

James M. Krueger
UMSL Commencement Speech
December 19, 2015

Chancellor George, thank you so much for your kind words of introduction.

Including three today, I have attended more than 170 commencements in my 41 years at UMSL. I have done so to show support for our students. These events are always joyous occasions for the graduates, their families and their friends.

This commencement ceremony is special for me because it will be the last one where I am a member of the platform party, but even more so because I am honored and humbled to be your commencement speaker.

I was told that my remarks are supposed to be 8-10 minutes, but I am accustomed to teaching summer classes of 2 and ½ hours, so I make no promises.

I am going to ask the graduates to consider tonight's ceremony as your last UMSL class of the Fall 2015 semester. Looking ahead, I would encourage you to consider taking more classes or pursuing additional UMSL degrees. We need the revenue.

In my classes, I expect class participation. Tonight is no exception.

I am going to ask you graduates a number of questions. The answers to these questions will help show that UMSL students are unique and more diverse than students at many other higher education institutions.

Undergraduate students: Please stand if you are 23 or older, not the typical 18-22 old undergrads. Please be seated.

Undergraduate students: Please stand if you worked full-time or part-time to help pay for your UMSL education, as opposed to having your parents pay for it. Please be seated.

Undergraduate students: Please stand if you are the first person in your family to earn a four-year college degree. So was I, many years ago. Please be seated.

I imagine that a number of you hit the trifecta of answers to those three questions.

Graduate students: Please stand if you worked full-time or part-time while attending UMSL. Please be seated.

Graduate students: Please stand if you are the first person in your family to earn a graduate degree. So was I, many years ago. Please be seated.

All students: Please stand if you are an international student. Please be seated.

Finally, all students: Please stand if you are proud of your academic achievements at UMSL. I certainly hope all of you are standing. Please be seated.

In every class, I also lecture. My lecture tonight has only three relatively short parts: The Golden Rule, Do the Right Thing and What Will Matter.

The Golden Rule is simple to state: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. I believe that sometimes we fail to follow the Golden Rule in our personal and professional lives. I know that I have. Still, try to use this simple rule as a guide for your actions.

Do the Right Thing is also a simple concept that can be difficult to put into practice. I guarantee that each of you will be challenged to do the right thing at some point in your career.

One recent, major example where doing the right thing did not happen is the Volkswagen diesel emissions scandal. The CEO resigned, although he may never have known about the cheating.

A recent newspaper article that I read provided information about the ongoing investigation. VW still believes that only a comparatively few employees were actually involved in the manipulations. However, so far, data has been analyzed from the laptops, phones and other devices of 400 employees.

Also, more than 2,000 employees have been informed in writing that they cannot delete any data in case it becomes relevant to the investigation. Finally, external auditors have already gone through 102 terabytes of data, which is the equivalent of 50 million books. That is big data.

As this case shows, it matters to you, to your employer and to society that you do the right thing. Graduates, think to yourself “What would I have done in this situation had I been a VW employee?”

I will now quote excerpts from the poem What Will Matter by Michael Josephson.

“So what will matter? How will the value of your days be measured?”

What will matter is not what you bought, but what you built; not what you got, but what you gave. What will matter is every act of integrity, compassion, courage or sacrifice that enriched, empowered, or encouraged others to emulate your example.

What will matter is not your competence, but your character. Choose to live a life that matters.”

Congratulations and best wishes. Always be proud that yo