

**2008 Commencement Address**  
**By**  
**Robert A. Scott, President**  
**Adelphi University**

**I. Introduction**

Thank you. Graduates, this talk is for you. It is for you to reflect on how you got here, who has helped you, and how you will approach the future as family members, citizens, neighbors, and professionals. In it, I will comment on the universal values of work, beauty, and charity as represented by our honorees, Lon Gorman, Paul Taylor, and Adele Smithers.

So Lon, Paul, and Adele, this talk is for you, too.

You, and the others whose names I will call, represent the nearly 2600 graduates here today, baccalaureate and masters candidates alike, who have done so much to enrich the Adelphi experience for all around them.

**II. Universal Values**

The great philosophers grounded Western thought in the study of the true, the beautiful, and the good, believed to be the universal properties of all that exists. Some equate the “true” with the mind, “beauty” with the heart, and “good” with the hands.<sup>1</sup>

One of those philosophers, Emanuel Kant, formulated three questions which I relate to these values:

What can I know? (Mind)  
What can I hope for? (Heart)  
What ought I to do? (Hands)<sup>2</sup>

With these three values and three questions, I will discuss the themes represented by our honorees: work, art, and charity; the true, the beautiful, the good; mind, heart, hands.

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<sup>1</sup> Plato. Republic. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992

<sup>2</sup> Kant, Emmanuel. The Critique of Pure Reason. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996.

Today, I hope to become your final professor of the academic year because,

In the end  
 We will conserve only what we love  
 We will love only what we understand  
 And we will understand only  
 What we have been taught<sup>3</sup>

Adaeze Udoji, Leah Prestamo, Adair Thomas, Isiah Hall, this message is for you.

## **Work**

We all work. The key question is – “How should I define success?” “What can I know?” asked the sage. I like the description of a successful person as one having a combination of competence, courage, compassion, and conviction.

As another Commencement Speaker said, “Material possessions rust away, wear away, or depreciate. Character alone will never tarnish.”<sup>4</sup> This is why we say that an Adelphi education is as much about character and citizenship as it is about careers and commerce.

Today, we honor three people for their accomplishments: Lon Gorman for his work, which made it possible for others to find employment and fulfill life’s goals; Paul Taylor for the beauty of his art and his contributions to our understanding of the human condition, as well as his commitment to Adelphi students as a professor in the 1960’s; and Adele Smithers for the examples she sets in demonstrating the goodness of charity.

We selected Lon to represent work without diminishing his appreciation for beauty or his commitment to the community. He acquired complex knowledge and earned licenses; he pursued his goals with passion and sought greater and greater challenges; he became a leader in his company and his industry; he learned how personal ambition, national

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<sup>3</sup> Gregorian, Vartan. “A letter from the President, “Carnegie Reporter,” CCNY Vol. 1, No. 2 Spring 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Dole, U.S. Senator Elizabeth. Dartmouth College, 1991.

interests, and international law must be balanced. Like you, he wanted a career, not just a job; he knew that success requires continued learning and the management of time. He mastered technical skills and gave them life.

You, too, have worked – at your studies, jobs on and off-campus, student government, fraternities and sororities, athletics, clubs, art, performance. Some of you wear scarves and cords on your gowns to reflect your accomplishments on campus and in other countries. One of you talked with me about Adelphi encouraging your “inner voice” to grow and mature in ability and accomplishment – to be proud but not satisfied, always striving but never complacent. You are proof that Adelphi’s campaign themes -- create, excel, teach, inspire - - have meaning.

Sharon Robbins, Vincent Rubino, Rita Delfonce, you know this.  
Gianna Smith and Andrew Meditz, you know this, too.

Kevin Rummel, Irina Ostrovhynyuk, and Mary Aldridge, this is for you.

### Art

One of my favorite quotes is this:

... All good things ...  
Come by grace  
And grace comes by art  
And art does not come easy.<sup>5</sup>

What is art? Picasso, with whom Paul Taylor has been compared, said, “Art is a lie which makes you realize the truth.”<sup>6</sup> Others think of art or beauty as the inspiration of dreams. “What can I hope for?”, asked the sage.

I suggest that “art” is what we hope for: we hope for ways to create beauty; to express ideas; to reveal the truth of a memory, an observation, an insight - - whether in Western or in Eastern thought. This is what we see in a Paul Taylor dance, a Picasso painting, or a Noh play.

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<sup>5</sup> Maclean, Norman. A River Comes Through It. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976, p.8.

