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## President's remarks from the 128th Commencement (5/6/2000)

*Remarks delivered by President John E. Worthen during the main commencement ceremony at Ball State University.*

Good morning. Welcome to this Ball State University commencement—a celebration of accomplishment. It's always a privilege for me, as it is for the faculty, to participate in a commencement because this is the culmination of our efforts as well as yours. It's as much our joy to see you here today as it is for you and your families. For the undergraduates, you have arrived at this point after four, five ... or even six long years.

You've achieved a worthy goal by working a little harder, persevering a little longer, sacrificing a little more to accomplish something that didn't come easily. And you've done it, in part, because you've had the support of your families and friends. In large measure, it's because of their love and care for you, and their pride in you, that you've been able to accomplish this milestone today.

Don't take that support for granted because the support of others is a vital ingredient to individual success. So we extend a special welcome to the families of our graduates. And we offer congratulations to all our undergraduate and graduate students who are receiving degrees today. Let me say to those completing master's, specialist, and doctoral degrees, we are aware of the special efforts required to achieve at this level and we recognize your creativity and your persistence in meeting this challenge.

This is a special day for me, too. If I'm counting correctly, this is the 45th commencement at which I have officiated. But this day is very special because this is the last time I will have the pleasure of participating in a Ball State commencement as your president. Sandra and I will retire on June 30 after 16 wonderful years working with a very creative and committed faculty and staff, an excellent administrative team, and a very loyal and supportive board of trustees. And the last time I will be able to say congratulations to a group of our graduates who will provide leadership for our nation over the next 50 years. I have great confidence in the new president who will begin July 1. I will look forward to observing as Ball State continues to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

I have two messages I would like to leave with you as you leave Ball State. We've all been reading a lot lately about the breath-taking pace of change in economics, politics, culture, and technology.

Let me share some figures that may surprise you. In 1302 the Sorbonne Library in Paris contained about 900 volumes—the total accumulation of all knowledge in the Western world at the time. Today, 2,000 new books are published every day. Seven hundred new books in a single profession every week.

With Internet sources growing exponentially every day, the availability of information isn't growing, it's exploding. Members of Congress each receive 200 million pieces of mail each year, up from 15 million in 1970. On a typical day there are 1,800 reporters generating stories from the White House alone.

At the current pace, more new information is being generated in an hour than you can expect to



An estimated 15,000 people watched Ball State's main commencement ceremony on the Old Quad Saturday. President John E. Worthen gave his final commencement address on a warm, sunny day. He retires June 30. (Marc Ransford photo)

take in during the rest of your lives.

The change is phenomenal. Of the 100 largest U.S. companies in 1917, only 15 exist today. Besides six oil companies, there are two automakers, and these seven others: AT&T, Citicorp, Dupont, General Electric, Kodak, Proctor and Gamble, and Sears. The other 85 companies went bankrupt, were liquidated, were acquired by another company, or were left behind.

Things are changing fast. E-business has become just business because that's the way business is done today.

Jobs are changing as fast as technology.

In 1970, 7 million Americans were self-employed; in 1997 the number had grown to 10.5 million, and growing each year. Twenty-six percent of all workers in the United States have been in their current job less than a year, according to a recent study.

And here's some good news—92 percent of job seekers who had been laid off found jobs with an equal or better salary.

How did they do it? They changed. With savvy and self-confidence, they mastered new technologies, learned financing and marketing, and sold themselves.

In other words, they did not stop learning; they continued to learn. And that's the first message. It was our goal to help you learn how to learn and your graduation today confirms that, indeed, you have accomplished that goal. You do know how to learn. We hope, therefore, that you will use this ability and be a continuing learner; a learner all your life.

Change, much of it generated by technology, is now part of our social fabric, and if you and I are to survive, let alone succeed, we must be able to change—jobs, attitude, outlook, skills, location, viewpoints, practically every aspect of our lives.

Those who succeed will be those who continue to learn and adapt to change easily and quickly.

Since you arrived here at Ball State, you've been brought together with people from other cultures, with other backgrounds and interests, with other ways of looking at life and the world. And probably without even realizing it, you began to change as you learned from each other as well as the faculty.

The faculty fostered those changes by presenting different ways of looking at the world and encouraging you to be skeptical of the conventional wisdom, and the university offered out-of-class experiences and opportunities to grow and learn.

With the help of the state legislature, we have provided extraordinary technology, and modern classrooms, laboratories, and studios so that our outstanding faculty can concentrate on teaching and students can concentrate on learning in groups small enough to allow for personal connections to occur. And we have encouraged you to become involved in the university community, as well as the greater community.

My second message to you is a challenge: use that experience, the degree you earned here, and the gift of personal learning that you received, and look for ways to share what you have learned. There is a legacy of beneficence, represented by the statue that is Ball State's symbol. That legacy of beneficence is as much a part of you now as the legacy that your family and friends have given you.

One of the purposes of a public university like Ball State is to educate students so that they can be effective citizens. It's our expectation that as graduates you have learned the skills necessary to become engaged in civic responsibility and that, in addition, you have developed the attitude, that is, the inclination to contribute to your community. Thomas Jefferson said that one purpose of education is to give every citizen the information he needs for the transaction of his own business. But Jefferson added an even more important objective of education, "to understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge with competence the function confided to him by either...."

You, and indeed all of us, have a fundamental responsibility to be active agents in the democratic process. I urge you to read about and study the issues and the candidates for office; volunteer for political causes that are important to you; vote.

But in addition to taking an interest in the political process, I encourage you to participate in worthwhile public and community service projects like those that were available to you through Ball State's Student Voluntary Services. Strive to make your community a better place to live; and by doing that, you will help to develop the social capital that makes our democratic society work.

But don't think that you must correct all the world's problems. There are important contributions, small and large, that you can make in your community.

James Appleberry, former president of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities said that, "education provides the anchor that enables an individual to stand independently, develop the self-confidence to act responsibly, and adopt values that result in a willingness to lead effectively, act with integrity, and care for others."

If Appleberry is correct, and I believe he is, what you've learned at Ball State about independence, responsibility, service, leadership, and integrity will be valuable to all of us.

We're very proud of the value Ball State adds to our state and nation. And you can be proud of the difference this university has made in your lives.

Now, it's your turn to make a difference for all of us.

Again, congratulations and best wishes to each of you and congratulations to the families and sponsors who are here with you today.

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