

My Fellow Skidmormians...

By Chris Ladd
EDITORIAL EDITOR

I don't believe I will ever become class president, don't think I'll hold any position of power within SGA, and so I doubt that I will ever stand before you, my classmates, during commencement some May afternoon to present any sort of inspirational address. I'm not much for speeches.



WHERE THE
HELL IS
WAYNE, ME?

But I have sat through two of these ceremonies in my time here, and watched two full classes shake the president's hand and walk to the far end of the stage, pausing a moment for a photograph. Some are confident, ready to face life. Others seem unsure how to hold their hands and faces during their forty-seconds of limelight.

The speakers at these graduations are usually accomplished in their fields, quick with their words, and long in their robes. They give hope and wisdom to the departing graduates, and steady the gait of more than a few of Skidmore's newest alumni during their long treks across the stage and into the world.

I realize that my qualifications here are debatable, but because I will likely never have the chance to speak at an actual graduation ceremony, and because I'm going abroad next semester, I'd like to take this opportunity to write my own mid-mentemence speech, advice for the pre-graduate, to the classes of 2004 through 2007, and anyone else who cares to read.

Ahem.

Students. Faculty.
Distinguished subscribers. I am

honored that you have chosen me to write this column, and before I accept such a prestigious honorary byline, I've prepared a short speech. Don't worry, I know you all must be hungry, and so I'll be as brief as I can, and get you all off to your lunches/dinners/breakfasts as quickly as possible. I could do with a Snapple myself.

[speaker wipes brow with handkerchief, pauses for laughter]

We live on a campus of great opportunity, and yet, in the traditional sense, ours is not a great college.

The food is awful, there's no other word for it. Dorms and academic buildings are filthy and poorly maintained, there is urine in the Tower elevators and area winters are cold beyond belief.

[student in back empathizes 'that's true']

Ours is a campus where the reasonably intelligent can manage a B+ without reading. A campus where two or three weekend spurts of academic fervor can birth enough term papers and final projects to last a semester. We are not a Harvard, or a Cornell, or a Middlebury.

But we are a great college. We are, as I've said, a campus of great opportunity. Because Skidmore, if nothing else, gives us time. Because academic rigors here can be shirked, because, for some, classes are only as challenging as we make them, we have many choices for our time outside the classroom.

[professors glancing amongst themselves uneasily behind speaker]

And yet look around you as you walk through this campus. Graffiti lines our covered walkways

and academic buildings, trash is strewn about our open spaces, and those awake in the bright hours before ten or eleven a.m. on a Saturday or Sunday can attest to empty 30-rack boxes and bottles scattered between the cars of the parking lot. Tour guides wade through pools of hostile students between Case Center and Starbuck,

It is time that we, as a campus, began working harder and playing less. It is time we started living as we'd like to be remembered.

or the D-Hall and the Art Building. "Go to Vassar!" I heard one student yell at a passing group.

Meanwhile, our relationship with the Saratoga community dwindles. Residents are fed up with noisy, disrespectful students waking them and their children in the early hours of workday night/mornings. Two summers ago, a Skidmore student stole one of the display horses that line Broadway with a screwdriver and wire cutters. This fall Wilton residents held a town meeting to protest students with no respect for their neighbors, and no inhibitions about emptying their bladders on resident's lawns.

[slight trace of laughter from middle sections of crowd]

Forget the honor code. Forget "student responsibility." How is this any way to live?

[laughter dies, and several heads tilt slightly askew]

My message to you, the assembled reading public, is this: use your time here deliberately. Find your passions within these walls and

exploit them. Use these four years where so little is expected of you to find something you like doing, something you're good at, something fulfilling.

These problems we face within our student body and on and around our campus are not caused by malice or intent, but apathy and unthinking. These problems are caused by students with little direction for themselves and less care for others. Our time matters here.

It is time that we, as a campus, began working harder and playing less. Time that we stopped living as if this college experience were somehow separate from our normal lives. These lives we are living now are the only ones we've got. It is time we started making the most of them. It is time we started living as we'd like to be remembered.

[varied nods of agreement]

I mentioned that I've seen two full classes, almost twelve-hundred people, march from that presidential handshake off the stage and into the blank canvas of their futures. I knew many of these people, and I can tell you that many of them had little idea what they wanted to be when they grew up, or what they wanted to do now that their "real life" had begun.

Their error, their fault was in the assumption that their lives for the past four years had not counted. Our lives are right now.

This is a great college. Ours is a place where there are no limits for the ambitious, and yet there is no one to push and prod the lazy and

apathetic. Dozens upon dozens of clubs lay waiting for members, and SGA sits above them with nearly \$800,000 to fund them; money reserved for our use.

For the academic, Skidmore grants students top notch facilities for the arts, sophisticated labs and equipment for the sciences, and a faculty and administration who are as open and willing to mentor and guide as the students in their charge are forthcoming with their own academic and co-curricular desires.

Students here can literally do just about anything they want. But we are not doing enough.

[rabble and murmur from balcony seats]

Spend 20 hours a week volunteering, or writing, or practicing an instrument. Spend your free time climbing the peaks of the Adirondacks, or the ranks of the club of your choice. The really great people, the ones that matter, are those that make the most of their lives and those around them. The student who fights the local political machine to lobby for a voting booth on campus, or who spends hours before a mirror perfecting ballet positions. Or the student who throws him or herself completely into their studies.

I would urge each of you to be one of these people, to live the life you want not after the board of Regents certifies your Bachelor of Arts degree, but now. It is only through hard work that we can grow. What better time than today?

[jaw-crashing silence as the gravity of the speech settles fully upon audience's shoulders]