An Open Letter to Graduating College Students

Dear Graduating Seniors,

First of all, congratulations on the whole getting-your-degree thing! Knew you could do it.

I taught almost 100 of you this Spring, you Seniors about to graduate. I'll never tell you to your face (you know how I favor the tough love over nurturing), but I'm really proud of you. For all my bitching about students (see here, here and here), the fact is, a lot of you guys have worked your asses off to get through school and earn your degree. Several of you did it on your own -- you paid your own way, and that in itself is pretty freaking impressive. Whether you paid your own tuition or not, a bunch of you took ownership, and decided that college was an opportunity to transform yourself, and your brain. For that, you have the right to say that you officially kick ass.

Most of you have the right to be extremely proud of what you've accomplished. Some of you... not so much. But that's ok. Sure, a few of you came into college with that classic consumer attitude that we teachers hate: the idea that, since you (or someone who's invested in your future) is paying for your education, that education should be easy, convenient, and guaranteed. You bitched about the workload or about 8 a.m. classes. You complained about having to take any class that wasn't directly in line with your major, saying that General Ed courses like Religious Studies, Anthropology, and English Literature were not relevant to your Business and Management degree, and therefore a waste of your oh-so valuable time. You know, that really drives me crazy -- I mean, how you can tell me my classes about Writing, about Argument, are a waste of time?? It's like, think about your place in the world!! About the persuasive influences you're subjected to every day!!!! I mean, Christ!!!! How can you POSSIBLY tell me--

--Sorry, I got a little distracted. Let me start again. Like I was saying. Really, really proud of, like, 90% of you guys.

Most of you are emerging from college with a talent for learning how to work The System. You've learned how to successfully cram for multiple choice mid-terms in 24 hours, as well as how to erase all that information from your short-term memory banks right afterwards with a line of fast Jager bombs. You've learned that when the teacher reading listlessly from his or her PowerPoint in the front of the 500-seat lecture hall doesn't care whether or not you're learning, you don't have to care either. You've learned that C's get Degrees. You've learned that units earned is more important than knowledge discovered.

The sad part is, I'm not completely sure what you learned during your time in college. I wish I could say you're leaving with strong critical thinking skills, the ability to question old-school ideas and perspectives (both yours and ours), and an appreciation for creativity, analysis, language, and achievement through hard work. But it's more likely that, through no fault of your own, you're emerging from college with a talent for learning how to work The System. You've learned how to successfully cram for multiple choice mid-terms in 24 hours, as well as how to erase all that information from your short-term memory banks right afterwards with a line of fast Jager bombs. You've learned that when the teacher reading listlessly from his or her PowerPoint in the front of the 500-seat lecture hall doesn't care whether or not you're learning, you don't have to care either. You've learned that C's get Degrees. You've learned that units earned is more important than knowledge discovered.
Again, this is not your fault.

So if you’ll indulge me, I just wanted to leave you with a few parting words of advice, stuff that we didn’t really have time to cover in class, that might actually come up as you go from College to World.

Post-College Advice from Professor ToughLove:

1) Your opinions are valuable, and it’s important that you have them, about all kinds of stuff. But having an opinion means being responsible for understanding it: where that opinion came from, what influenced it, and how much of it is based on what you yourself have learned about the world vs. what parents and pundits are shouting at you.

2) Being chronically late to class gets you a lower grade. Being chronically late to work will get you fired.

3) If you’re a girl, and you played dumb in class because you thought it would make you more attractive to guys, you were probably right -- but it wasn’t worth it. From now on, be as smart as you are.

4) If you’re a guy, and you played dumb in class because you wanted to maintain a high Sardonic Cool Dude Quotient (SCDQ), that crap got played out in 11th grade. Real men read books.

5) Before you get that celebratory graduation tattoo, think about the Five Year Rule. Sure, that beauty shot of a giant phoenix devouring a unicorn across your lower back seems super cool now, but just sleep on it for a couple nights, ok?

