

Commencement Address by  
Brian Williams  
The Ohio State University  
June 8, 2008

Thank you.

O-H --  
>> I-O.  
O-H --  
>> I-O.  
O-H --  
>> I-O.

Thank you very much.

Members of the Board, the Chancellor, elected officials, faculty, family and the Class of '08: at least they let you wear black. So that's nice. Someone just said to me, you know you can go ahead and take your hat off while you speak. I said, "Are you kidding"? The one day when you guys will have more pictures taken of you than any day but your wedding and it is like a bad hair decade.

So I'm with you in that. I'm not sure commencement speakers are to be as humbled and made to feel so modest as I am right now. I think we're supposed to be mature and wise about it. But after all these years watching on TV, to be standing in the middle of the Shoe; what an honor. I'm also counting my blessings and I'll be brief here today because I know how hot it is out there, but at least I don't have to speak slowly and measure out every syllable and explain everything as I go on, as you have to do in Ann Arbor.

A quick note - that was Tom Brokaw's idea. He came to me in the news room Friday, my hand to God, knowing where I was going to be spending my Sunday and gave me that material. One of my friends who is an anchor at, shall we say, one of our NBC stations in Ohio gave me another one. Over an open satellite on Friday as we talked on television, he said, "I got the best one. Why did we come to find out that O.J. Simpson's white bronco was heading to Ann Arbor that day of the slow speed chase?" I said, "I don't know, why?" He said, "Because he knew no one would look for a Heisman winner in Ann Arbor."

I'm just saying, I do want to pay tribute to you. Sadly, today of all the people in the world, of all the people you could have chosen, you invite a college dropout to give the Commencement speech to celebrate all of the hard work that we celebrate in you today. You all reached down and found it. You all did what I failed to do. I was a work study kid, I was a student loan kid, and I didn't make it. I did not achieve what you have done. So know at least if you remember nothing else from this today, you start at a point further along the line than I did.

There's no telling where you'll go or how you'll convert your diploma from this institution. And I know you all reach down to get it, but you also reached up. And that means family. And that means mentors. And that means loved ones. So at this point, I know you all know where they're sitting, can you stand up and direct your applause to the people responsible for you being here, just for a moment, all the students. Outstanding.

Outstanding.

I was going to say earlier, I don't think I ever looked down on such a tired, broke, hungover bunch, but enough about your parents.

I'm the father of a college sophomore so I've been watching all of you very closely, living vicariously through you to see what I have in store for me over the next two years. I tend to be a bit of an intimidating parent. New boyfriends come home. My philosophy is pepper-spray them first, and when they come to during questioning, we'll see if they're men of good character. And I hope your dads are just like that.

I come here today with a request for the Class of '08. We need you to fix the country. And I'm sorry to ask this of you. And I'm deadly serious and we really do. I am 49 and on behalf of my generation, I'm so sorry, but the internet is so cool. We got side tracked. I can burn an hour on Perez Hilton like that. And I know I speak for a lot of you.

WebMD - very cool, except anything I've ever punched in comes back thyroid cancer.

The internet is fantastic. And it takes way too much of our time, so with apologies, we need you all now to step up. And every adult in this place has every faith that you're up to the job. You are, today, as of today, as fearsome a weapon as the one they assembled during the Manhattan project, in a similar place, Soldier Field, in Chicago. You are the most fearsome weapon in the world.

You are students in the United States of America, armed with a newly-minted college degree from The Ohio State University. So pick one area--energy, politics, diplomacy, science, education, military, transportation -- start with climate, something tells me this may be a challenge in the years ahead. Tomorrow's predicted high for Columbus is 220 degrees.

Energy policy, can you please help us find a way to get around without fuel in our tanks that comes from an enemy of this country? We can no longer fly dependably, commercially, point to point in this country without absolute certainty, and that's a tragedy, as it is what we're paying for it.

Politics; pick a campaign this year. Campaign for McCain. Campaign for Obama. Campaign for the libertarian. The vegan party. Campaign for Moby. But volunteer, get out there, and campaign for someone. We won't see an election like this for decades again in this country.

We are at a crossroads. They don't get more important and it's so important that you all get involved. Put your generational stamp on American politics. Dial in and pay attention and I say that as part of a group, we all have to start thinking and acting as one. There are, as of this week, 117 million blogs in the United States.

One more time.

117 million blogs.

And I stand here today as one of them. And what do most of us bloggers talk about? Us.

And the problem is, we need to start talking about us, all of us. We need to start thinking of us as the collective, the United States that we used to know. It is going to require a lot of work.

I am proud to say that in my life and my job I get to spend a lot of time with Americans in uniform. They are magnificent and they would so enjoy this here today. They don't have the chance to be here and I mean that in more ways than one. They would love this. They love being in the Shoe here today. They would love what all of you are about to be handed, what you've earned.

And instead they have chosen to go a different way. Some from among your ranks, some will come back and become Ohio State students. They have raised their hands and volunteered to go to places with names like Hadithah and Ramadi and Mosul and Kabul. But they too, as you are, are the very best of your generation. Think of them when you think you're having a bad day. Think of them when you're faced with any kind of challenge at all. Think of my friend Jack Lucas who died a few days ago. Jack Lucas was a recipient of the Medal of Honor. His death leaves 104 men alive with the medal.

Jack Lucas signed up for World War II. He lied a little bit. He was 13. Not yet 14 years old. Stowed away to get to Iwo Jima. Two grenades land next to him, he covers them with his body. 250 pieces of shrapnel, 26 surgeries later. We lost Jack Lucas in his 80's last week and of all things, leukemia got him. But he leaves behind a part of him in all of us. Think of him and all others like him when you think you're having a bad day.

And let me try a second experiment, your indulgence, will all veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces please do us the honor of standing up in place? All you need is one of these guys, really. They'll get you out of any fix. This is the generation that went to the moon without breaking a sweat. The older folks here among us today, won World War II "titanic" struggle for control of the globe against incredible odds.

You got a guy here named John Glenn. John Glenn flew the X-15 when there was no guarantee he would come back, went up in a tiny black capsule when there was no guarantee we could get him back. And for kicks later in life, for a retirement job, he went back up in space. John Glenn is part of the folklore at O'Hare airport. Once had to put his shoes through the easy bake oven there at the TSA before you can get on the plane. More than once as the attendants just blindly went on about their work. Guess which passenger on board that commercial flight that day was the least likely to take down a commercial aircraft? Probably the greatest patriot walking through O'Hare airport at that moment. We can't ask guys like that to put their shoes through a metal detector if we can't put more brain power into the problems that face us as a country. We owe him more than that. We owe all of these patriots more than that.

And so as of today with the authority vested in me, as a newly-minted Buckeye, welcome you to adult life in the greatest nation on earth. As of today, you will have plenty of hands there to help you. You'll have safety nets underneath you if you fall. Take chances, but wear a seat belt. Shake the hand of the next person you see in uniform. Go ahead and eat and then go swimming immediately afterwards. Unplug all appliances and cell phone chargers while not in use. And ladies and gentlemen, members of this graduating class, members of the graduate studies, wherever you go, please tell them you're a Buckeye. There is nothing wrong with America that someone from Ohio State can't fix. Go get them.

O-H --  
>> I-O.