

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
May 18, 2008
Presented by Robert J. Culp

Good afternoon, members of the Board of Trustees, Brother James, honored guests, faculty, staff, fellow graduates, parents, family and friends.

Anyone who knows me can tell you that I have been around the block with colleges. I have attended a total of 5 different colleges or universities, with Lewis being the third and fifth one. I left Lewis at one point for a job in Pennsylvania and transferred to a school out there, but the school lacked the intrinsic values that Lewis offers throughout its programs. The heritage and teachings of St. John Baptist de La Salle, founder of the Christian Brothers who sponsor Lewis University and schools around the world, are the basis for the University's commitment to: diversity, justice, knowledge, association, fidelity, wisdom, service to the poor, and accessibility to affordable education. These are Lewis's beliefs—Lasallian beliefs—all of which I strongly support, value, and attempt to incorporate in my life every day.

Now, graduation has finally arrived; congratulations are being extended for each and every one of us. For some, who have returned to complete their degrees after working for a while, it has been a long journey, for others it has been the anticipated next step in our lives. For some, we are the first in our families to graduate from college, and for others we may be following in the footsteps of parents or siblings who are graduates that may have been an inspiration to us. For some of us, our degree is our final grade and for others it is the prerequisite to graduate and doctoral programs. But for all of us here today, it is a means to a better future, and it comes with a great responsibility.

As we leave the comforts of college, we enter the “real world.” The responsibilities that come with being a productive member of society are huge. Each of us has to go out, and as Gandhi said, “be the change we want to see in the world.” Lewis, with its Catholic and Lasallian Mission, calls us as nurses, actors, business people, teachers, pilots, police officers, psychologists, scientists, scholars, and individuals, to make a difference.

As a combined special and elementary education major, I will strive to be a transformative educator and an advocate for social justice for every individual I encounter. Even though I have this strong desire, it scares me. I wish that once you graduated college everything was easy, but, as we all know, it is not. In order to grow and move forward in life, we need to continually push ourselves past what is comfortable.

How often in our life are we willing to step out of our comfort zones though? What does it even mean? Well, for some of us, stepping outside our comfort zone may mean having the courage to take a job that has less pay and tougher demands, but where we know we can make a difference by doing it. For others it may mean accepting a job that takes us to unfamiliar cities or cultures, as strangers far from home. Whether we are graduating as adults established in life, or still young adults, we cannot let these apprehensions stop us from anything.

Dr. Seuss wrote a book called *On Beyond Zebra*. It is about a boy named Conrad who just learned his alphabet, from A is for apple to Z is for Zebra. He is so proud of his accomplishment, but is shocked when another boy tells him that there is more to be found once you go on beyond z. This other boy, not content with the confines of the ordinary alphabet, tells Conrad about the letters beyond z that he

has created. Letters like “nuh” and “Quan” and “Flun.” I believe it is time for each of us here today, graduating or not, to think about how we can push beyond z in our own life. We should be proud of our accomplishments like Conrad was for knowing A to Z, but we should also always be searching how we can push past z and go on beyond zebra.

Pushing past our comfort zone, going beyond z, is something personal and very different for each and every one of us. While at Lewis, it was Dr. Laura Sloan who pushed me past z. I knew I wanted to be a teacher when I started here, but it was Dr. Sloan who saw a gift in me and helped me to find my passion for special education. The decision to change from secondary education to special and elementary education pushed me past my comfort zone, but it was one of the best decisions I have made.

I believe I can safely say that John Baptist De La Salle also pushed past z in his life. I am sure it was not always easy and often very challenging and difficult for De La Salle when he expanded schools of the seventeenth century to include the poor, founded colleges for teachers, technical and secondary schools, and established **reform** schools for delinquents.

How did you push past z during your time here at Lewis, and more importantly, how will you continue to go on beyond zebra in your life as you leave? I have learned that it is ultimately our faith and values that allow God to take us beyond the expected, to do something greater still.

So, here is our challenge as we graduate:

May our faith inspire us each day to stretch out to others, to reach beyond the status quo, to help make the world a better place, to accept diversity, to serve the poor, to fight for access to affordable education and for justice, to constantly learn more, to exceed normal expectations— as far as our faith, love, and imaginations will allow.

Congratulations and go on beyond z.