

A Constellation of Pluses

By long William & Mary tradition, the president gets the last words at Commencement. Graduation rites do run on and on. So, approaching these remarks last May 15, I felt a bit like the corpse at an Irish wake. They need you there to have the party, but they don't expect you to say much.

Since degrees were conferred shortly before my "last words," I was speaking to newly christened alumni and alumnae of William & Mary, almost 2,000 strong, counting the graduates from all five schools in the university. Let me share these thoughts with you as well.

When high school seniors get the fat envelope in the mail bearing an offer of admission to the College, we tell them, "There is only one William & Mary — and now it's yours," but these words speak to our new graduates far more directly than to high school seniors still in the throes of picking a college. It's our new alumni and alumnae who have just spent enormous amounts of energy climbing William & Mary's steep academic mountain and who have now reached the summit, ready for the journey ahead.

In my view, a William & Mary degree will nurture our graduates richly during this journey, indeed, until they shuffle off their mortal coils. Why do I say this? Why does a William & Mary degree stand you in such good stead going forward? Three reasons in particular.

First, consider the caliber of the education received at the country's second-oldest university. The capacity to think rigorously and communicate effectively, an understanding of the great issues that have confronted human beings for millennia and still do, plus an awareness that there are no easy answers to most of these issues — all this radically exceeds the grasp of most students graduating across the United States. The high caliber of a William & Mary education provides a huge comparative advantage going forward.

Second, while in William & Mary's embrace, most people make friends for life. Friends for life are precious. They rejoice with us in good times and help sustain us in bad. They provide continuity across the years. It's warmly satisfying to have friends who roll through the decades with you and remember, along with you, what it was like when you walked William



& Mary's red brick paths together, played on teams together, and did any of the other countless things at William & Mary that unite us. Keep those friendships alive. Friends for life are a rare blessing.

Third, a degree from William & Mary is a serious distinction, an important personal credential, a key that opens opportunities not otherwise readily accessible. People who know higher education in America understand the excellence of our faculty and students and the superb education inherent in a William & Mary degree. As many have already discovered, graduate and professional schools love to recruit William & Mary alumni and alumnae. Employers who have hired William & Mary graduates speak lyrically about them and return wanting more. It helps, and it feels good, to have a degree that commands attention and respect.

So, a compellingly good education, wonderful friends for life, and a powerful credential rooted in the College's renown — quite a constellation of pluses for the road ahead. Truly, *there is only one William & Mary — and now it's yours!*

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "W. Taylor Reveley III".

W. TAYLOR REVELEY III
President, College of William & Mary

To view excerpts from President Reveley's closing remarks at the 2011 Commencement ceremony, go to www.wm.edu/news/video.



PHOTOS: STEPHEN SALPUKAS AT THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY