

Commencement Address - UMSL College of Optometry
May 18, 2013
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Chancellor George, Provost Cope, Dean Davis, distinguished faculty, candidates and soon-to-be colleagues from the TUMSL Class of 2013, friends and family members. I am honored to be with you on this special occasion.

My hope is that I will not make the same mistake as the speaker at my undergraduate commencement in 1982 from Washington & Jefferson College. It was memorable for two related reasons. One, it was extraordinarily long, and two, the three words that garnered the biggest applause of the evening *immediately* upon his speaking them were “And in conclusion...!”

So I will get immediately to my point.

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. Luke 12:48

The first part is *From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded;*

I hope that today, in the presence of family and friends, you will reflect on how much you *have* been given. Yes, you have worked hard for your accomplishment, (and are likely in serious debt), but your achievement would be much less likely if you had not been given the opportunity of living in this great nation. Ronald Reagan said that “America is too great for small dreams.” You *have* dreamed big, but we all have been truly blessed to live in a land of opportunity.

Your accomplishment would be much less likely without being given the support that comes from those closest to you. We had one tradition at Pennsylvania College of Optometry that I wish was universal. That is the conferral of the PHT, the lauded certificate awarded for Putting Him Through or Putting Her Through. A special thank you to those deserving of the PHT award who are here today.

The second part is *From the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.*

And you *have* been entrusted with much. You are soon to be among the 3% of the US population with a doctoral degree. Worldwide that number is under 1%. You are entering a small profession of 40,000 optometrists entrusted to provide primary eye care for 316 million people. For those of you scrambling for your calculators - or Dr. Bachman, your abacus - that is 7,900 patients each. 7,900 people are counting on you to provide appropriate care to assure that they see singly, clearly and healthfully throughout their lifetime. How well you provide this care can have lasting influence on each and every patient...whether they succeed in school...whether they make a significant impact on society.

So this is what I would like to demand of you. I want you to be more than just a passive member of our profession – I want to challenge you to be a leader. You can do that to some extent by being the best you can be as a clinician. You can commit to lifelong learning, so 40 years from

now you will be a better and more up-to-date than those pesky new optometrists coming out of school.

But the profession of Optometry is looking to you not just as exceptional clinicians, but as the next great thinkers, educators, researchers, and leaders in our community.

It was not just those who were content with their accomplishments and the status quo that made optometry great. It was those leaders like Charles Prentice in 1895 who was threatened with jail for charging a fee for an eye exam. It was those leaders who met at LaGuardia in 1968 to discuss the expansion of our scope of practice into the use of diagnostic drugs. And it was those leaders who continue to push through state legislatures our scope expansion into the realm of therapeutic medications, lasers and minor surgical procedures. You and your generation must continue this progress to lead the profession to ever increasing goals. And each goal should be based on improving the quality of care that we can provide to our patients.

Sometime in the future, when all has been said and done, you will look back over the course of your career and life and ask, “Did I fulfill my responsibility?”

You will be measured by your answers to questions such as:

- Did I reach my potential?
- Was I passionately dedicated to my patients?
- Did I demonstrate integrity and courage, and stand up for what is right?

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

I lost my father last month. He was a member of the Greatest Generation, and he served in the South Pacific in World War II. When I think of what he and his contemporaries accomplished during their lifetime with what they had been given, it sets the bar pretty high for the rest of us. I found out at Dad’s funeral that he may have set it even higher for me.

I was prepared for the usual “I’m sorry” or “you have my sympathy.” I was not prepared for hundreds of people from all walks of life from all across the State of Pennsylvania to say “I had a world of respect for your father,” “I never met a more decent man,” and “I was a better person for having known him.”

Dad was not an optometrist. He had a high school education, and was a mechanic by trade. Some of those kind remarks at his funeral were from family, but most were from colleagues that served with him in leadership positions statewide. In over 50 years of leadership roles in the Lions Club, their Eye Research Foundation, and Beacon Lodge Camp for the Blind, Dad may have done more for eye and vision care, and caring for the visually impaired than many optometrists. What might he have done with a Doctor of Optometry degree? What will you do with yours?

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Congratulations to the Class of 2013. Thank you for the honor of addressing you.