DIVERSITY, i^2e, AND THE POTENTIAL FOR GREATNESS

Commencement Address
Polytechnic Institute of New York University

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President Hultin, members of the platform party, faculty, families, friends and, above all, distinguished graduates: it is truly an honor for me to be a part of this occasion in which we celebrate Poly's 155th Commencement. I have been exceedingly impressed by what I have learned about your university, your *Six Driving Principles of Transformative Capital Planning,* the *Power of Polythinking and i^2e*, your *$2 million Center for Innovation in Technology and Entertainment,* and your brilliant and creative corps of NACME Scholars. Moreover, I identify fully with your mission, vision and values, ones for which my friend and colleague, your president, and I share a deep belief and commitment. I am truly Blessed to receive the Honorary Doctor of Engineering degree from this distinguished and distinctive institution.

NYU-Poly has one of the most diverse student bodies in the country, and for someone who has been working for almost 40 years to increase diversity with equity in American higher education, this graduation ceremony is beyond encouraging. Looking over this graduating class, I see diversity in its most expansive definition. I see the ambassadors of Thomas Friedman's "flat world" before me, as well as men and women from the five boroughs of New York City, all manifesting the potential for unprecedented greatness.

That potential for greatness has been nurtured in an academic culture defined by invention, innovation, and entrepreneurship. NYU-Poly has armed its faculty and students with the tools, resources, and inspiration to turn their research into applications, products, and services that take flight as faculty- and student-owned companies. Here and abroad, The Class of 2010 has been ably prepared to deal with the future of cities, managing technology and financial risk, improving healthcare, designing more efficient and secure information technology, cleaning up the environment, just to name a few of the world's most intractable problems.

But, above all today, I see and feel the power of diversity at work. We at the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering, Inc. (NACME) are in sync with your worldview. You are

graduating at a time when the country's best and brightest minds from academia, business, industry, and government are trying to determine how to maintain America's competiveness and capability in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) in a "flat world." We refer to this situation at NACME as "The 'New" American Dilemma." In our opinion, the solution to America's competitiveness problem is to activate the hidden workforce of young women and men who have traditionally been underrepresented in STEM careers. For over 35 years, NACME has been working to create a STEM workforce that looks like America. NACME strives to catalyze a national agenda around opportunity, diversity and entrepreneurship that is manifested here at NYU-Poly.

The contribution of diversity to the i^2e equation may, at first, appear incongruous. Too many leaders and policymakers have failed to recognize, or perhaps, to admit that diversity drives innovation and that its absence imperils our designs, our products, and, most of all, our creativity—all components of competitiveness. Increasing diversity in STEM opens the doors for new approaches to solving problems and allows for new ways of thinking and, therefore, the potential for greatness. The fact is that the need for talented individuals in STEM fields has never been greater.

I'm not going to challenge you to try to imagine what the world will look like in 30 years, because there's just no way of predicting that. If 30 years ago someone said we'd be able to carry hundreds to thousands of songs, movies AND videos on ONE device that easily fits into your pocket, they'd be labeled a nut or dismissed as someone who spent way too much time reading science-fiction. But that's just it. Technology has far surpassed anything we once thought possible and entered the realm of what would have been considered the stuff of dreams.

My challenge to you is, embrace diversity and champion equity. Don't be afraid to take risks. Learn and appreciate the value of excellence, perseverance, boldness and optimism. Welcome challenges and take deliberate steps to overcome boundaries. Keep a positive and constructive set of attitudes.

NYU-Poly graduates are well-prepared to offer solutions. I concur with President Hultin who reminded the NYU-Poly Class of 2009 that, "In this rapidly changing world, the best answers will come from what you know best: technology, engineering, and applied sciences …enhanced with a strong dose of i^2e."

Most importantly, continue to dream and to follow your dreams. I close with my favorite dream metaphor by Langston Hughes:

Dreams

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

-Langston Hughes

I wish you Godspeed and Best Wishes.