

**GRADUATION SPEECH by Ryan Baumtrog**

**Robert M. La Follette School of Public Affairs, University of Wisconsin–Madison**

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Director Wolfe, Associate Director Chinn, Professor Dresang, Lieutenant Governor Lawton, faculty, staff, family, friends, and most importantly, my fellow graduates of the class of 2008. Good afternoon. I just got out of my meeting with Nick Bubb and I am ready to give my speech. Nick and many others offered plenty of help with my speech. Their insights and ideas were supportive, but I couldn't help but wonder where they all were when I needed help completing my other graduate work at the end of the semester.

I am not the first, and I definitely won't be the last, but I want to say congratulations to you all. To make this more interactive, turn to your neighbor and congratulate them. I am sure you did this at the bar one of the last few nights but who can turn down the opportunity to celebrate? However, if the person next to you is someone you worked with on our semester long capstone project and you prefer not to have any more contact with them at this moment, I completely understand.

Now sit back, take a deep breath...can you feel that? The responsibility of graduate school is being lifted from your shoulders as I speak. Now before you get too comfortable, I want to be the first person to give you an additional responsibility. I am not talking about the responsibility of telling your friends and family what it means to have a Masters in Public Affairs or International Public Affairs. I am sure everyone at one point or another has had to explain our program. When people ask me what public affairs means, I tell them that public affairs deals with the latest Hollywood gossip and requires us to read In Touch and People magazines. They usually don't believe me. No, I am not talking about that responsibility; I am talking about the responsibility of life-long scholarship. Now, before your eyes glaze over like they did in our stats and econ classes, just hear me out. Life-long scholarship might not sound sexy, but its rewards are better than you can imagine.

Life-long scholarship requires learning all you can from the people you encounter and a willingness to provide all that is asked of you to those who seek the information from you. Being a life-long scholar also requires the personal drive toward intellectual improvement and the desire to never stop learning and sharing information. But, your reward is an enriched life AND the opportunity to enhance the lives of all the people you encounter. Life-long scholarship will allow us to live ten lifetimes in one lifespan, providing opportunities and knowledge that cannot be obtained by passively going through life. The catch is that you only get the benefits of life-long scholarship if you recognize the responsibility.

About mid-semester last year I had one of those moments that just about everyone goes through at one point or another during their time at La Follette. I found myself thinking, "what the heck did I get myself into." Problem set after problem set, chapter after chapter, paper after paper...I

found myself feeling more over burdened than our statistics teaching assistant Jonathan Hore felt during his office hours. Combine all the school work with the fact that I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life and I had myself an identity crisis. There I was, a 22 year old, having the first identity crisis of my life.

Then one day, it hit me. It hit me harder than my first econ exam score. And trust me, that score hit me hard. I realized I had been given a gift and not a burden. I had been given the opportunity of scholarship and my short-sighted views toward graduate school kept me from seeing the big picture. This big picture was the opportunity and responsibility of scholarship. I had the opportunity to learn any subject I wanted. I had the opportunity to hear lectures and speeches from highly regarded professors and speakers. I had the opportunity to socialize with other La Follette students and learn from their experiences and insights. All these opportunities enhanced my knowledge, opened my perspective, increased my freedom and promoted scholarship. But, I had been too caught up in the mundane details of school work to realize the wonderful opportunities I had been given.

Once I finally recognized the amazing opportunities that had been given to me, I realized that it all came with a responsibility. With my intellectual freedom and personal growth came the responsibility of acting on these opportunities. I had to alter my perspective from being overburdened with the responsibility of scholarship to embracing it.

I am honored to be graduating in this class- many of the graduates have the opportunity for life-long scholarship in their next profession. Here are just some of the places Fightin' Bobs will be next year. Our graduates will be working as policy analysts for the Wisconsin Audit Bureau, Department of Workforce Development, Department of Administration's Budget Office, and Department of Health and Family Services. Others will be working nationally as consultants, attorneys, and analysts at prestigious institutions such as the Federal Reserve Board of Governors and Government Accountability Office. Even more have been selected to prominent fellowship programs such as the Kansas City Management Fellowship and the Presidential Management Fellowship. Still others will stay in Madison or return to their parent's homes, analyzing late night television, auditing their parent's bank accounts and plotting where they'll make their next big splash.

Now, as we all move on into the next phase of our lives and do great things, I implore you to not forget about the responsibilities and rewards of life-long scholarship. I urge you not to fall into the trap I did by getting caught up in the minutia of life and missing out on the big picture. The opportunities and rewards of scholarship will pass you by if you don't take advantage of them.

Your mission as a long-life scholar, if you choose to accept it, will allow for true personal growth. But true personal growth will only come from understanding that gaining information obligates you to act on that knowledge. Your responsibility to embrace and teach all those you encounter is just as important as the freedom you gain from your knowledge. Opportunities become opportunities foregone unless you take advantage of them. Never stop learning. Take on the responsibility. I challenge you to be a life-long scholar because life-long scholarship provides the opportunity to enhance your life and the lives of all the people you encounter, no matter where life takes you.

Now, it is truly an honor to introduce Professor Dresang. As most of you know, he is retiring in the fall. I have been blessed with the opportunity to take four of his classes and work with him for the past year as a graduate assistant. I am relatively sure that all the time I have spent with him in the past two years is not what drove him to retirement. Professor Dresang is retiring with remarkable accomplishments. His accomplishments are comparable to another Wisconsinite who is also retiring, Brett Favre. Brett has 442 touchdowns, is a 9-time Pro-bowler and led the Packers to two Super Bowls. Professor Dresang has taught roughly 8000 students, trained over 700 students who have graduated from La Follette and led the Badgers to 3 Rose Bowl victories as a member of the athletic board. You might say that Professor Dresang is to public affairs and political science as Brett Favre is to Packer football. All joking aside, Professor Dresang has left his footprint in Madison forever. He is the founding director of the La Follette School of Public Affairs, is the current director of the Center for Wisconsin State, Local and Tribal Governance, and has taught political science and public affairs for nearly 40 years. Without further due I introduce you to my mentor, professor and friend Dennis Dresang.