6) Yea, whoever told you four years ago that C’s get Degrees was right. But after college, mediocrity gets you nothing. It’s time to adopt a new attitude.

7) Hey, that’s a nice résumé you’ve got there! Guess what: 99% of all college graduates look awesome on paper. There’s like 5 jobs, and 5,000 fresh grads who want it. And they all have the same degree as you. So what else you got to stand out? Find something. Maybe start with volunteer work. Seriously.

8) Please proofread your writing, even though I’m not standing over you. Good writing is important, no matter what your career is. If nothing else, read your correspondence carefully before sending. You know what to look for. Remember what I told you in class: every time you misspell a word in an email, a puppy somewhere falls down dead.

9) Do you know how many college graduates get a job that’s actually related to their major? Well... I don’t actually know myself. But it’s fewer than you’d think. There’s some study somewhere. I’ll find it. The point is, don’t be afraid to change career plans. Remember, a lot of you guys chose your majors when you were 18-year-old doofuses.

10) Facebook in college and Facebook after college are very different. In college, those pics of you at the university Midnight Undie Run made you popular. After college, those pictures could keep you out of the job market. Because future bosses are so gonna check your page. Consider scrubbing it up a little.

11) The world owes you nothing: no job, no future, no guaranteed spot anywhere. Remember how you blamed your shortcomings and grade problems on your teachers for being too tough/unfair/vague/boring? That’s meaningless now. There’s no one else to blame for what happens next. The only person who’s the boss of you now is you.

Remember that I am a big fan of you. I’m rooting for you, even the 10% of you that pissed me off. Now go be awesome.

Your pal,
Me

Remember: Proofread for the Puppies!

You might also like:

http://didactic-pirate.blogspot.com/2010/05/open-letter-to-graduating-college.html
Dear Directionless, Freaked Out College Student...

No Virginia, There is No Such Thing as Extra Credit

From a Student, to the Rest of the Students

9 comments:

Elizabeth  May 15, 2010 at 6:24 PM
I am afraid I have killed many a puppy.....oh the guilt......

Reply

Anonymous  May 16, 2010 at 6:18 AM
"6) Yea, whoever told you four years ago that Cs get Degrees was right. But after college, mediocrity gets you nothing. It's time to adopt a new attitude."

love it.

Reply

Karl  May 16, 2010 at 9:22 AM
I don't know the study, but the results are 70% of people with degrees do not work in the field of their degree. And, I think, the rest are English majors.

I will be using the puppy line from now on. Are there royalties involved?

Reply

nova  May 16, 2010 at 9:24 AM
HAHAHA You're gonna hate my graduation tattoo!!
It literally says Cs get degrees!! But the way I read it, it's more of a reminder that just because a person has a degree doesn't mean they necessarily worked hard for it or deserve any respect; there's more to life than a piece of paper. You know what to call the guy who graduated with the lowest score in medical school? Doctor.

Here it is if you want to see...
http://www.tattoozoo.net/?p=180

Reply

Didactic Pirate  May 16, 2010 at 10:42 AM
Nova -- Well, that IS a pretty cool looking tattoo.

Reply

peanutbutterfingers  May 17, 2010 at 9:29 AM
loved your first point about opinions - well said. :)

Reply
Jeni Rickard  May 21, 2010 at 9:59 PM
Seth, you rock. Again. I want to show this to Meg now, to avoid any angst later. OK?

Reply

jillosmo  May 27, 2010 at 3:14 PM
This is very cool and correct. Too bad I'm 20 years too late.

Reply

mckelmccoy15  November 10, 2010 at 12:43 PM
As a recent college grad, I do have to agree that the world doesn't owe me anything, and it isn't afraid to let me know! I haven't done a single job related to my major. I'm almost fine with that...but the nerd in me is excited for grad school...I just hope 8 AM classes aren't mandatory.

Reply