

Thank you!

President Moulton, Members of the Board of Trustees,  
University Administration, Faculty, Graduates and Guests.

Congratulations to you graduates on reaching this milestone in your careers, and to your parents, spouses and friends for the support given to you during your tenure at the University of South Alabama. Each of you has achieved a goal and dream which took hard work, sacrifice and dedication. You selected a field of study, fulfilled the requirements and now you are being recognized as a learned person in that field. It is a time for congratulations, celebration and a commitment to achieve success in the future. I remember well my own graduations, three at the university level; they were “religious experiences,” each a miracle and a heavenly blessing.

During the time you devoted to reaching this moment, you traveled a long and difficult path. It has not been easy. You and your families made many sacrifices to achieve this goal. A University education is open to all, but the twists and turns require perseverance. Walt Disney said, “All of our dreams can come true – if we have the courage to pursue them.” You had the courage, in fact, many of you might have thought this ‘college degree program was impossible.’ Now you can look back and say – it’s kind of fun and exciting to do the impossible!

When I was asked to deliver this commencement address, I immediately consulted colleagues in my Department and college regarding suggestions they might have as to important topics to be included in a commencement address. Their response was unanimous, “KEEP IT SHORT.”

After you have taught at a University for over 40 years, the University, its Mission, your colleagues and above all, the students become part of your life. In my case the relationship has been rewarding and one of no regrets.

When I started teaching at the University of South Alabama at the beginning of the Fall Quarter 1967, the total enrollment was 3,356 students, enrolled in only four Colleges: Arts and Sciences, Business, Education and Engineering. There was a combined total of 206 full-time and part-time faculty. There were two classroom buildings, the Administration Building and the Instructional Laboratory Building. Although the University had a swimming pool and cafeteria, now the Computer Science Classroom Building, it was in 1968 that a Library and Physical Education Building were constructed.

In the Spring Quarter 1968, The University of South Alabama awarded 209 degrees, 6 were the first Master's

degrees. It was the University's second graduating class raising the total number of degrees to 297. Today, 1505 will graduate, increasing the total number of degrees awarded to over 61,000.

The growth of the University since 1967 has been phenomenal. There are now over 14,000 students, 10 colleges and schools, with a new one added within the past year – The Auburn University Harrison School of Pharmacy at the University of South Alabama, 114 Buildings on the Main Campus, with many more on the Baldwin County and Brookley campus' and a full time faculty of approximately 800 full time and a part time faculty of 340.

The University accomplished this growth during a period when virtually all academic disciplines experienced technology advances used to retrieve, decipher, store, update and disseminate information. Technology does not

come cheap. Although faculty are involved in obtaining outside funding, it is the responsibility of the University to meet matching fund obligations and fill voids in order to maintain excellence in our academic programs. Technology is critical to success in many disciplines. For instance in the discipline of Meteorology, computers are needed to obtain virtual real time satellite imagery on a worldwide basis for interpretation and weather forecasting. The Doppler radar, basically a computer system, scans the atmosphere at different levels every few minutes producing a variety of detailed weather images. This computer technology allows the meteorologist to study storm structure as well as predict the path of severe weather.

The explosive growth and commitment to excellence is reflected in the University's Mission statement, which reads: "The University's environment must encourage and foster the qualities expected of leaders, such as integrity, service,

stewardship, involvement and respect of individuals, as well as an appreciation for diversity.”

At the University of South Alabama, helping students realize their potential is our challenge and in the process you become our most cherished asset. Students, some representing Social Organizations, Professional and Honorary Societies and Religious Ministries, have made a significant difference in Metropolitan Mobile, The State of Alabama, The Gulf Coast Region and the Southeastern United States.

Let me give you some examples of this leadership:

- After Hurricane Katrina, South Alabama students assisted in the rebuilding and repair of homes, restocking school and city libraries, and restoring communities devastated by the storm. The University joined in this commitment by offering an academic

base to students who lost their university, college or junior college to extensive damage.

- Our students work closely with well known and recognized non-profit charitable organizations, such as The American Cancer Society, The American Red Cross, Relay for Life, Penelope House, Ronald McDonald House and the Children's Miracle Network.
- Student groups care for underprivileged children living in urban and rural poverty areas by providing a "trick or treat" experience at Halloween or vision screening to improve the sight capabilities of children who might never have the opportunity to correct their vision problems.
- Several student religious ministries participate in Outreach Programs to reach young adults who seek a spiritual peace or have dependency problems, depression or other maladies that impede their ability to function in a normal manner.

- A recent “Vanguard” article spotlighted South Alabama students who have become active in an organization called HOME FOR OUR TROOPS. They help prepare a new life for soldiers injured in service, providing an amazing opportunity to give back to those who have given so much to us.
- Students representing SGA, Jaguar Productions and six academic departments, along with the Faculty Senate, are taking a leadership role in making the University of South Alabama a “green campus.” They developed an environmental area to preserve native flora and fauna of Southwestern Alabama and constructed interpretive nature trails that highlight several different habitats of native and rare or threatened plants and animals. Now, future generations of University students, faculty and the community can appreciate and enjoy this unique natural area.



The University of South Alabama and our students are making a difference. It seems appropriate that you graduate and receive your diploma in the Mitchell Center, named after the Mitchell Family, and in particular the late Mr. Mayer Mitchell who has made a difference in our community, state, country and the world, now and for generations in the future. Today you will receive a diploma. This document certifies that you have completed a course of study. It is a document of honor, privilege and power. It says that you possess abilities in your chosen field of interest, either at the undergraduate or graduate level of study, but it also indicates an enormous responsibility on your part. Now you must go forth and make a difference beyond the University of South Alabama.

I was an undergraduate student during the election of John F. Kennedy. In his inaugural address on January 21, 1961,

he outlined the qualities, talents and freedoms we possess as Americans and our dedication to share them with the world. Finally he said, “Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.” In many respects that philosophy applies to you today.

You received much at the University of South Alabama, now you must go forward and make the world a better place.

Use the experiences and resources you gained at the University to further its Mission. The best place to start is in your community – note the problems, pollution, violence, children who cannot read, litter in the streets, the homeless; the list goes on and on. Utilize the extraordinary talents you developed at the University of South Alabama as a student when you made a difference on campus. Remember the challenges of rebuilding after Katrina, raising funds to help the less fortunate, providing needed health equipment and making our community a better place to live. Those endless challenges are still present, but now you have moved on to a

different level. Maintain your integrity as a University of South Alabama graduate and your commitment to excellence, and bear in mind the sacrifices and contributions you made as a student to your fellow man. Also, keep a sense of humor, you will need it.

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with the words of a dear friend to all,

Dr. Seuss:

“And will you succeed?

Yes! You will indeed!

(98 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  percent guaranteed).

You’ll move mountains!!!!”

**YOU ARE OFF TO GREAT PLACES!**

**TODAY IS YOUR DAY.**

**YOUR MOUNTAIN IS WAITING,**

**SO GET ON YOUR WAY.**

Thank you.