**Remarks at the University of Cincinnati Commencement**

Saturday, December 15, 2012

Thank you **Dr. Ono**, for that kind introduction. I always hold my breath when my brother, **Wym**, is talking about me in public -- think what your brother or sister could say about you! But I’m proud of him and his service to U.C.

It’s wonderful to be here with the Class of 2012. Congratulations! You made it! //

It’s also great to be here for Dr. Ono’s first U.C. graduation as president. U.C, Cincinnati and Ohio are lucky to have Dr. Ono. He is a leader in higher education nationally, he has a passion for learning, and he loves students, it’s a good combination – he’s also on the frontlines of social media with his @ [at] PrezOno Twitter account.

I liked his recent # [hashtag] PrezPoll tweet: “# [hashtag] BearcatNation: Vote for which soda company you like better -- Pepsi or Coke”. Finally – a clean campaign everyone can get behind!

But I love his hashtag HottestCollegeinAmerica! Both Harvard and the University of South Florida have sued for the rights to that hashtag – for different reasons! But U.C. is hot – and on the upswing – 42,000 students and over $200 million a year in federal research dollars. It’s become a magnet for scholars and scientists from all over the globe.

And sports are better than ever, too: In fact, I can’t wait for the Bearcats to get their 10th straight win when they play Marshall this afternoon. When did you last see a bald Santa, especially during the Christmas season?

I do have an early Christmas present for you Dr. Ono: Notice the red and black!

There is such loyalty to the University of Cincinnati. One of the staffers on our team -- **David Jahnke** -- is a U.C. alum, Class of 2011. Through him I have seen firsthand the enduring bonds U.C. students have with the school.

In the middle of meetings, a strange look will come over his face and he’ll suddenly break into this energetic chant: you know it! “**Oooooohhhhh oooooohhhh ohhhhhhhh (clap, clap) U.C.**”. Then he disappears to **Uncle Woody’s** for the rest of the day. Needless to say, he is in Bearcat rehab.

I know there are other, even more important bonds, that have supported you and sustained you through this day. One thing that has certainly sustained you are the family members and friends gathered here this morning.

Class of 2012: Let’s give your family and friends a round of applause for what they’ve done to help make this day possible.

To the parents: With one son still in college, and a daughter heading there in a year, **Jane** and I are a little envious.

And to the graduates: Don’t be surprised if some of your folks celebrate more than you will later today!

**Transition**

Some of you members of the Class of 2012 probably feel like the late **Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes**, when one day he was on a train and could not find his ticket. The conductor watched, smiling, as the 80-year-old Justice Holmes rifled through his pockets trying to find it.

Finally, the conductor came to Justice Holmes and said, “Mr. Holmes, it’s okay. I recognize you. I’m sure you will find your ticket when you get off the train. You can just mail it to us later.”

To which Justice Holmes paused and replied, “Young man, that is not the problem. The problem is not where my ticket is. The problem is, where am I going?”

Well, for many of you, that is the question you face today as you receive your degree – you’ve got your ticket now, but where are you going? What direction will your life take?

First, don’t stress too much about it because it’s impossible for any of us to know for sure the answer to that question. When I was in your shoes, I was an anthropology major intent on studying and working with people of strange and unusual cultures. I guess you could say, being in Congress, I followed my dreams!

But I do have some thoughts to share as you begin the next step. I know it’s not easy to find a job these days. And as much as you love your folks, moving back in with them is probably not your idea of a good time. Your folks agree. But even if you have to take a job you’re not wild about now to pay the bills – and pay off your student loans – don’t lose your dreams because that will be where you’ll find true happiness. To do that, continue to examine your life and try to figure out what inspires you. And second, avoid becoming complacent; push yourself, and continue to grow and learn.

**Follow Your Dreams**

So, first, follow your dreams. Your job is to use those analytical skills you learned in college on yourself, to think critically about what your own calling in life may be. It can’t be what your family, or friends, or society is telling you it should be. It must emanate from you. Listen to advice, but follow your instincts. Your vocation is yours alone.

Think about what experiences have ignited your interests. What makes you perform to your highest capabilities? What excites you?

Some of you may say you have already figured it out -- but I ask you to continually reexamine it. For those of you who may be less sure, I say to you -- don’t hesitate to try several paths. Sometimes you don’t know what you will like until you get into it. That’s one of the great things about the co-op program at U.C.

I myself have had a somewhat varied career. While I liked studying anthropology during college, a junior-year internship with my local Congressman lit my passion for public policy and public service. I followed that passion to a policy job in Washington after college. Then I tried practicing international law, then business law. But I kept returning to my passion – which was public service.

It’s funny, but you get warning signs along the way – signs that you are on the wrong or right track. If you learn how to listen to yourself, you will figure out pretty quickly what leads to fulfillment and real happiness.

**Avoid Complacency**

Second, always push yourself as you continue to learn and think and grow. Don’t look at your degree here today as the end of a process; look at it as a step along a much longer path. This may sound cliché, but as many of you know from experience, the things you learn outside the classroom are every bit as important to you as the things you have learned inside it.

Whether you pursue other degrees or enter the workforce, you will need to apply the broader lessons you have learned here -- the ability to adapt to learn new things -- and new ways of doing things -- in an incredibly fast-changing world. That’s why, more important than the facts and technical skills you have learned, is the ability to bring those critical thinking skills to bear on a new problem, new project, or new assignment.

Whatever comes your way, constantly strive to do your best, and build strong relationships and trust person-by-person. Building these relationships with others will come back to benefit you in life and work in ways you can’t imagine.

And some of you have already built those sorts of relationships with others through your work as a co-op student. As you probably know, U.C. is father of the co-op model. I personally think this model -- the experiential model -- is the best way to learn. It builds teamwork. It builds out-of-the-box thinking. It builds the habits of success.

**Closing**

So as you leave here today, I encourage you to follow your dreams, and keep learning to achieve your full potential.

Use the same dedication, perseverance, and intellect that brought you here to Fifth Third Arena today in everything you do going forward.

You have worked hard to get here, and I know you will represent the C with distinction going forward.

Thanks for including me today, and to the U.C. Class of 2012, Go Cats and Godspeed in your exciting journey.