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"Your Journey Begins Here:" The Importance of Graduation and Setting and Achieving Goals

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GCW Remarks

Fall 2006 General Student Assembly

August 30, 2006

“Your Journey Begins Here:”

The Importance of Graduation and Setting and Achieving Goals

I want to welcome all of you back to the “Hill”—back to another semester. Many of you spent your summers all over this country, indeed some of your fellow students, professors and administrators spent time all over the world this summer. Which really is the way it should be! You should be having new experiences and taking advantage of opportunities.

Still, as Mr. Prairie View pointed out when we observed the Moment of Silence, at least one of our students did not make it back. As a Father and a President who is concerned about all of you, I wish I could just place a net around you and keep you protected, but since that is not possible, I will just remind you that life is precious. Make decisions and choices that demonstrate your understanding of how valuable you are!

There is a very simple reason why we are having this program: I want to inspire you to reach your goals. God has richly blessed me & in turn I must help others reach their goals. I was a prof from 1977 to 1993, & every week someone tells me that I inspired someone they know. I must try to do that now as president.

You have my sincere respect for pursuing a degree here at Prairie View. As you know, indeed, as you have been told a countless number of times by someone who is my age, **attending College is one of the most important decisions you will make in your life.**

I still vividly recall what it was like to start College. Indeed, that is the main reason I enjoy speaking to you because I can so relate to you.

At best, I had been an average high school student. But, I had several things going for me: (1) the blessing and faith of my Mother;

How many of you have a Mother who is behind you, pushing you to succeed? Some of you have a Mother and a Father who do this, but either of these should be counted as a special blessing.

Second, I loved to read and think about the things that were mentioned in books. That I did my own thinking was a good thing, because I had already discovered that far too many of my contemporaries got themselves into trouble by associating with the wrong crowd and being swayed by them.

Don't all of you know someone who has been influenced by the wrong crowd? Maybe you are the one. This is the time and place where you must begin to think for yourself and make decisions that are going to positively impact your future.

I mention these things about myself to make the point that you and I really are NOT THAT Different. I have been where you are. If I can rise to the levels I have risen to, then so can you.

Note to me: Tell my story, briefly, mention going to UK and Duke and completing all of it by age 27.

Key Point: I want to share with you the things that led to my being successful in College: “Setting and Achieving Goals.” There has never been a substitute for hard work and there never will be. Anything of value that you ever achieve or gain will be more valuable because of the hard work it took you to get it. We all benefit from listening to others, from having role models. This is where parents and teachers come in. Our role models will not only encourage us, but they often say the things that we may not want to hear but we most surely “need” to hear these things. **In other words, in College you must understand and accept constructive criticism and to take responsibility for your choices.**

In previous semesters we spent a lot of time talking about inappropriate behavior. I won't give you that entire speech today, but I will warn you—since this is the first time I am addressing some of you. ~~Before I give it to you to fair warning.~~ We have a zero tolerance policy when it comes to inappropriate behavior. This is for the safety of all of you! Do not fight! You will be sent home. Do not have a gun on this campus—it will end badly! We had an “accidental shooting” last Spring and it was a tragedy for every student involved. Do not smoke marijuana or use any other illegal drugs—you may go to jail and get put out of school. You see, you must make a choice—right here and now! If getting your education is important at all, then all of those things must go way down on your list of things to do.

~~My advice would be to scratch them completely off the list, but this is fair warning. Because I want you to graduate and as I have already told you your life is valuable I believe that getting a degree from PVAMU will enhance your standard of living, but you have to put in the hard work and make choices that will help you reach that goal.~~

Don't wake up 30 years from now, broke, with no options telling your grandchildren that you went to Prairie View for a semester or two, but someone from Houston or Dallas disrespected you because they happened to be born in a different city in the same state! Come on Ya'll! You will be forced to explain to them how bad your choice was.

It is important that you set high goals for yourself. And, then every day, work to achieve your goals. To me, an important aspect of goal setting is to dream, envision being in important situations and positions, and then make those dreams become real. By the time I had completed my Freshman year at the University of Kentucky, I told everyone that I would be “rich and famous” some day. What is your goal? Why not tell that to someone?

A very tactical way to implement this plan is to set academic and personal goals for this year. I challenge each of you to write them down and turn the academic goals into your advisors.

I am then going to require your advisor to meet with you, individually to discuss how the academic goals can be achieved and what the University can do to assist you. Each advisor will maintain progress reports for each student and provide a written report to each Dean and Department Head on students who may need intervention in achieving their goals. I am going to require each Dean to report to the Provost on each of these individuals and what they are doing to help each of you succeed.

Key Point: Take advantage of the services here and enlist your academic advisor as a person who will help you meet the goals that you set. It will make a difference in your college career; it may even result in your graduating earlier than if you had not set specific goals and developed a plan to achieve them.

There are some very practical things that will assist your education. **Reading is an essential part of your education.** It helps you to think critically. Mention my love of Reading and my Reading List.

Later on in this semester, we will disseminate the new Prairie View Recommended Readings and I encourage you now to begin thinking about subjects that interest you and books that you might like to read, separate from what is assigned in a class. All reading will broaden your mind, help improve your vocabulary and many people say it strengthens your creativity. I have to say that this has not been the case for me. Indeed, I have often said that my wife has an advantage over me because she is creative and I am not. However, for those of you that are not yet sold on the benefits of reading—I say, I shudder to think of all that I would lack if I did not love reading—If I had not discovered the adventures one can experience through reading.

In books I was there for the March On Washington, I heard Abe Lincoln free the slaves; I saw those bodies lining the beaches of Normandy during World War II (Note to GCW: Many of these may not be right or you may want to use different experiences, but give them some things you experienced in a book that you were not alive to see! Or not old enough to appreciate...)

You must learn how to write.

The more you read, the better your sense of correct grammar usage and sentence structure will become. Even when you can't remember the rule, reading will allow you to know, "Hey, something ain't quite right with that sentence or that paragraph!"

College is a time to have new experiences. No matter what your background or beliefs, you will meet a significant number of people who see the world differently than you. **An important aspect of your education is having new experiences, meeting "different" people, and doing some things for the first time.** We all know that the world beyond the walls of the University is more "diverse" than ever. Take time to meet other folk and gain an understanding of your differences and similarities.

But, here is the key for me: the more I learn about "other people," the more I come back again and again to the view that they are not that different after all.

Lastly, I want to encourage you to treat each other like brothers and sisters. Respect each other. Appreciate your differences and allow people to be themselves. This is the Prairie View A&M University family—let's support each other and be proud of this great institution that we are all affiliated with. I want to encourage all of you! Students, faculty, staff and Administrators to wear your purple and gold on Thursdays. Every Thursday is Spirit Day! Show your Panther Pride.

I am asking the faculty members to come to games, not every game, but bring your families and show up to support our students. Let's all wear our PV t-shirts; golf shirts; jackets to games and show up in a way that reinforces our dedication to the students. Later on in the program, we will have a mini-Spirit Rally, which I understand is a pre-cursor to the full-blown Sprit Rally on Friday. It is truly important that all of us show pride and appreciation for this University.

Conclusion

1. **Obtain an education and not just a degree from College.**
2. Help someone.
3. Ask your God for "His Blessings."