

Undergraduate Commencement 2012

- June 10, 2012

- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

Please know my congratulations, joy, and thanks as president of Seattle U. and the congratulations, joy, and thanks of those I represent: faculty, advisors, directors, coaches, staff, administrators, trustees, regents, alumni and donors, all of whom have supported you in a committed way so that you could get to this day of celebration. This is your day. With your families and friends we rejoice in you.

Those who know me well know that I like to say my middle name is “Perspective”... Fr. Stephen Perspective Sundborg. I like to see things in perspective; in fact, I can't see them at all unless I get perspective on them. So how might we see your graduation from Seattle U. in perspective?

First of all, as you have often heard me say, as of today you are the one in a 100 of the 7 billion people in the world who have a college degree. You are not the 99. You are the one. That gives one perspective on the true meaning of today.

Another perspective is added by seeing how successful you have been getting to this day by realizing the following. If we were to take the 100 students in your class in freshman year of high school—let's say in a typical state like Washington—only 69 graduated from high school on time, 35 of that original 100 went on to college right after high school, 25 were still in college in their second year and only 15 of the original 100 high school frosh are graduating from college within six years of starting college. So in perspective you are among the 15 in 100 who have successfully navigated it to today through the maze which started with high school.

Let me mention four other facts which provide some perspective. For every 100 men who graduate from college in America, 134 women graduate. (Whichever way you want to take that: let's hear it for the many successful women and the fewer surviving successful men!) On average you will earn \$1,000,000 more over a 40 year working life from age 25 to 65—that's \$25,000 more a year—than those with only a high school degree. But don't wait to get at it till you're 25 and be kind and generous to some future S.U. president when he or she comes calling! In regard to earnings and jobs, it is good to know that our oft-quoted current and correct unemployment rate of 8.2% is not the whole picture. How that breaks down is that of persons with less than a high school diploma 13% are unemployed, of people with a high school diploma and some college 7% are unemployed and of those with bachelors or higher degrees 3.9% are unemployed. And last of all, because of good health habits—which I might say have yet to appear in your lives—you will on average live nine years longer than those who did not finish high school.

All of these statistics provide some perspective on what today means. But as statistics they don't necessarily apply to you personally nor do they indicate the fuller or more important meaning of today.

I believe the most important question is how you will use your college education and for whom you will use it. You have been asked this question even from the day you first visited this campus, and in orientation, and in all your classes. Of course, it's an education for you, to live longer, to live better, and to live more fully and deeply. No apologies for that. And it is for others, whether the 99 who don't get a degree as you do, or the 85 who did not make it from the start of first year high school to today, or the unemployed and poor. If your degree is not put to use for others, then it fails the test of our mission of "empowering leaders for a just and humane world".

We, your university mentors, do not believe that you will fail this biggest exam of all, this final exam. We believe that you are "Seattle University graduates for others". We trust that you will not settle into the first side of the "haves" and the "have-nots" in America and the world. We believe you will not increase the division and tension of classes in our society, but will live in such a way that you do not find what you want unless others have what they need.

From a Jesuit viewpoint this provides the truest perspective on what we celebrate today in you, together, of course, with the prayer and assurance that your Creator and the Creator of all will guide and bless and love you and them together. Thank you for being our students and our graduates.