

All Campus Graduation Celebration 2008
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You can't graduate from college without realizing that life is full of patterns. You've been analyzing patterns for the past few years: Patterns of development of democracy in post-colonial states; patterns in thermodynamic potentials; patterns of cell development in pre-cancerous growths; patterns of language acquisition across diverse cultures.

But how about this pattern? In life, you often find yourself going from the top of the heap to bottom of the ladder.

And now, here you go once again....

So, think back to all those other transitions. What have you learned, what can you apply, that will help you thrive?

Let's see: Kindergarten to grade school... how about, "Never underestimate the value of a nap...."

How about middle school to high school—where you found it was cool to be smart.

Then, high school to college—where it was possible to leave behind the old nicknames and old cliques, to reinvent yourself, full of possibilities.

So now you're experts in one of life's biggest transitions, because the move *into* college really was the beginning of independence and adulthood. College graduation is just the next step in that process.

Let's look at some of the life lessons you probably learned in the transition to college, and what they mean for this next great transition.

You learned not to judge people by their appearances—the guy down the hall who looked like a geek ended up being one of your best friends.

You learned how much more likely you are to be lucky when you work really hard—and put yourself in the right place at the right time.

You learned that you can only pull so many all-nighters in a row before you fall asleep on your laptop.

You learned that you do know how to bounce back from a fall—even though you might have thought it was the end of the world at that moment.

I hope you also learned that professors and advisors can become your friends, for you are probably about to leave behind a world dominated by peers and enter a more intergenerational environment.

So what lies ahead in this next great transition?

In all my years of staying in touch with college graduates, I've observed a few things...things you might not have heard amidst all of the hope and expectations.

The truth is, the twenties are kind of random—and that's okay. You *feel* as if you're expected to have your whole act together—to be a real adult, when of course you're still arranging the pieces. I find that there are three strong threads that will come together over the next few years—and not all at once.

First, there's the "Who am I" thread—the real sense of identity, of strong values, enduring beliefs, commitments, and principles.

Then there's the "What do I want to do?" thread, of vocation and temperament, that combination of talent and passion that makes work seem fun and the work week fly by.

Then there's the "Who do I love?" thread of meaningful relationships, people who ground you and love you back and whom you can't imagine living without.

It's been my observation that most of you have at least one of those dimensions nailed down now, but few have all three, and that's all right. The twenties really are for exploring and continuing to learn and grow within yourself. Your lives have been so scripted, the stakes so high, that it is time to free yourself up and follow now the syllabus that you write for yourself.

A good colleague of mine, Marcia Baxter-Magolda, made a long-term study of a particular cohort of college students at Miami University in Ohio. Miami is a bit like UC San Diego, a “public ivy.” Their students, while less diverse than ours, are similarly of high ability, involved, and goal-directed. She carefully charted their intellectual development over several years, and found inspiring patterns of increases in the ability to view life more complexly.

When she re-interviewed her cohort ten years post-graduation, she found some pretty remarkable things.

She found that many of her participants came to learn that the voices they’d been listening to, about what they *should* do and who they *should* be, were not necessarily their own voices. There were lots of familial and societal expectations that had shaped their choices, and it was only through living with these commitments that they found *their own* voice.

They also found that there were few formulas in the workplace. There were often multiple ways to approach their work, and their bosses weren’t going to tell them just how. They were startled by how much autonomy they had in their jobs. While they might be stifled by the loss of personal freedom to come as they want and go as they please, they were both honored by and intimidated by the amount of decision-making authority they had. They were surprised that their workplace colleagues treated them as professionals from Day One.

They also found themselves confounded by patterns of larger societal changes: Fluidity and uncertainty in gender roles and relationship expectations, wedged in between families that expected them to follow an old script.

Baxter-Magolda coined the term “self-authorship” to describe the central task of this next part of the journey: The ability to collect, interpret, and analyze information and reflect on one’s beliefs in order to form judgments. Self-authorship requires that we balance independence and connection.

As a counselor and advisor to many students through the years, I have never expected you *not* to make mistakes; only, please, to learn from them—and such is true for the coming years. Whatever your next steps, your teachers, advisors, and bosses will be

there to give you feedback, help you learn and grow. Don't be a perfectionist—instead, lap it up when someone is willing to give you pointers. Anyone will tell you, upon quiet reflection, that our deepest learning occurs not from our successes, but from our mistakes.

I think you know we expect great things from you—but not all at once. And I must confess that the world you inherit is not what we'd hoped to be giving you.

Many of your parents, like me, are members of the Baby Boom generation. We strived to create a world that was more just, more open, more tolerant, with fewer constraints and more possibilities. Don't judge us too harshly, for we succeeded in many ways you can now take for granted.

But your legacy includes a globe made more fragile for all of our progress. It includes a world of people more closely linked, and at the same time more sharply divided, than ever before. We have treated our physical world very shabbily, leaving you a long list of messes to clean up, species to save, and technological challenges to face.

But think for a minute what a truly wonderful job UC San Diego has done to prepare you for these challenges:

- A university with a global reputation, on the cutting edge in dozens of fields, remarkable for its spirit of inquiry.
- A university committed to innovation, on the crest and cusp of so many achievements and discoveries of national significance.
- A university transforming the local community with discovery and commitment.
- A university that has made a meteoric rise to the top 10 of public universities in less than 50 years—a feat never before accomplished, and one unlikely ever to be matched.
- And, a university incredibly proud of her young cadre of alumni.

You may find, outside of the academic world, that not everyone is familiar with our stunning accomplishments. So you must be our ambassadors, letting others know about our jewel of higher education nestled here in San Diego.