

Address to Graduates
American University's 123rd Commencement
College of Arts and Sciences
Cornelius M. Kerwin, President
Saturday, May 9, 2009

This is the point in our proceedings when the president delivers his charge to the graduates.

When you arrived here, we made you certain promises. To the undergraduates, we promised that if you applied yourself and took full advantage of what our university can provide, you would leave us educated men and women. You would leave us experts in your chosen fields, and you would leave us experienced, through your use of our great city—as a laboratory and a gateway to the nation and the world.

To our master's students, we promised that you would enhance the education you brought to us, through us providing you the knowledge and tools to advance in, and ultimately lead, in your chosen careers.

And to our doctoral students, we promised you would leave us scholars—having added to your field's knowledge through original and important research, guided by the senior scholars on our faculty and capable of doing the same influential scholarship throughout your lives and, we hope, while teaching new generations.

The faculties have certified now that we have prepared you in these ways, and time will tell how well you use what you acquired.

I charge you to remember, however, that you have acquired something else—a lifetime of relationships to American University. And on this day of commencement, on this day of beginnings, it is a time to make fresh commitments.

I charge you to succeed by taking the qualities you have demonstrated here, in all phases, aspects, and stages of your life. I charge you to become alumni—to whom we can point, along with the extraordinary knowledge and insight created by this great faculty, as American University's greatest work and American University's legacy.

I charge you to remember that American University is a place where you tested yourself and found yourself equal to very high standards, a place filled with people who challenged you, helped you, angered you, argued with you, conspired with you, and will always care deeply about your well being.

We, who remain here at American University, will strive to keep you an active and influential part of this learning community. We will regularly communicate with you about our progress, our accomplishments, our challenges, and our shortcomings, and enlist you actively in the important and ongoing work of our institution. That work will advance this institution's critical mission, to make the world a smarter and better place, enhancing the importance and the value of your degree—as you and tens of thousands of alumni who came before you, and tens of thousands of alumni who will follow you—dedicate their minds, their energy, and their passion to their communities, our nation, and our world.

You leave us a stronger institution because of your time and effort here. My final charge to you is to accept our thanks and our sincere best wishes for a long, productive, and happy life.

Provost Bass will now begin the conferral of degrees.