

President Raab, Provost Rabinowitz, Trustee Foster, Trustee Witten, Trustee Appel, Vice Chancellor Sapienza, Distinguished Guests, Faculty, Staff and Graduates of the class of 2014, Senator McCaskill, Senator Schumer

INTRO

Graduating class 2014 you are 3000 strong, come from every continent except Antarctica, speak 100 languages representing 150 countries, the youngest of you is 20 years old and the oldest is 70, 36 different types of degrees are being conferred on you today by 6 schools and you have 9 valedictorians. You are students, bread winners and workers with all kinds of responsibilities that you have successfully negotiated to become graduates. Congratulations! I see, husbands and wives, mothers, brothers, step-fathers, grandfathers, grandmothers, daughters and sons, uncles and aunts, friends and used to be friends, little bitty babies and....I see many many who are taking advantage of a second chance LOOK WHERE YOU GOT TO NOW.

I) HUNTER EDUCATION

For the assortment and range of graduates that sit in this Hall today, there could be no better place to have received an education than Hunter College in New York City. It was New York that established the first free, public institution of higher learning was established for children of immigrants and the poor. And Hunter College would become and remains the jewel in the 'crown of achievement' of the New York City Education system. This institution was founded in the spirit of equality, integration and uplift through knowledge. And today, with its tradition of fulfilling the full promise of American Democracy, Hunter College has given each of you the elevating and transformational advantage of high level skills and of profound kinship with an uncommonly diversified and life -tested student body.

In Jazz, we call the various unavoidable and uninvited pains in life... dues. Well, you and your fellow students have paid all kinds of dues to be here today. The dues you have paid to get this education is evidence of your desire, your hunger.... a hunger to make something happen to transform your lives, a hunger for progressive change, and hunger to reimagine the world we live in. The diplomas you have earned is a strong momentum building step towards creating the world you imagine.

Any and all quality education gives you the quantifiable power of facts and figures and processes and procedures. But, Hunter College has given you the opportunity to experience the limitless energy created when people of different belief systems, tribes, generations and genders are brought together for a common and worthwhile pursuit. These relationships have been earned and cultivated against the backdrop of a most ignorant and repressive past in large part defined by injustice, prejudice and corruption. These are still with us, and your vigilance is required lead us ever upward.

Although you are self-identified by the letters on your degree and by your field of study, it is the bonds formed within this unique student body that are perhaps the most valuable accreditation you will take away from this ceremony today.

STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR HUNTER PEOPLE.

Duke Ellington, the greatest of all Jazz composers, once said, "THE people are my people."
SO LET YOUR CIRCLE EXPAND TO INCLUDE "THE" PEOPLE.

II) NYC

The Hunter college experience has also introduced you to New York City and forced you to become better acquainted with this one-of-a-kind town. Our town.

It's a living monument to making things happen, to realizing dreams. What better city than New York.

From the dawn of our country 'till today, NY has been the primary destination of those coming to the US to fulfill grand ambitions. Immigrants from virtually every country would find their way to this temple of modernity on the cutting edge of civilization. And those who were already here let others in on the secret. "Man, you have to hustle in New York, but you have the best chance of being yourself here without having to conform, than anywhere else in the world. And in New York, you can make something happen." In the responding to the meaningless salutation, "What's happening?" Jazz pianist and New Yorker Thelonious Monk replied, "Everything is happening all the time, man."

I'm here speaking to you today because I am a jazzman. And Jazz is the art of making things happen in real time. Through improvisation a diversity of musicians create order, form and logic....under the pressure of time. And college itself is time and pressure. So graduating from college in New York....has to be the very definition of triumphing over the pitiless rush of time. Jazz musicians named this city the Big Apple in the 1930's because if you took a bite out of it, you better be chewing 'cause you had a lot to swallow.

In New York, THERE IS A LOT TO DO AND YOU HAVE TO DO A LOT TO MAKE SOMETHING HAPPEN.

