



Good morning, President Ayers, Dean Narduzzi, podium guests, friends, family, colleagues and graduates of the class of twenty eleven!

I am honored to be here as part of today's celebration of your accomplishment.

One of Merriam Webster's definitions of "inspire" is "to breathe life into." Think, for a moment, about those who have inspired you; those whose example or stories helped you decide to go to school, work hard and earn today's diploma.

Joseph Campbell, the world's leading mythologist until his death in 1987, inspired George Lucas to create a trilogy of movies the world knows and loves. Using Campbell's work on the Hero's Journey, Lucas told us, in Star Wars, the story of Luke Skywalker's educational journey.

According to Campbell, a hero's journey begins with a call to adventure, followed by travel down a dark and perilous road into a dangerous wilderness.

Along the way, the hero receives help and encouragement from unexpected sources, comes face-to-face with at least one demon, and, finally, returns to the world he left with a gift, returns having been changed into something he was not before.

I would argue that each of you graduating today has traveled your own hero's journey.



You answered the call to adventure when you took that deep breath, submitted your application to school and registered for that first class.

Your perilous road took you into labyrinths of research, through hours among stacks and stacks of books, into a bewildering assortment of evolving technology.

You received help and encouragement along the way from family who supported you by understanding when school work trumped family events, from friends and co-workers who asked what you were studying this semester, from my colleagues and me who challenged you to think deeper and more critically about the topic at hand.

You faced demons. You wrestled research into meaningful, thoughtful papers. You carried hours of study into successful completion of exams.

You faced, head on, the most fear-filled two words ever to appear on a syllabus: the dreaded . . . Group Project. You wondered where, on earth, you would find a place to park that night when you got to class.

Today, you return to the world you left when beginning this journey; you return with the gift of a hard earned, well deserved education.

You return a changed individual – you are no longer like young Luke Skywalker, undecided about how to move forward.



If George Lucas were here, he'd have Princess Leia waiting to present you with a kiss and a medal. We, of course, have for you, Dean Narduzzi with a handshake and a diploma!

Remember my original question to you?

Who inspired you, breathed life into your dream of going to school?

Here's my final question for you to ponder: who are you inspiring today?

Who will tell the story of your journey as their inspiration for accepting the challenge of continuing education?

Thank you, friends.