

Graduate Commencement 2015

- June 14, 2015
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

Good afternoon and welcome to the Seattle University Graduate Commencement 2015.

As you probably know, we had the Undergraduate Commencement right here this morning with all the high fives, high spirits, high volume, and hijinks of the students. I always like coming to this graduate ceremony having, as it were, “put the kids to bed”, so that we can have a more mature event and conversation.

It is always helpful at the end of an education to tell graduate students what their education has been all about! You have had a Jesuit education. It’s time to let you in on the secret of what a Jesuit education actually is!

First, as when the New York Times writes that someone—whether coming into office or going to jail—is “Jesuit educated” they mean the person knows how to think and to do so deeply and rigorously. I call this “being intellectually roughed up for life!” Your Jesuit education seeks first to take you apart intellectually, to expose your assumptions, adopted cultural norms and values, your taken-for-granted ways of thinking and judging. I hope your Jesuit education has taken you apart, intellectually roughed you up, so that you will never be the same, will never recover.

Secondly, your Jesuit education seeks to “put you back together again”, but requires that you do the putting back together in your own way so that you know and take responsibility for what you think, how you judge, what you value, and can defend it and be accountable for it as really your own life of the mind rather than one borrowed from others or from the culture at large. We help you to put yourself back together again around, a mindset, a spirituality, your own spirituality.

Thirdly, your Jesuit graduate education has operated on the principle that you learn as much by contact as by concept. The only kind of knowledge which lasts, which sticks, which does not get sloughed off in the summer is a learning which applies concept to contact and revises concept by contact. This contact is with people: communities, persons other than, or different from, you whether economically, racially, experientially, or socially. The interplay of concept and contact—moving both ways—is a key to Jesuit education. It leads not only to learning that sticks, but also to commitment that empowers.

Finally, Jesuit education is not complete until it is used, until it is applied, until it becomes service. We do not hold—especially at the graduate level—that you do this only after you graduate. We believe you chose us in the first place because you were already applying knowledge to issues and using your competence in service. It might seem obvious that anyone would apply their education to the major issues of the day. However, I am amazed how often with the complex and controversial issues of the day—ranging from race, economy, and gender; to environment, migration, and public education; to government, politics, and peace—the stances people take show little sign of application of the education in which they have invested. A Jesuit

education not only has as its goal your involvement in the major issues of the day, but seeks that you bring to those issues the whole of your education of having been intellectually roughed up for life, having put yourself back together again in your own way, and having deepened your knowledge and your commitment through the interplay of concept and contact.

Those are the key aims of a Jesuit education. I thought it would be good on the day of your graduate commencement from Seattle University to let you in on the principles upon which your education has operated, our secret Jesuit sauce. Keep it secret! Don't tell anyone; just do it. Thanks.