself clean and bright; you are the window through which you must see the world.*"

Eat well; manage your stress and get some sleep....

Take care of your spiritual health. Health of the human spirit is as important as health of the body and mind. This is not your Sunday sermon or an opportunity for me to tell you what to believe. Bellingham, Cohen, Jones, and Spaniol (1989) in an article in the *American Journal of Health Promotion* define spiritual health as "the ability to live in wholeness of life." Another writer states that spiritual health is hard to define, but it can be described: "It is the element of us that experiences a meaningful level of peace, contentment, joy and hopefulness - even in the face of great difficulty." Spiritual health is related to basic human needs for meaning, hope, and relationships with others, with

self, and with a higher power. Four broad dimensions of spiritual wellness emerged from C.E. Westgate's review of authors about spiritual health in the *Journal of Counseling and Development* (1996): (1) meaning and purpose in life; (2) intrinsic values; (3) transcendent beliefs/experiences; and (4) community relationship.” Exercise for spiritual wellness. Meditate. Practice random acts of kindness. Practice integrity. Let these words be not merely a part of your vocabulary, but a part of your life: kindness, compassion, reverence, gratitude, enthusiasm, forgiveness, nurturing, justice, love peace, faith, hope,....The spiritual component of wellness provides meaning and direction in life and enables you to grow, learn, and meet new challenges.

Be good to your community: work to make it a better place to live. What you do for your community, you do for yourself. I quote Albert Schweitzer as I say, “I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know, the only ones among you who will be happy are those who sought and found how to serve.” Your ways and means of serving may be to vote and encourage others to do so. It may be to serve as the scout or club leader, to participate in cleaning up and rehabilitating our environment, to build homes for the less fortunate, to visit the home- or hospital-bound,...to practice random acts of kindness. Improve conditions: help to build a stronger and safer community; help to develop better resources for all citizens; grow personally; improve morale; help to humanize our society. It was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow 1807-1882 who said, “Give what you have. To someone, it may be better than you dare think.” Whatever the ways and means, make constant contributions to our universe.

The world we live in demands a great deal from us in intellect, health, spirit, and our altruism. I do not need to delineate for you what is happening in our world. But, I will tell you that it will require our inquiry, health, spirit and altruism to address the challenges that are both individual and collective. You have achieved a goal—degree and/or certificate—that stands you in good stead to face challenges head on and achieve, achieve, achieve for both the personal and the greater good.

I will amend Langston Hughes’s statement quoted earlier and encourage you to reach out your hand and touch many stars in your lifetime for there are many stars in the galaxy. Keep striving, keep learning, stay healthy and play fair in the sandbox of life. You’ll be a winner for a lifetime if you continue to recognize and be ready—intellectually, physically and mentally, and spiritually—to seize your important moments in time.... to continue your journey of achievement. Congratulations to all of you who are part of this celebration.