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Subject: ISU Special Announcement - More than 1,800 Sycamores participate in commencement

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ISU Special Announcement

Saturday, May 12, 2018

More than 1,800 Sycamores participate in commencement

Loved ones celebrated the end of one journey and the beginning of another as more than 1,800 Sycamores crossed the commencement stage Saturday -- and became graduates of Indiana State University.

Of the 2,404 students who were eligible, 1,397 undergraduate and 462 graduate students signed up to participate in either the morning or afternoon commencement exercises at the Hulman Center.



It was the first of such events for President Deborah Curtis, who became the 12th president of Indiana State on Jan. 3. Students' "transformational" experiences at State are the university's "calling card to the world," Curtis said. She encouraged the new alumni to find their passion and pursue it.

"Our students understand the value that obtaining a degree will bring to their lives, and they consistently pursue that goal with enthusiasm, hard work and perseverance," said Curtis, who earned a Ph.D. from State in 1986. "I'm looking forward to seeing the many ways you apply the knowledge and skills you've developed at Indiana State to advance your careers, serve your communities and literally help change the world."

Veteran public relations executive and political science alumnus Ron Culp, '70, spoke at both ceremonies. Upon arriving in Terre Haute on Friday, Culp toured campus, starting with his old residence hall, Cromwell, and ending at the Indiana Statesman, the student newspaper where he worked and met his wife, the former Sandra Bowman.

A first-generation college graduate from a middle-class family in a small town, Culp began his career as a newspaper reporter. He made the change to PR, working eight years in politics in Indiana and New York.

Culp then progressed to be senior vice president of public relations and governmental affairs at Sears and worked in senior corporate communications roles at Sara Lee Corporation, Pitney Bowes and Eli Lilly. He is the recipient of the Public Relations Society of America's Gold Anvil for lifetime achievement and is the only individual to win the two top awards bestowed by the Arthur W. Page Society.

He credited his professional success to his experience at State and hard work.

"I would have had to say 'No way!' if anyone would have told me I would go on to a career that included traveling the world ... meeting every president from Nixon to Obama, having breakfast with Princess Diana, dinner with Oprah and a private conversation with Michael Jordan," said Culp, who is the professional director of the graduate program in public relations and advertising in DePaul University's College of Communication.

Culp used his platform to specifically thank the faculty who mentored him. "Incredibly dedicated faculty make the bigger world seem less intimidating and, indeed, attainable - even for small-town kids with very little money," he said.

Mary Alice Banks was among the educators who left an impression on the young Culp. She taught a one-hour etiquette class in which she trained students how to hold a soup spoon and set the dinner table. Banks also let the students pick a social situation that made them uncomfortable so she could guide them on the proper things to do and say.

"Most classes picked business dinners or weddings, but our class decided on a funeral. So, sure enough, Miss Banks hauled us off to the Bedino Peace Chapel where we attended a funeral for a homeless man," Culp said. "No, you'll never forget these kinds of ISU memories."

The only regret Culp said he had of his experience at State was he finished his coursework in December and didn't participate in commencement.

"It took me 50 years, but I'm here," he said to a round of applause. Culp then paused to take a selfie with the graduates.



Shalynn McNeal, a communication major from Michigan City, Ind., offered the morning address for the College of Arts and Sciences, Scott College of Business and Bayh College of Education.

"To my fellow graduates: We have made Indiana State our home for the past four years, and those years have been anything but a breeze. ISU has not only challenged us, it has shaped us into more than just educated individuals," McNeal said.

She compared life to running a race, one filled with hurdles along the way. Even though one's legs get tired and self-doubt fills the mind, runners keep going.

"I stand before you a proud African-American woman. A proud 21st Century Scholar, and a proud first-generation college student," McNeal said. "We are all living witnesses that if you want something -- no matter how hard it is, you can achieve it. Congratulations, we have crossed the finish line of our graduation race. Time to lace up our shoes and take on the next race life has to offer."

In the afternoon, health sciences major Shan Antony of Mishawaka, Ind., addressed the colleges of Health and Human Services and Technology. He, too, focused on the importance of perseverance by sharing a story of when he and a friend were in a canoe in a lake on the top of a volcano in Ecuador -- and a storm rolled in.

"At first there was slight drizzle, but by the time we made it halfway back, it was a full downpour. I began to contemplate if we would, in fact, make it all the way back," he said. "It was raining harder, waves were starting to form, I couldn't see a landmark or any other humans, and my arms were completely exhausted."

Antony made it through the storm -- the same way his fellow graduates navigated their own tempests, metaphorical or otherwise.

"The experiences that culminated our college narrative remain as invaluable resources when you leave this campus and part of the foundation that will allow you to thrive in the next journey," he said. "So as you step into your boat remember, it may rain, your boat may shake in the waves, your arms may get tired, but never stop. Your boat is sturdy, and your arms are strong. You can make it across this lake because, after all, you already have."



