

Undergraduate Commencement Address 2015



This beautiful and inspiring speech was given at graduation on Saturday by Jake Wilkerson, pictured at right. Soon to come, inspiring words from our graduate commencement speaker Zita Agazzi, pictured at left. Congratulations to Jake, Zita, and all of our graduates! We are honored to know you and super proud of all that you do.

Hello graduates, parents, loved ones, faculty, administrators and Board Members. We made it, the day that many times seemed like it would never come, is finally here.

We have all heard the saying that we can be anyone or anything that we want to be. Our parents tell us this from the time we are small children. Our teachers and professors inspire the notion. We hear of the American dream and we yearn for accomplishment and success. But who defines success? Is success creating the next Facebook or Instagram? Is it ranking highest in an organization, or making the most money? Is success sacrificing the luxuries of life to serve the helpless and underprivileged of our community? Or, is it having a corner office in a billion dollar tech startup, and no one even knows what you do?

Success is subjective. Because it is subjective, we are forced to ask, potentially one of the most important question we will ever ask ourselves... Who am I? What are my morals, my values? What do I stand for? What will I fall for? What do I believe? For what will I fight? WHO AM I?

My time here at Notre Dame was saturated with professors who, second to their exceptional credibility and knowledge, had a perceived fascination and relentless desire to make me and my fellow students answer this very question. Who am I? Sure, in business leadership or perhaps professional development courses we expect to work through this construct. But when a finance professor or a marketing professor inspires me to look deeper within myself than I ever had before in search of developing my passion and heart for the world... Well then at that point, I cannot deny NDNU is a University that truly values us students as unique and gifted human beings, who, with complete knowledge of ourselves, can surpass all expectations placed upon us by the society in which we live.

“We can be anyone or anything we want to be.” I must tell you that I stand by leadership expert Tom Rath when I say that I do not agree with that statement. I do not agree that we can be anyone or anything we want to be. We can only strive to be the best version of who we are. And in order to be the best versions of ourselves we must truly know ourselves. We were each uniquely and intricately made by God with talents and abilities and strengths... that when applied to our calling and passion in life, will produce a holistic illustration of what truly living is suppose to look like.

As it is time for my fellow graduates and I to say farewell to this amazing University, that has educated and prepared us to go out into the world... I would like to challenge us for a moment. I challenge us today never to forget the bigger picture of life, and the purpose that we serve. We live in a fast paced culture and society, especially here in the Silicon Valley, that demands our attention, our commitment, our intellect, and our heart. But let us not forget that the same talents we have that make us great business men and women, or artists, or mathematicians, can be used to further the Kingdom of God throughout a hurting and broken world. And let us not forget that who we are, our heart, our compassion, our ability to love unconditionally is the most powerful tool we will take with us as we go forth.

So I would like to leave us with the essence of the Hallmarks of NDNU as a reminder and a guide for how we should aspire to tackle this next chapter life. Let us develop learning communities which educate for life. Let us act on behalf of justice and peace in the world. Let us commit ourselves to community service as we embrace the gift of diversity. Let us create community among those with whom we work and with those we serve. Let us honor the dignity and sacredness of each and every person. And above all else, let us proclaim by our lives, even more than by our words, that God is good.

Thank you, to the faculty who have supported and educated us beyond expectation and congratulations to the Graduating Class of 2015.