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**47th Annual Commencement Speech**

Good afternoon, and a sincere and warm thanks first and foremost to Rector Clemente, board of visitors, President Cabrera, provost sterns, George Mason administration, faculty and staff, friends and family, and most importantly, the GRADUATING CLASS OF 2013!! We made it!

In the eloquent words of Winston Churchill, “There is no doubt that it is around… the home that all the greatest virtues, {the most dominating virtues of human society}, are created, strengthened and maintained.” We have called Mason's continually expanding campus our home for many years now, and now it's time to make somewhere else our new home. As defined by Merriam-Webster, virtue is a “particular moral excellence; a beneficial quality or power of a thing, manly strength or courage.” As students about to graduate from George Mason University, we have certainly gained virtue, courage and moral excellence in this high educational institution.

I think I can speak for most of us here today that we are extraordinarily proud to be here, to have attended George Mason for our degrees. Our old home has been nationally recognized as a highly successful entrepreneurial and research-focused institution, with some of our professors and fellow students having conducting ground breaking research in cancer, bioscience, and climate change. Among GMU’S many accomplishments, with more than 33,000 registered students, U.S News and World Report has ranked us as the #1 “Up-and-Coming” college in the nation in 2012-2013.

This has truly been a big year for us, with Angel Cabrera nominated as the university's 6th president, who has already implemented big and positive changes for this school, which will certainly be to our benefit in many ways. Mason’s former president of 16 years, Alan Merten was an active facilitator in George Mason’s swift climb in becoming one of the fastest-growing universities in Virginia. Since Merten’s initiation in 1996, with an original 24,000 students, our campus has grown by a 27% increase in student population as of 2013. In a state of constant progression and innovation, Mason covers more than 800 acres of beautiful landscape, as well as representing more than 130 countries, truly making us a cultural diversity-embracing university. This very diversification of a unique cultural student body is one that we make our strength, our virtue.

To say that George Mason University has grown tremendously over the past few years is an understatement. We have been mentored by and instructed by some of the most distinguished and successful professors who truly care about molding us from students into professionals. From coal into diamonds. From sand into pearls. But the sand and coal that was pressing us into something greater isn't our home anymore. Our home has matured into diamonds and pearls now***.*** Through the visions of excellence and of prosperity of our founding fathers, we have been granted the opportunity and rewards of such virtue.

Back in the good ole 60's, Mason students called the "Original Four" their campus home, which constituted of the East, West, North (now Krug Hall) and South (now Finley) buildings, with Fenwick and lecture hall added in 1979. The Mason we called home now has grown enormously, from housing 700 students in the 70's, to currently housing over 6,000 students, thanks to the newest addition of Roger and White top Halls, the brand new apartment suites opened Spring of 2012. A new vision for further building propagation has been continually created and strengthened.

No longer will we call Fenwick, the JC, or Southside our home. We sold back our last textbooks, took our last exams for our current degrees we now hold, and are moving into a new place in life. The pay-off has finally arrived.  The virtue has been created, and will now become strengthened.

George Mason is founded upon two core values: freedom and learning, both of which have been reinforced daily, whether we were studying late into the night for our final exams at the 24 hour Starbucks, or enjoying a sweet delicious cupcake from Cupcakes Actually, the brand new and very wise addition to the JC. My friends and I particularly made our stomachs the home of many red velvet and buttercream cupcakes. Homes change, but they still maintain their fundamental values. We will not forget the many virtues of integrity and the importance of flourishing in a growing home, values that we will certainly take with us from our time here at Mason.

In the mid 1700’s, George Mason wisely said that, “A few years’ experience will convince us that the things in which we regarded as our greatest misfortune have proved to be our greatest blessings.” Our misfortunes? Receiving that unexpected low grade on an exam you studied hard for; oversleeping for lectures; fighting one another for decent parking spots. The blessings? Walking away with many memories of our time spent here at Mason, taking with us the valuable lessons and virtues we will carry with us for the rest of our lives. George Mason was right, I wonder if he dreamed that a flourishing high educational institution would be named after him and his values.

Our statue of George Mason sits in between the lovely fountains, a beautiful part of campus, to remind us that we represent the original Patriot, who was also known as the "Father of the US Bill of Rights." As a developing Mason tradition, fellow classmates and I have rubbed his big toe during final exams in a desperate attempt for good luck. Our founding father was also known to us, my fellow graduates, as the Father of freedom, change, innovation, and the Father of learning. Our cultural diversity is a significant trademark of Mason that we are extremely proud of, and I believe that George Mason's dedication to fighting for equal rights for all is paralleled by our unique and diverse student body.

We are innovators. According to Webster Dictionary, innovation is defined as the introduction of something new, a new idea, a new method, or novelty. And that, my dear friends and family, is what makes Mason prosperous. There is newness all around us, so many opportunities and exciting possibilities of what could be, which has been instilled in our young, eager to learn minds from our countless classes and textbooks. We are entrepreneurs. Some of us will build our own houses, pioneer our own career paths. We are philanthropists.We are facilitators of change. Some us will re-design and reconstruct our houses, our futures. Whatever our future “homes” become, our final virtue is this: We. Are. Mason.

Although some of us will certainly miss the convenience of fulfilling a sugar craving for Auntie Anne’s cinnamon pretzel bites amid many study sessions, but it is now time to move onto another cupcake store. Today, as historically founding entrepreneurs and innovators, I think Winston Churchill and George Mason would agree that we as proud graduating GMU Patriots, have exponentially grown, flourished and thrived into a promising, highly skilled and ambitious class. So today, May 18th, 2013, I ask you, George Mason University graduates, are you ready to create, strengthen and maintain our learned virtues? I welcome you officially to a new age, a new era. This, my fellow graduates, in the point in which we are moving on to something even greater, and decide where to begin our lives from this point on. Mason Patriots, we have arrived!!