

Harvard College Class Day  
May 25, 2011  
Ivy Oration  
(Text is as prepared for delivery. Check against delivery.)  
Embargoed until Delivery

*Class of 2011, We Are Not Special*  
Scott Levin-Gesundheit – Mather House

Good morning, Class of 2011. First, I want to thank the Class Marshals for allowing me to open for blonde Tina Fey. It's an honor.

We are the future! Look toward the horizon and reach for the stars!  
EVERYTHING THE LIGHT TOUCHES BELONGS TO YOU NOW!

Thanks, I just wanted to get that out of the way so that we can all say later that this speech made you feel good.

Class of 2011, look at yourselves today, seated across Tercentenary Theater as your fathers anxiously aim their video cameras at you and then pan back to the less attractive person standing up here at this podium.

Now think back to where you were exactly four years ago. Not much has changed. Right now, just like back then, you are wearing a cap and gown, and you are graduating number one in your class.

Depressing sarcasm.

But while we may not all be valedictorians, an astonishing 30 of you will be graduating from Harvard with 4.0 GPAs, thanks to the gracious services of one Mr. Adam Wheeler. What a guy!

Actually, though, a lot has changed in four years. AOL Instant Messenger became “Gchat,” and President Bush became black and much more globally respected. My good friend Mr. Binkie Blue Blanket became Binkie, College Blanket.

We are older now, wiser even. I, for one, am much, *much* fatter. There was the Freshman Fifteen, the Sophomore Seven, and the Junior Stopped-Counting-Too-Sad. Twinkies are shaped like my parent’s disappointment.

But let’s all think back to when we were just 18 — young, chipper Harvard admits, still waiting for our first mouth-kiss. A “Golden Nugget” was something that you mined from the ground and not from some glorious deep fryer forged by the hands of God.

I remember when I left my small town to head off to school — it felt a bit like an old-timey American soldier going off to fight in the war. People would look at me and say: “Hey, youngster, gee whiz, you’re going off to the big time!” They would turn to their friends and say: “Poor boy, doesn’t have a chance out there.” Then they’d sip bourbon out of a flask and criticize women’s suffrage. It was a really small town.

But I don’t think I’m alone in saying that some of us come to Harvard as hometown heroes, unjustly praised, unnecessarily encouraged, with so many pats on the back that we start to bruise. So I want to take the chance today to give Harvard thanks, for teaching us perhaps the most important lesson of all: [*serious face*] we are not special.

Maybe you thought, like I did, that you are an awesome jazz bassoonist. Well Harvard already has five exceptional jazz bassoonists, they’ve formed a quintet, you’ve “comped” it four times, and every time you go to their concerts, you cry in the back row in perfect syncopated rhythm. But not perfect enough.

Harvard has taught us other lessons as well. First, that you should never, under any circumstances, pay real money for a b.good Burger. Second, that the only surefire way to make a group of people scream is to do something like this: MATHER HOUSE! This is Harvard, not Six Flags, okay, people?

I also learned, and I am quoting this secondhand here so I may be wrong, that in order to graduate from Harvard, you must complete three tasks. One: run naked during Primal Scream. Two: Have sex on the John Harvard statue. And, three: pee in the stacks of Widener Library. I have only done this last one, but I have done it nine times. And let me tell you, there is no more pure Harvard experience than urinating on a first edition copy of Bacon's *Essays*.

But despite these lessons, there are still many things for which Harvard has not yet prepared us. Take a look with me into the future, into the year 2012, as we, the entirely non-special Class of 2011, occupy the real world, which is not all that special either.

In the year 2012, we will show up on the first day of our first real job. Finding real work difficult, we will leave after thirty minutes to go shop something else.

In the year 2012, we will get into an argument with a bouncer at a nightclub, yelling something about "unlimited swipe access."

And in the year 2012, we will attempt to eat all of our meals at a single buffet restaurant for the price of ELEVEN DOLLARS PER MEAL. This actually will not be difficult. When the restaurant does not accept our Harvard IDs as payment, however, we will ask if we can clean their bathrooms for the wage of THIRTEEN DOLLARS PER HOUR. This will be impossible.

As you can see, the real world is a scary place. There is no over-priced course pack called “Life” on sale at the Coop. And there is definitely no one who will let you copy it at Gnomon. In many ways, Harvard has failed us, and by that I mean that they have given us B+s.

But stand tall, Class of 2011 — tomorrow we will be Harvard graduates, and that means something! It means that we will be just like any other college graduates, only with a crippling inability to tell people where exactly we went to college. Or exactly what a mouth-kiss feels like.

But I will say it again: tomorrow we will be Harvard graduates — how many people can *say* that?

Answer: Anyone! Freedom of speech. [Pounds fist against podium with pride.]  
God bless America.

Thank you, Class of 2011! Best of luck in all of your endeavors.