

Clarion University Winter 2011 Commencement
December 17, 2011
President Karen M. Whitney
“The Promise of Higher Education”

To the Class of 2011 let me extend congratulations on your great accomplishment of graduating from Clarion University. This is truly an eagletastic moment!

To your family and friends, congratulations on your great accomplishment of supporting this new graduate. I think you will agree that it was a team effort.

I am here today not only as the President of Clarion University but as a champion, a cheerleader for what you have done. For graduating from college is no small feat. In fact, only 27% of the adults in this country have a college degree. Today you have joined the ranks of the educated elite.

As you know, higher education has been and continues to be the way our American society advances itself. First, American higher education educated white men who wanted to prepare for the clergy. The preparation for other professions followed with our country's need for teachers, doctors, lawyers, journalists, and artists. Our unique American approach to education and higher education has for over 400 years been one of increasing egalitarianism with a focus on increasing the number of Americans who, through preparation and determination, could advance themselves intellectually and professionally to a higher standard of living and a higher status within our society.

My own family is this great American story of promise through education. My father's father had a 6th grade education, drove a truck, was a farmhand, and retired as a rural deputy sheriff. My father was the first in his family to go to college, earned a bachelor's degree in business and was a career federal civil servant. I earned a bachelor's in psychology, a master's in public administration, and a doctorate in higher education administration and currently serve as President of Clarion University. In three generations, my family story is one from truck driver to university president.

I share my story with you today because I have come to know many of your stories. I know that this American promise is alive and well in Clarion. Daily I talk with Clarion University students who are working hard to prepare themselves to fulfill their promise and to live their dreams. As I look out in the audience, I have talked with many of you about your hopes, dreams and desires.

I know that a part of your dream was to come to Clarion and earn your degree. I am here today to say keep going with that dream. In fact, I hope your Clarion experience has not only prepared you to live your dream but has also provided an environment in which you find yourselves dreaming even bigger dreams.

So, you may ask yourself or you may even want to ask me, “Ok President Whitney, this dreaming is all fine and good but how do I take my really big dream and make it real?” Here goes with my take on how you take dreams and make them real.....

1. The answer to making a dream real is in the making of the dream itself.
Let’s say your dream is to be a college president. You might come to this notion because you love to teach, love to learn, love ideas, love the whole college thing and want to be a part of it for the rest of your life. The operative word is "love." At the core of any dream is doing what you love. In doing what you love, you will do it really well. In fact, I bet in doing what you love to do, you will become one of the best at it and in being the best you will be successful and you will live your dream.
2. How do you know what you love?
One definition I like is, “Something you love to do is something you would do for free, for no payment.” I can tell you that I love being president of Clarion and I would do it for free but my family would not be very happy about that. So let’s say that the love I am talking about is something you would do for free but that pays.
3. So, now what? You have a dream, you have really studied your dream and how you came to this dream, and you have some thoughts on what you would love to do with your time and your talents. So, now what? Take the dream, the love, your time, your talent, this Clarion University degree and take steps, even the smallest steps toward that dream. Some of you have those next

steps in place--going onto a next college degree or starting your first job after completing your degree. Some of you are continuing to search. No matter where you would place yourself, continue to search with a very open mind knowing that the smallest steps in your life can take you to your dream. Those steps can be obvious like a graduate degree, or starting your first job after college job, and they can be not so obvious like taking the time to volunteer in your community, using your time and talents to help others. With everything you do you are advancing your dream.

4. The final step to making dreams come true can be summed up in the word “relationships.” The relationships and friendships you have throughout your life can inspire, guide, and help you. I learn from everyone with whom I talk and work. I take what I learn and let it inform my dream and the pathway I created to live my dreams. I encourage you to do the same if you have not already begun this listening-learning-doing effort. It’s very powerful. One sure way to create your pathway to living your dream is to find others who have this same dream and listen and learn about how they got to where they are today. Your pathway will be uniquely yours but there is much to learn from those who have gone ahead of you.

To help you make your dream real, I will leave you with your final homework assignment—three steps that if you take them will make a difference.

1. Give thanks: Make a list of everyone who helped you get to this day and thank them. Take a piece of paper and start writing names. Include that third grade math teacher or the tenth grade English teacher. Include family, friends, neighbors, professors, advisors and your fellow students. Send them an email, a postcard, make a phone call, or drop in for a visit. Let them know they made a difference and you are thankful.
2. Keep your dream: Finish this sentence: “To make my dream come true, in five years I will ____.” Write this out and put it on your refrigerator so you will see it every day. If you can dream it, you can be it.
3. Be a dream maker: Look around your world and ask how you can help other people fulfill their dreams. As a college graduate you have now joined the ranks of the educated elite. Even now in your life, you are more educated

than 73% of the population of this great country. You can be the inspiration to others as they work to make and live their dreams.

In conclusion, please know that I am very proud of you and of what you have accomplished. I look forward to celebrating your future success as you live your dreams. You are truly Golden Eagles who are taking flight.

Fly Eagles Fly!