



2007

Reflections From the Faculty

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Recommended Citation

Shaw, Greg, "Reflections From the Faculty" (2007). *2007 Highlights*. Paper 3.
http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/comm_2007/3

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Good afternoon. It's a real pleasure to visit with you on this commencement day. Your vote of confidence is flattering, especially considering the grief I gave many of you as you endured my classes over the past few years. As someone whose teaching style is considered by some students to be an acquired taste, I'm encouraged that you invited me here today. It's also humbling to be counted among the company of so many very talented faculty members who are part of our Illinois Wesleyan family. Thank you for this honor.

I'd like to talk to you about gifts. Over the last several years you have received many of them: support from family and friends and teachers, scholarships, opportunities to travel and experience other cultures, exercises in leadership, and even perhaps the occasional person who *actually believed* that your dog ate your homework. Most importantly, you have been given chances to spend a lot of time reading and thinking and writing. With a little luck and some determination, you'll carve out time in your life to continue doing those things for a very long time to come.

You have also given much. You have worked very hard, sacrificing not only the opportunity to participate fully in the labor market over these few years but also a good bit of sleep and time away from momentary pleasures to be here instead. You've paid more for books and ... well, other college expenses ... than you and perhaps your parents care to recall. But beyond this, you have given more important things: You have taken time to help your peers understand statistics problems, the use of the subjunctive in languages other than your own, accounting and economic

principles, and the list goes on. You have also given much to the faculty. You have written us thoughtful papers to read and have taken an interest in our artistry and our research. You have allowed us now and then to share in the joys and difficulties of your personal lives, from scholarship competitions, to family crises, and everything in between. In my own case, you have co-authored academic papers with me, you have achieved great academic successes, you have sat my children, and a few of you have come to my office to weep. But perhaps most important of all, you have protested on occasion that you disagree with my premise or the way I have framed a question and have then pressed on to pose a creative alternative, all of which led me to change my view of the world. You have shared much with us, and we are all richer for it. As my friend, Jim Sikora, suggested to you just a few weeks ago, you have been about the business of building social capital. In the process, each of you has become far more than you were when you first entered our lives, and we are happy not only for the things you have given us, but more importantly, for what you have become.

Taking slight liberties with the often-cited passage from the 11th chapter of Ecclesiastes, we are told that when we cast our bread upon the water, it comes back buttered. Generosity is, after all, contagious. By sharing what we have we not only improve our own corner of the world, but we experience a payback many times over. Members of this graduating class will soon be busy as teachers, nurses, community activists, graduate students, bankers, Peace Corps volunteers, actors, and accountants. Regardless of your calling, discovering ways to answer it while casting your bread upon the water will pay you back in ways that most of you can only vaguely imagine

right now. Strive to be the most generous person you know. It pays amazing dividends, and it's your obligation, because you are among the privileged.

Now, I'm not asking you to feel guilty about being privileged. Rather, I'm asking you to pass it on. You have learned more during these four years than you perhaps realize. In the spirit of commencements, now is the time to put this to work. Teach someone something new every day. Think of it as showing off if you like. Reach out to people who don't look like you when your organization needs a new employee. That person's fresh thinking may be your salvation. Help build labor markets that honor motherhood, and remember always that a having a uterus should not be a handicap. You, after all, came from one. Speak up in the face of discrimination. When you do, you will make meaningful friends very quickly. Read a book with a child every chance you get. It's great fun.

In the end, we are not just talking about confronting injustice – though that's very important too. I'm talking about giving of yourselves in ways that will allow you to live into your full potential and will foster the same among those around you. Gifts cannot be demanded, but you'll find that the more you give, the more you get. So cast your bread, and we will all eat better.

Congratulations on this great day of beginnings, and thank you for this opportunity.