<sup>6</sup>Pablo Picasso quoted by Simon Schama in The Power of Art, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006. For Taylor comparison, see “Field Guide: Paul Taylor” by Laura Jacobs, in Portraits, Paul Taylor Dance Company, Spring 2008 printing

I think the essential components of education are imagination and history, and imagination is nourished by art, resulting in our ability to interpret world history and create a more meaningful national and global future. Researchers have found that studying art develops important cognitive as well as aesthetic traits.<sup>7</sup> Paul Hunter, who has traveled the world to photograph the beauty of nature, understands this. LuAnna Lasso, through music, understands this. Kathryn Taylor and Brett Garfinkel understand this through dance. Robin Iovino, recipient of the A. Conger Goodyear Award in Art, you know this, too.

Each of these students, and many others of you, has studied art; created beauty; and contemplated the flowers, bird-songs, and sculptures on Levermore Lawn, the flagpole green, and Blodgett's yard.

Sam Adams, Lindsey Beecher, Michelle Cohen, Laura Scully, Joe Leggio, Amy Bartlett, this is for you, with thanks only you can understand. We say to you, "create art ... create something worth cherishing."<sup>8</sup> You have the talent and the opportunity.

## **Charity**

Winston Churchill once said, "We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give." Thus the question, "What ought I to do?"

Charity, serving others, is well known to you, Class of 2008. By honoring Adele Smithers today, we celebrate charity, philanthropy, voluntarism, and civic engagement. We also honor our students who have done so much for others.

During your time at Adelphi, you have inspired children in Costa Rica; assisted in reconstruction efforts after Katrina; raised money for children with cancer; assisted the Make-A-Wish Foundation, the Salvation Army, and the American Heart Association; raised funds, clothes and music CD's for our military in Iraq and Afghanistan; tutored local children in reading and math; encouraged those eligible to vote in local, state, and

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<sup>7</sup> Hubert, Ann. "Drawing Lessons," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 22, 2008, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Nadine Gordimer. Commencement Address at the University of Witwatersrand, 1980.

national elections; and mourned fellow students who died much too early and comforted their families as best you could.

Perhaps those who know this best are Kristin Martin, Jung Ki, Takiyah Thomas, Dely Francisco, Kristen Schreiner, and Lauren Flanagan. This, then, is for them.

## **Conclusion**

Each of our honorees, and each of the students mentioned, as well as many more, has fulfilled responsibility for work in a meaningful and imaginative way; has shown that they recognize the virtues of art and the value of exploring beauty; has shown how thinking of others, whether through recognition or through charity, but always with respect, strengthens the universal human condition; and has learned that many people who succeed, achieve what they do by overcoming adversity.

That is true for each of our honorees: Lon Gorman, who had to leave Adelphi due to family obligations at a time not of his choosing; Paul Taylor, who started dancing while in college, long after his competitors had mastered basic techniques and earned accolades for precocious talent; and Adele Smithers, whose inspiration was the death of a loved one.

You, too, have overcome adversity of varied forms.

Perhaps those here who best exemplify this dimension of success are a daughter and mother, a graduating senior, Kristen Gabriel, creator of the Clothesline Project at Adelphi, bringing greater awareness to sexual assault and violence against women, and her mother, Theresa.

This then is for them, nominator and winner of the Parent's Association Parent Recognition Award for exemplifying competence, courage, compassion and conviction. Kristen and others, surely Michael Berthel, Kendra Britto, and Michael Bradshaw, show these traits, too, while some in your generation are observed to "wait, wonder, and watch wanly or warily."<sup>9</sup> These students and others of you learn actively and engage others in seeking solutions for the common good, not just in pursuit of self-interest.

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<sup>9</sup> Coles, Robin. "Afterward" in *It's Complicated: the American Teenager – Portraits and Interviews* by Robin Bowman. New York: Umbrage Editions, 2007, p. 147.

They combine talent and tolerance, master tools and skills, and pursue truth, beauty, and service with a passion - - not a bad goal for this lesson. Learn it well.

And remember these questions:

What can I know? (Mind)  
What can I hope for? (Heart)  
What ought I to do? (Hands)

Not tomorrow, but today.

For (as Thoreau said), Yesterday is but a Dream,  
And To-morrow is only a Vision:  
But To-day well lived makes  
Every Yesterday a Dream of Happiness,  
And every To-morrow a Vision of Hope.”<sup>10</sup>

Go now Class of 2008, with mind, heart, and hands at the ready for all that comes next. Rise up now and take your rightful places among educated men and women.

Congratulations! Good Luck! Thank you.

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<sup>10</sup> Thoreau, Henry David: Walden, chapter 6, conclusion, p. 170 (1906, reprinted 1968). Originally published in 1854.