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Make Peace, Find Love and Don’t Settle – With Words of Advice, the Class of 2014 Graduates

During annual Commencement ceremony, Governor Chafee, University President Farish and others encourage graduates to seek opportunities and leave no regrets

May 17, 2014  |  Public Affairs Staff

Bristol, R.I. – The weather may have started wet, but the sun broke through and Commencement celebrations among more than 6,000 graduates and guests were hardly dampened, as the 1,035 members of the Roger Williams University Class of 2014 culminated their college careers on Saturday at the University’s annual Commencement exercises.

In addition to awarding bachelor’s and master’s degrees to the candidates, RWU President Donald J. Farish conferred honorary doctorates to two special guests: the Honorable Lincoln D. Chafee, the 74th governor of the State of Rhode Island; and Pulitzer Prize-winning author and historian Doris Kearns Goodwin.

Selected as the university’s Commencement speaker in celebration of the growing array of projects in which RWU students and faculty have partnered with organizations to improve quality of life in the State, Governor Chafee called upon Roger Williams, the University’s namesake and the State’s founder, as an example for today’s graduates – and particularly his role as a peacemaker in his era.

“To build an age of lasting peace for your generation will require concentration and will,” Governor Chafee told the graduates. “Perhaps we can draw inspiration from the examples of Roger Williams. If you learn languages, as he did, you can engage the world on its own terms. If you start new
enterprises, as he did, you can invite others into the experiment and provide jobs and opportunities for many others… If you speak truth to power, as he did, you will be faithful to your conscience and you will help our society to stay strong. If you work to achieve consensus, as he did, you will become a meaningful part of whatever community you choose to join and you will plant your ideals in the hard soil of everyday reality.

“If you do all these things, you will be living up to much more than the promise of Roger Williams University or even Roger Williams – you will be giving new life to some of our oldest aspirations as fellow inhabitants of the same fragile planet.”

In a deeply personal address, President Farish offered the Class of 2014 a healthy dose of “unsolicited advice,” as he called it, in the very “official” form of “Farish’s Four Rules for a Happy and Successful Life.” First, be a lifelong learner. Second, find someone to love. Third, find something that you love to do. Fourth, and most importantly, don’t settle.

“If you don’t like the view from the particular mountain you’ve climbed, climb back down and climb another mountain,” the President told the graduates. “It’s the easiest thing in the world to make excuses for putting up with something intolerable or distasteful or merely unpleasant. ‘I have a spouse, I have children, I have a mortgage… besides there’s something ennobling about putting up with some level of adversity.’

“Balderdash! If you don’t like your circumstances, change them… Don’t put yourself in a position when at the end of your life, you find yourself looking back with bitterness and regret at the missed opportunities you chose to let pass you by.”

In a lyrical speech punctuated with messages about community and inclusion, English and secondary education double major Jesse Ramos ’14 – a slam poet and the first student speaker to hail from Bristol – expressed his gratitude for the care and kindness he felt at his hometown University.

“I remember growing up five minutes down the street thinking, ‘I’ll never go to Roger Williams’… Four years later I stand here. Five minutes down the road, in a whole different world,” said Ramos, who will work this summer at the Rhode Island Transition Academy helping young adults with autism transition to college and work life.

“If I could offer any words that mean something to a group of people that taught me a lot and changed my life for the better, keep on growing. Use your brains and hearts together and go fight like hell against indifference… Never forget your roots no matter where they started growing from, and keep feeding them everyday.”

In what’s become an annual tradition since its establishment in 2007, 12 students took home President’s Core Values Medallions in recognition of their academic, professional and community-based accomplishments. And during the ceremony, Provost Andrew A. Workman presented the university’s Seventh Annual Excellence in Teaching Award to Professor of English Deborah Robinson of the Feinstein College of Arts and Sciences.
The Class of 2014 featured an important academic first for the University, as the inaugural group of journalism graduates earned degrees, two years after the journalism major launched. Versed in the essential skills of both print and multimedia journalism, the 12 graduates will hit the job market as experienced, versatile reporters ready to take on an evolving media terrain.

A number of the journalism students leave with jobs already secured – Christopher Ferreira, for example, will chronicle live news as a general assignment reporter for KCFW News, an NBC affiliate in Montana. An additional 64 underclassmen have already declared the journalism major, based on the nascent program’s growing reputation.

Among the 774 undergraduate day students who graduated, the five most populous majors included psychology, architecture, criminal justice, psychology, media communication and marketing.

One day earlier, 169 students were awarded juris doctor degrees in a Roger Williams University School of Law ceremony highlighted by an address by Judith S. Kaye, the trailblazing Chief Judge of New York and the Court of Appeals (retired), now with the Skadden firm.

As RWU Law wrapped up its 20th Anniversary year, the Commencement ceremony was the last over which longtime dean David A. Logan presided. Dean Logan. Logan has headed the school since 2003 (more than half of its existence), which places him among the 15 longest serving law deans in America. He will step down from the deanship as of July 1 to return to full-time teaching; founding RWU Law faculty member Michael Yelnosky will succeed him.