

Commencement President's Remarks 2013
Steven M Corey, PhD, President

You're Well Prepared. Now Lead and Make a Difference

If you listen to the mass media these days, it's doom and gloom about college, college attendance, and the prospects following college. We read and hear story after story of extreme cases and examples which tell us that getting into college is harder and harder; college is unaffordable; student debt is so high that it can't be repaid; and on top of it all, there aren't any jobs when students graduate. While I'll acknowledge that college access, affordability, and graduate's employability are all important... essential even, the state of these priorities are nowhere near where the media would like us to believe they are. Our graduates here today, and your colleagues graduating around the country, are in a position of strength, in many ways like no other time before.

Surprised? I thought some of you might be. Let me share a little with you about the advantage you have as you leave the Cutler Event Center in an hour or so as an Olivet College graduate.

First of all, think about your high school freshmen class. On average, only about 25% of high school freshmen eventually earn a college degree, so you're already in a very small group. As a college educated person, you have enormous advantages and have nearly-predestined successes that others essentially don't and won't have.

INDIVIDUAL ECONOMIC BENEFITS

The New York Times, earlier this month reported that:

The unemployment rate for college graduates in April 2013 was a mere 3.9%, compared with 7.5% for the work force as a whole.

Even at the very worst of the business cycle, in November 2010, it was still just 5.1%, very close to what the rest of the work force experiences when the economy is at its best.

We also now know that college graduates are the only group that has more people employed today than when the recession started. More specifically, since the recession, the number of college-educated workers has risen by 9.1% while the employment of others has declined 9% [Repeat for emphasis].

Contrary to what you might hear and read in the popular press, and I imagine to the delight of our graduates here today, the research shows that even young college graduates are getting jobs. For example, in 2011, unemployment for people in their 20's with college degrees was 5.7% while those without was 3-times higher at 16.2%. So this also means that the

unemployment rate for 20-year old college graduates matches the optimal unemployment rate of a much more experienced and mature non-college educated workforce... and then it only gets better from there.

So, not only is your probability of employment dramatically higher, but your earnings will be higher as well. In 2012, a full-time worker with a college degree earned 79% more than those without. 20 years earlier this premium was 73% and 30 years earlier it was 48%. So as you can see, this has been a long-time trend with the gap only widening.

Those with college degrees earn, on average, \$22,000 more per year than those without. College graduates earn more early in their career and the gap widens over time. This equates to a lifetime earning advantage of over \$1 million.

Overall, the economic benefit of a 4-year degree is equivalent to an investment return of 15.2% per year, even factoring in the earnings students forgo when attending college. This is more than double the average return of the stock market since 1950 and 5-times greater than corporate bonds, gold, long-term government bonds, or homeownership.

INDIVIDUAL NON-ECONOMIC BENEFITS

But the benefits of a college education aren't only economic. They also highly correlate with a greater overall quality of life.

For example, college graduates have lower measured blood pressure, lower stress, and greater overall health. In addition, they have greater access to healthcare, better high quality healthcare options, and greater rates of medical insurance coverage.

We've known for some time that higher levels of education, particularly the education of women, have also been demonstrated to be correlated with higher rates of child health and wellbeing, not only in the US, but in developing countries as well.

And finally, college graduates consistently report higher rates of job satisfaction and satisfaction with life, overall.

BENEFITS FOR SOCIETY AS A WHOLE

As if this long list of individual benefits isn't enough, society as a whole also benefits from you receiving your college degree.

Our graduates will be pleased to know what the rest of us already experience, and that is that college graduates pay 80% more in taxes than others, generating the vast majority of Federal, State, and local tax revenues.... oh, and congratulations by the way...

The healthcare costs of college educated adults are significantly lower than that of others.

Society saves on average \$48,600 for each college-educated woman. This is a function of the fact that those without college education are 3-times more likely to live in poverty and 8-times more likely to be on governmental assistance than those with a college degree.

And, college graduates participate in much greater rates of volunteerism and vote at a rate 2.5-times greater than others.

BENEFITS OF GRADUATING FROM A PRIVATE COLLEGE

But you're not graduating from just any college. We also know that private college students graduate at higher rates. At Olivet College, students graduate at a rate more than 7-percentage points higher than would be predicted. This means that almost 30 students in this graduating ceremony wouldn't have been predicted to be here graduating today, had they attended the "average" college. We also know that the opportunity to complete on time is also important. At Olivet College, over 70% of students who graduate do so in 4 years or less with 95% doing so within 5 years.

Graduates of private liberal arts colleges are also more than 2-times more likely to be in senior leadership positions in top corporations, leading nonprofit organizations, and government than the proportion of private college graduates would predict.

YOU'RE WELL PREPARED, NOW LEAD AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

With these advantages, you're well prepared and ready for success. In fact, you've already made it to one, if not "the," major victory line. Success is virtually assured. However, the game's not over. As you've heard me say before, with success comes an obligation,... a responsibility, to lead and to make a difference in the lives of others and your community.

Decide now, if you haven't already, that you're going to be a leader; a leader who will make a difference. With the strong and engaging experience that Olivet College students have you're already well prepared. Your experiences in the classroom, around campus, in clubs and organizations, on sports teams and in Greek societies, and through honor societies, seminars, internships, and the many other engaging activities have prepared you well.

One group of students I'd like to particularly highlight is the inaugural class of the President's Leadership Institute. Twenty-one students successfully completed a year-long leadership program covering topics usually reserved for experienced professionals on a leadership track in top companies. Having successfully completed the program, these students have been designated as fellows of the President's Leadership Institute and can be recognized by their PLI fellowship medals. These students have not only gained unique and valuable leadership

knowledge and skills for their own benefit but are also committed to promoting and developing leadership in others and in the organizations and communities in which they find themselves, today and into the future.

But you don't have to be a President's Leadership Institute fellow to be a leader. So, to all of our graduates here today, let me affirm that as Olivet College graduates, you have developed unique skills and abilities that put you ahead of the rest. You have an advantage over others, others without a college degree and others who didn't benefit from the distinctive Olivet College experience you've had. So, today let me congratulate you and acknowledge just how special an accomplishment you've made. You're one of the few and one of the privileged. You're also one of the obligated,... obligated to make a difference in your life, the lives of others, and the communities in which you find yourselves.

Thank you.