



Commencement 2009

Student Address

by

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Welcome friends, family and guests. Let me first thank you all for being here today as we close a chapter of our lives and look ahead with enthusiasm to the beginning of a career in engineering and applied sciences. I know that without your support and guidance, the successes we celebrate today would not have been possible. You've given us the tools and the freedom to dream, discover, construct, and as any engineer naturally would – simply tinker, allowing us to better understand how the world around us works.

I'm sure many of you were as excited as I was to see that Bill Nye would be speaking at this year's distinguished speaker series. Bill Nye's enthusiasm and love for the sciences definitely rubbed off on anyone who watched his half-hour TV show. As he spoke to us last month on Earth Day, he presented some of the very serious problems facing society and then encouraged us to – dare I say it – change the world! As I sat at the top of the student section, I began to wonder what it would take to, if not change the world, at least find a way to make some meaningful contribution to my field and my community.

Over our years of study, we've built up this wonderful wealth of technical knowledge: in math, chemistry, and physics; computer programming and electronic devices; in structures, materials, and thermodynamics. Yes, this understanding will prove to be a useful tool throughout our careers, but when Wikipedia can also answer those questions, and so many more, we must go one step further to **apply** this knowledge, and solve useful problems.

As engineers we like to build stuff, and so all those labs and design classes we took will be another tool for our future endeavors. I'm sure many of you have had experiences building, experimenting and creating well before college: in pine wood derbies, science fairs, with Lincoln Logs and Lego's, and chemistry or electricity kits. And now over these last few years, we've had a chance to build and play with some bigger, more expensive toys: from Baja and formula race cars to robotic vehicles to steel bridges and concrete canoes, and who could forget battlebots during Engineer's Week. In our project classes and club projects, we've spent months designing and then building, and still more time troubleshooting some of those *unintended* features. But in the end we not only had learned something, we were proud of our creation.

And so how will we decide what stuff we'll build? If we merely design for what is required of us now, we'll soon fall behind. What is truly required to keep pace is the **creativity** to anticipate what will be needed. In my sophomore year I took an arts class where we studied creative acts in both the arts and sciences on equal footing. I know as an engineer they seem like oil and water, but in many senses they have the same root creative spirit, and only their domains differ.

Being here today, we have demonstrated a proficiency in the domain of engineering, a field where many creative acts are possible. On the science channel, I've enjoyed the show Weird Connections, which follows several experiments that seem to lack an application at first glance. But by the end of the show, it becomes clear that the results of every experiment inspired another until a practical and useful discovery was made. And so I encourage you to remain balanced in your professional interests and most of all with your personal life, for you'll never know where inspiration will strike.

And lastly, we'll take a part of the Buffalo region with us wherever we go. We'll take the ruggedness that was brought out through the October Surprise snowstorm, and that amazing sense of community we showed the world as we helped our neighbors dig out or as we served meals to our peers in the dorms. We were some of the last tenants of the trailers, seeing their final demise. And we witnessed the groundbreaking of what I'm sure will be a beautiful new engineering building.

And so I challenge you, change the world in some small but noticeable way. We have collected many excellent tools here at UB, and I'm sure we'll pick up some others along the way as we begin our careers or continue in graduate studies.

Again, congratulations graduates. I wish you all the best in your future endeavors!