

Convocation Remarks

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This evening 3,600 students distributed over 250 degree programs will graduate. Seventy-five percent of you are undergraduate students and 25% are graduate students. Sixty-five percent are men and 35% are women. You represent all 50 states. Twenty-two percent are from 60 foreign countries, including our two branch campuses in Europe.

Some of you will continue your studies in graduate school, but most of you will enter the world of work to begin or continue your professional careers. Most importantly, all of you will have the opportunity to serve your community outside of your professional life and, for some, to serve your community as part of your professional life. I would like to focus my remarks tonight on community and public service.

You may think it strange that, at a career-focused and technology-based university, I speak of service. I do so for two reasons. First, you are fortunate to be as well prepared as you are for success in the world of work and, therefore, should be encouraged to give something back to the community which has supported and will continue to support you. Second, there are many people – in our local communities and around the world – who are less fortunate than you and who need your assistance.

RIT has a very strong record of community service. For example, this year, RIT faculty and staff raised \$300,000 for the United Way of Rochester, 10% more than it raised last year and 4% above its goal for this year. This occurred in a poor economy in which the United Way of Rochester as a whole missed its goal by 2%. Each year, RIT has the highest percentage employee participation of any of the local universities. RIT faculty and staff serve in leadership roles in dozens of community governance and philanthropic organizations.

You students, again this year, also contributed greatly to our local community. Four thousand students participated in 320 community service events and projects. Students raised \$53,000 for the community, \$20,000 of which was raised by our fraternities and sororities. Rochester is a better community because of your efforts.

I would like to mention two student/faculty community projects. One is the 2002 ESPRIT project, which involves 60 RIT students from the fields of photography, graphic design, printing, information technology, and packaging science. Under the direction of RIT faculty, these students are working in partnership with the Make-A-Wish Foundation to support children with life-threatening illnesses. These children were asked the question: "If you could have one

super-power, what would it be and why?" Photographic illustrations of the answers are transformed into posters, a book, video, web site, and packaged for distribution.

A second student/faculty community service project is RIT's "Learn and Serve America" project. RIT's College of Liberal Arts and the Division of Student Affairs received \$420,000 from the Corporation for National Service to support this project. RIT is collaborating with the Rochester Northeast Neighborhood Alliance (NENA) so that the community becomes an extension of the classroom. Students majoring in public policy, interior design, media/communications, marketing, business development, and information technology, working in concert with neighborhood leaders, are supporting the community's economic development efforts.

By volunteering, RIT students, faculty, and staff have made the Rochester community a better place to live, work, raise a family, and study and learn. In turn, we have become better human beings knowing that we have helped others improve their quality of life and achieve their goals. Many of you here today know what I am talking about. It feels good.

So far, I have been talking about "volunteering" and "giving something back" to the community. The assumption is that you are already gainfully employed in the corporate sector or in your profession. Let me now turn to full-time employment – that is, a career – in the service of others.

One-half of the local, state, and federal government work forces will be retirement-eligible over the next few years. This means there will be vacancies – and opportunities and needs – to be filled in the public sector. Yet, a recent survey shows that only 16% of college-educated workers would be interested in a government job. One-third of the graduates from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government now take jobs with the government, down from 75% 20 years ago.

To make matters worse, before the end of the decade, the labor force will increase by 12%, while the number of available jobs will grow by 15%. Moreover, 20% of the new workers entering the work force will be immigrants with limited English language and technical skills. The private sector, therefore, will be putting increasing hiring pressure on the best new college graduates at the same time that public sector job openings are increasing.

It is vitally important to this nation that some of our very best and brightest seek employment in the public sector at all levels of government. I truly hope that some of you here tonight will take up this challenge.

Our government, at all levels, faces issues that relate to poverty, the disadvantaged among us, violence, the environment, the economy, and transportation. There are critical issues of safety and security both home and abroad.

Talented and dedicated individuals are needed to develop policy and strategy, and to administer and implement these policies and strategies. We need public sector leaders who understand civic responsibility and are committed to democratic participation.

Some of you graduating today will shoulder these enormously complex public challenges. I thank you in advance for your efforts. Others will pursue opportunities in the private sector. I thank you for coming to RIT and wish you happiness and success in the years ahead.

I urge all of you, throughout your careers and lives, to find ways to serve your community either through direct public service employment or through volunteer efforts locally, regionally, nationally, and globally.

You are well prepared to go forth. Good luck!