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Societal Responsibilities of an Educated Person

Taken from presentations given to
Mortar Board, a university student honor society
and
Beta Alpha Psi, a national accounting honorary organization.

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You probably believe that most people your age are in college. There is a good chance that you think that it is natural to be educated. It seems to be true that a college degree has replaced a high school education for most job/career purposes today.

Therefore, you may be surprised to know the answers to the following questions: First, what percent of the U.S. population has a college degree today? Second, we live in an increasingly global world, so what percent of the world population has a college degree today? Answers: Only one out of four (25%) of the U.S. population and less than 1% of the world population has a college degree. Upon completion of your degree, you will be in a minority group with respect to education in the U.S. and in the world.

Many college students appear to believe that a college degree guarantees a good life. That is not true. You have to do that. Perhaps you have not yet realized how much potential power and responsibility you have as 1% of the people in the world that will have a college degree!! You need to begin to decide how you are going to use your knowledge and education. Don't flaunt it. Don't get overly egotistical. Think about this. I will use myself as an example:

- I was born in the current era.
- I was born healthy with the exception of very bad eyes.
- I was born in the U.S.A.
- I was born bright.
- I was born female.

I had no choice in any of this. I also cannot take credit for any of it. What if I had been born

- 200 years ago? With my eyes, I probably could not have ever been a functional part of society.
- In a part of the world where even today there is no decent educational system? Or, in part of the world where even today women have no rights or worth? Or, in the USA only one or two generations earlier when accounting was definitely not considered a field for women? I certainly would not have ended up as a professor of accounting in any of those circumstances.

What would I be today if I wasn't given most of the traits that have made me a functioning part of society? Always remember that much of your life was GIVEN to you. You cannot take credit for it. But, what you do with what you are given is up to you.

Do you know how many people are in the world? The answer is almost 6 billion. If you looked at the world's population, what would you see?

- 6% owns ½ of all the wealth in the world
- 33% are children
- 75% do not own a phone and 50% have never made a phone call ever
- Only 7% own a car
- Less than 1/10 of 1% has a computer or has ever been on the internet

Worse yet

- 80% live in substandard housing
- 70% cannot read!
- 50% suffer from malnutrition
- 33% do not have access to safe, clean drinking water

STOP – THINK - THIS COULD HAVE BEEN YOU!!

You probably worked hard to complete your degree. You may be the first in your family with a college degree. You may have borrowed money and now have loans to repay. You might have worked and/or were raising a family while attending college. Some of you probably had some type of disability to surmount to complete your degree. I find it interesting to note, as a faculty member who interacts with a wide range of students, that many new college graduates believe that they worked hard in college, and now, they are 'owed' something. It is likely that you hold the belief that you deserve a job, respect, happiness (whatever.)

On the contrary, educated people owe everyone else. It does not matter how you hard it was to earn a degree. You have become one of the educated minority. It is now your responsibility to help others in some way. With that comes an ominous responsibility to the rest of society. And, remember, much of your success is due to what was given to you – the part you did **not** earn. How well will you do with the part you **did** earn?

Be the best at what you are. Be honest. Others should be able to count on your knowledge and integrity. Do not ever take advantage of others. You **will** be able to do this. Don't.

How do you pay back? The good news is that you can choose how to repay society for allowing you to be educated. Your method of giving back depends on your degree area, your age, and your talents and interests. Each one of you can select ways to actively give back. A passive, but very positive, way to repay

society is to ensure that you never use your education to purposefully harm others. But, this is not enough. Be active - give of yourself and your time if you don't have money, and continue to do so even when you do have money. You can make a difference – it can be small or huge.

Many of you are here due to some relationship with an organization that recognizes excellence. As a student who has already been acknowledged as excellent, you may have even more responsibility to be cognizant of societal responsibility than other students.

A viable society needs to be able to count on its educated people. We should be able to trust our doctors, teachers, politicians, company officers, church leaders, accountants, and the like. This trust that society places in us has been shaky lately and we are all harmed by it. Recently we have become aware that people in power in all areas of our society have used that power to the detriment of others and to their own self-interest. These activities have adversely affected hundreds of thousands of people. The people who betrayed our trust had a responsibility to use their leadership role and education for the benefit of society – not just for their own selfish interests. And, although business has gotten a lot of attention lately, it is sad to note that examples have been found across almost every spectrum of our society.

I guarantee that every one of you, regardless of your degree area, will be in a situation sooner or later where you will be in a position to take advantage of others due to your education. Think about that. Keep it in mind your entire life.

AND DON'T DO IT.

More over – go one step further... actively look for ways to use your education for the benefit of all.

Thank you.