In 1934 vocalist Ella Fitzgerald, dressed in borrowed clothes and a pair of men's shoes, won amateur night at the Apollo, right up the street in Harlem, in the midst of the Great Depression, clarinetist and chief initiator of the Swing Era, Benny Goodman set his entire Chicago family up with apartments in Jackson Heights, in 1943, Louis Armstrong bought his first house in Queens, and at his passing left his estate to NYC education....and just yesterday, West 77th street between Riverside and West End was named Miles Davis Way for the great Jazz trumpeter who came from East St. Louis in 1945 under the guise of attending the Juilliard School, but with the unexpressed intention of finding alto saxophone genius from Kansas City, Charlie 'Yardbird' Parker. He found him and a whole lot more, right here in New York.

Washington may be the seat of our national government, but we all know that New York is its true capital. That's why our town is the largest and most diverse city in the US. There are more languages spoken in any 30 blocks of Queens than anywhere else in the world.

You have received your education in the center of culture in this country. A place with the best museums, opera houses, clubs, theaters, zoos and major league sports teams. This is the center of finance, of national

media, with two of the greatest public parks ever built and a dazzling array of sacred buildings..... Well, just our big buildings in general.

Yet, the greatest asset of this town is also the most valued resource of Hunter College, its people. Though New Yorkers are known for being rough, fast paced and cold, I always notice that people proudly claim to be from here, wherever they come from....and what's more, they're telling the truth! They ARE New Yorkers.

It's just the energy of this place. No where else could you end up packed on a train with: Wall Street financiers discussing their business dealings without regard to surrounding ears, a group of activists hustling down to City Hall to ask for something or to protest something or both, a gaggle of exceedingly loud high school students dressing like everyday is Halloween and speaking an entirely new language not yet spoken in Queens, a lady with a baby and three unmanageable shopping bags pushing you out of the way and using the stroller as a weapon, and then, 4 guys will get on at one stop, start singing 'My Girl' and manage to sing the song while walking through the entire car, AND pass the hat before the next stop. That's New York ingenuity, and an example of improvisation under the pressure of time.

III) YOU

YES, THERE IS A LOT TO DO AND YOU HAVE TO DO A LOT. THAT'S WHY YOU HAVE TO STAY WITH YOUR HUNTER PEOPLE. AND THATS WHY 'THE' PEOPLE MUST BE YOUR PEOPLE.

There is an old African proverb: if you wish to walk fast, walk alone. If you wish to walk far, walk together.

MUCH OF WHAT YOU ALL HAD TO DO TO BE HERE TODAY WAS ROUTINE.

Classes..study..work...classes..study....work. But what you have achieved is far from the routine, when you stop to think about it...it's magical. You have created possibility in spite of obstacles that may have seemed insurmountable. That is magic. You did all of this work to create your life as you imagined. But in the course of this journey, so much has happened and there have been many unintended and unplanned consequences, some unpleasant to be sure, but many more have been beneficial or you would not be here today.

This day has the magical glow of achievement and is the result of years of work by many, but the feeling we have in this moment, in this magnificent hall, is greater than the sum of all of that work. When we give everything we have to realize a worthy goal, all of the unknowable hopes of future generations meet the dreams, sacrifices and intentions passed down through the ages. The invisible world of 'unseen actions and unrecorded desires' drives us ever forward and we feel a spiritual depth and shine that is most real. It's with us today. Take the time and let it hit you.

This magic is an unexplainable shared charisma that washes over us, through us and all up in us. Today, your ancestors, progeny and descendants are basking in the glow of your achievement. The anthem New York, New York says it best, "if I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere." Well you have proven it, and will continue to prove it, because you have made it in New York.

Now, what you bring to wherever you may be is the indomitable spirit of DOING, of creating actuality from possibility. And at Hunter College you learned that you could make it real, at Hunter you learned

how to collaborate with others not at all like you but exactly like you, and here... you were toughened by the spirit of New York that breathes through every pore of this institution.

WHEREVER YOU GO, You are always ambassadors of Hunter College and of New York City. But as you pass through, don't depend on circumstance to recreate the magic of this moment. There is a lot to do and you have to do a lot. The magic is you. It always is. And only you can make it happen.....and, you are the only one who even knows what IT is.

Do your thing.