

Winter 2010 Commencement Remarks
President Karen M. Whitney
December 18, 2010

It is an honor to be before you today, this cold crisp and sunny afternoon in December. I promise to be brief but I will take the liberty of also being bold.

As graduates, this day is one of both endings and of beginnings. As your university president I know that you have worked hard and, for this moment in time, I hope you are absolutely taking in this great accomplishment of earning a college degree.

As you take in this moment, also know that in earning a college degree you have now joined the ranks of the educated class; you have joined an elite group in our society. For you see, only 27% of the people in this country have a bachelor's degree or more and, in Pennsylvania, that number is slightly less with 25%, or only one in four adults have a bachelor's degree or more of education. Those of you with master's degrees are in a very elite group with only 10% or one in ten adults in our country having earned a master's degree or more. So, you see from this day forward you are part of the leadership of your community.

My bold message to you today is to ask you to recognize and seize your place in your community as a college graduate and leader. Now when I say "leader" I do not necessarily mean that you should run for political office, although I believe we need all the help we can get. What I mean by "leader" is that as you live your dream, as you pursue your professional and personal passions, be sure and include in that dream how you will join the civic life of the communities where you live and work. As a member of the educated class you bring a critical mind and an enthusiastic spirit to your community.

Let me describe what I mean by joining the civic life. I have five items I ask that you put on your to-do list. Five steps that you will take as walk out that door. They are vote, read, join, join, and advocate.

1. Be a registered voter and vote regularly. It's the foundation of our democracy. You are smart, you read and think critically.

2. Read the newspaper or news sites on the web every day. Be informed about our lives locally, nationally, and internationally.
3. Join, contribute, and give your time, talent, and treasure to at least one organization that has meaning to you personally, like your university, your church, United Way, Little League, Scouting—organizations that are working to make our world a better place.
4. Join one professional organization and contribute in a similar manner with your time, talent, and treasure. Every profession or field of work has organizations that advance your area of work interest. I tell you that not only can you contribute but I believe you must contribute—they need you. And you need them.
5. Be an advocate for higher education. You are a walking, and hopefully talking, advertisement for the value and importance of a college education. This summer I want you to help mentor at least three folks who are coming after you, who are younger, who are trying to decide if they can or should go to college. Someone helped you and it's your time to give back.

My hope is that my message today of living a civic life and voting, reading, joining and advocating will be one that you will embrace.

The faculty and staff of Clarion University have worked with you for years and we know you are up for the task of joining the educated class and taking your earned place in our community.

Have dreams, make them bold, and serve your personal and professional communities.

Fly Eagles Fly!

Thank You and All The Best.