

Commencement Address

Delivered by **Joseph Bergfeld**, May 17, 2014

College of Arts and Science ceremony
at the University of Missouri–St. Louis

Chancellor George, Members of the Board of Curators, Faculty, Administrators, family, friends, and especially, graduates; It is my honor to have been given the privilege of being the commencement speaker for the 2014 College of Arts and Sciences graduating class. And what a robust, talented, and diverse graduating class you are! Among the 563 of you receiving graduate and post graduate degrees are representatives of 13 different countries and 5 continents. You range in age from 20 to 70 years old, receiving degrees with majors or minors in 31 different academic disciplines.

And if that doesn't speak well enough of UMSL's diversity, among you are African American, African, Asian, Hispanic-Latino, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders, Filipino, and white students. You truly reflect the world's and UMSL's diverse culture, and you affirm the universal desire of all the world's people to advance themselves through higher education.

Your graduation today is the culmination of the achievement of a tremendous goal. With discipline, commitment, and strong effort by you, and with help, support and sacrifice from family, friends, educators and other supporters, you have reached that goal, and in so doing, better prepared yourselves for a life of success, significance, and service. More about that in a moment.

But first, what about UMSL? What about the university that will in just minutes become your alma mater? As it begins the second half of its first century of service as an institution of higher learning serving the St. Louis community, our country and the world, what has it done to make us know that we made a wise choice when We Chose UMSL? Well, I hope you will agree that its list of accomplishments is most impressive, including these facts.

We rank 9th nationally and 1st in the Midwest among all universities with 15 or fewer doctoral programs.

We've been named one of "America's Best Colleges" by Forbes magazine.

Our Optometry and Nursing graduates exceed a pass rate of 98% on their licensure boards.

We rank 3rd among the nation's public research universities and have many individual programs ranking in the top 10 nationally in their respective fields.

Time limits reciting the entire list of superlatives, but it is long and impressive. As a strong believer in and supporter of our Saint Louis region, it is to me most significant that over 70% of UMSL graduates choose to live and work in the St. Louis region. That makes our university one of St. Louis' most important sources of tomorrow's thought, community and business leaders.

The I Chose UMSL campaign has delivered a powerful message about the impact that past UMSL grads have had on our region. Their success and accomplishments are testimony to the UMSL legacy, and pride in what past UMSL grads have accomplished is most appropriate. But the We Chose UMSL campaign is about the continuation and embellishment of that legacy, and that legacy is you. As you bask in the glow of the accomplishment you've achieved by becoming an UMSL grad, what progress have you made regarding your life plan?

I will submit to you that if you do not have a life plan, you need to develop one, because in just the same way that your success in becoming a college graduate was achieved through planning and discipline, success in having the kind of life you want to have also will call for the disciplined execution of a well thought out plan.

And what kind of life do you want to have? Well, there are probably as many correct answers to that question as there are graduates at today's commencement, but I'm pretty sure that included in the plan each of you will make will be a life that is successful, significant, and happy. So, how do you envision success? What is your version of significant accomplishment, and what for you defines a happy life? Whatever the answers to those questions are, with a plan you can and will achieve them, because you are all winners. Zig Ziglar, an American motivational speaker, said "You were born to win, but to be a winner you must plan to win, prepare to win and expect to win. Fidel Castro said "I began a revolution with 82 men. If I had to do it over again, I'd do it with 10 or 15 and absolute faith. It does not matter how small you are if you have faith and a plan of action." And Lil Wayne said "The more time you spend contemplating

what you should have done, you lose valuable time planning what you can and will do.” Planning is bringing the future to the present so that you can do something about it now, so whether it’s motivational speaking, revolution, hip hop superstardom, or any other life goals you envision for yourself, develop a plan for achieving those goals, have faith and belief in yourself, and apply the same discipline and effort that you used to achieve success as an UMSL grad, and you WILL succeed.

In closing, I’d like to make two requests, and they are that you include in your life plan giving back to your community through community service, and that you stay connected to and support UMSL. Regarding community service, your community, wherever you choose to reside, is rich with opportunities to share with those in need your time, talent and treasure. Find a cause, an organization or a need that stirs your desire to give back, and become a community volunteer. I can assure you that what you get back will be much greater than what you give. And speaking of giving, please plan to support UMSL in the same way. When I graduated from UMSL in the Dark Ages in 1970, I was able to achieve that goal thanks to the support of others and to the financial aid that was made available to me. Many of you graduating today are also the recipients of many kinds of support, including financial support. As you move forward with your lives, give something back to those who will follow you, and just like you, the support they receive from those who went before them will help them achieve their goals and will strengthen our tremendous University.

Congratulations, Class of 2014, and may every aspect of your soon to be well planned life be richly achieved.