As I look out at the faces of the class of 2006, I see the face of this nation. I see faces reflecting many colors and backgrounds and I see faces that represent many paths into this university and, I expect, many paths leading out of it as well. But I also see one thing in common in all of your faces—a determination to succeed based on a belief in the power of education.

Today, you enter an elite class of people, in this nation and in this world. As holders of a university degree, you have earned a mark of distinction that not only carries great economic value but also represents a level of accomplishment beyond the imagining of most of the world’s inhabitants. Let me explain.

A study of the world’s demographics by the Dilemescheider Group took our current population of almost 6.1 billion people and shrunk it to a microcosm of precisely 100 people. With all the existing human ratios the same, the profile of our 100 person all-world village emerged as follows.

There are 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 people from North and South America, and 8 from Africa living in our village. Fifty-one are female, 49 are male. Seventy are non-white, 30 are white. Sixty-six are non-Christian, 34 Christian. Eighty live in substandard housing. Seventy cannot read. Half suffer from malnutrition. Seventy-five have never made a phone call. Less than one is on the Internet. Only one has a college degree. Half of the village’s entire wealth would be in the hands of six people. All six would be citizens of the United States. The majority of the distress is in Asia and in Africa. The inequities in our village are the grist for dictators, the excuses for bigotry and prejudice, and the seeds of war.

As educated citizens, you bear the responsibility of helping to find solutions to these problems. As the Greek statesman and orator Pericles said in his funeral oration: we regard the individual who holds himself aloof from public affairs as being useless. Recognizing that our way of life demands participation is a cornerstone of a university education.

As graduates of this outstanding public university, your challenge is to make education a lifelong pursuit and to engage in the life of your communities. You must continue to reach out in your communities and in your lives to educate yourselves about the needs of those less privileged and to look for ways to help others enjoy the power of education.
Just as you are joining the ranks of the world’s most educated elite, those ranks are growing ever thinner. Today, the most highly educated generation in U.S. history, the baby boomers, are retiring. They are being replaced by a growing population of young workers from the nation’s least educated groups. As the boomers retire, the size of our college educated workforce is shrinking. Because of this education gap, the U.S. is losing much of its competitive advantage in the global marketplace.

What does this mean for you? The responsibility you carry as a university graduate will be ever greater, and ever more precious. The problems you will face will emerge from this education gap—this gap between what you have achieved and so many others have not. Your challenge is to look for ways for our society to open the doors of opportunity to your fellow citizens, to help identify and create pathways for more young people to succeed through higher education.

Your alma mater, CSU Stanislaus, has a record of success in important endeavors that will help us address the needs of our changing population. But you are our most important asset. It has often been said that alumni are the only permanent part of a university. We look to you, as graduates of CSU Stanislaus, to continue the proud traditions of this university—to embrace diversity, to serve your communities, to make a difference through the power of the education you have received.

As your new President, I have had the privilege of welcoming one class of incoming students to this remarkable place to begin the journey that will change their lives.

Today, I have the privilege of saying goodbye to a class that began its journey before my arrival. But knowing what I now know about this extraordinary institution—and looking out at the faces of the class of 2006—I am confident that you, too, have made a life-changing journey. Along with your families and friends, I look forward to seeing how you will share the incredible riches of your education with your communities and your country in the years to come.

I wish you good luck and Godspeed.