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Freshman Convocation Ceremony Speech

Class of 2016



Losing Sight of the Shore

Robert G. Frank, Ph.D.
21st President of the University of New Mexico
Freshman Convocation Ceremony - Class of 2016

August 19, 2012

Welcome, everyone, to The University of New Mexico, home of the Lobos.

It is an honor to have the opportunity to speak to the Class of 2016 today, not only as your UNM President, but also as someone who was once sitting where you now are as a freshman.

Losing Sight of the Shore

French author and Nobel Prize winner André Gide has been attributed with saying that one cannot discover new lands unless one has the courage to lose sight of the shore.

The beauty of this metaphor is that although we are at the center of a landlocked state, we can still relate to the significance of the familiar shores in our lives and the comfort in keeping them close while we test deeper waters, feeling nervous if we sense a shift in the current or lose a recognizable point of orientation...kind of like that feeling you get when you realize you've left your iPhone at home. I recognize that this is a big transition and a crucial year – for both students and their families. As a parent, I also recognize that we have to have faith in our children, that we have instilled in them the values and strength to be successful and independent thinkers.



I want to ask you a question today...Do you have the courage to lose sight of the shore? Your being here, and being a Lobo, indicates that you probably do.

Lobo Words to Live By

Today we took a pledge together – you as the very first UNM freshman class to do so, and I as the first UNM President to take it with you. So as we push away from the familiar together, let's explore this promise.

Lead with courage and integrity

This involves making choices. You are here at UNM, and not at some other university, so you have made a choice.

To lead with courage involves living in a state of possibility. You will be experiencing times of stress and transition, of exhilaration, and of contemplation. It takes courage to learn something new, to stand up for something in which you believe, and to take on the challenges of everyday life. Most of all it takes courage to take chances, to make mistakes, and even to succeed.

To lead with integrity is to consistently make decisions and take action based on certain core ethical values. Those who lead with integrity have the courage of their convictions to “walk their talk” and have the potential to make exceptional contributions to the world and our future.

Open our minds to the diversity of people and ideas that surround us

We all look forward to the energy, distinctive perspectives, and good ideas that you will bring to UNM.

I encourage you to engage with and to enjoy the diversity of this community with an open heart and mind. Make an effort to get to know your fellow students, the faculty and the staff here at your new home. They come from all backgrounds, and they come from all over the world. You will find that they are friendly, approachable, and eager to learn from you and share what they know.

Challenge yourself to get out of your comfort zone. Choose classes and activities not only because you know you are good at or have an affinity for them - choose the ones that ignite your imagination and ambition. If you are from Illinois, take a class on Latin-American history, world culture, or our solar system. If you are a science whiz, take a poetry class. If you are a musician, take a class in global climate change.

If you only go with your strengths, you will continue to be the wonderful person that you are today. But at UNM, we think you can do better than that. If you want to really succeed, you must put yourself in awkward and challenging positions once in a while.



Be engaged in our community, making a difference in the lives of others

Be part of the community around you – a part of this diverse and singular campus. Reach out to people, make new friendships, become a student leader, access new opportunities, and embrace your college experience.

Commit to the service and spirit of caring about this community. Volunteer; mentor; lend a hand, an ear or a shoulder; or simply remember to recycle. If we all give a little bit, the impact can be great and long-lasting.

When you see my wife Janet or me around campus during the year—or in years to come—please say hello and introduce yourselves. In fact, try to say hello to someone at least once a day...to that person, that connection might just make a significant difference. Although we are a large community....maybe because we are such a large community....it is important that we put in the extra effort to get to know each other.

Own our future, through the pursuit of academic and personal excellence

Amidst the challenges and triumphs you will encounter here at UNM, there is still a lot of undeveloped and unexplored territory. Ask yourself, is there any uncharted territory that I have not yet explored? Or maybe something that has been explored before, but it is still not fully developed. Whatever the case, your time here at UNM is a chance for you to, not only discover and grow both personally and academically, but even to make your mark on history.

College is what YOU put into it. Determine your goals, identify your aspirations and work to meet them. If you look ahead to your time here at UNM, you are looking at more than 10,000 hours – so what will you do within that time?

My biggest hope is that each and every one of you will excel here and that we will celebrate your graduation in just a few short years. You are starting down a path to become important contributors to the communities in which you will live and work.

A Word to Parents

To the parents and other family members here this afternoon: sending a son or daughter to college is a major transition for most families, as it is for the students. Take it from someone who has only recently completed the adventure of parenting two college kids—you will continue to be a significant part of your student's life at UNM. You are the shores to which they will often return.

Though it may be difficult at times, try hard to let your student navigate uncharted waters and find ways to solve their problems for themselves. They will make mistakes, but usually they will be stronger and more resilient for having addressed and resolved their challenges. Let them look for new points of orientation and return from their adventures with exciting tales of discovery and enthusiasm for the next journey.



Out of sight is definitely not out of mind. Staying in touch is easier than ever in this day of rapidly expanding technology – text, tweet, skype..., even write a letter.

And please stay in touch with UNM - follow us on Twitter, become a fan on Facebook. Come back to campus for Parents Weekend and Homecoming if you can.

As You Walk Out as Lobos

So, Class of 2016, together, we can ensure that your years at UNM are a time of positive growth and learning. As our newest students you are now part of a worldwide family that represents the cherry and silver of UNM.

I have asked you, and I encourage you to ask yourselves, do I have the courage to lose sight of the shore? To break paradigms and blaze my own trail. To try, to fail and to adjust...over and over and over. To let go of what I know in order to find new ways of doing things. Remember, you've got more than 10,000 hours....

We can only benefit from new experiences and adventures, no matter how scary they may be (try being a first time University President).

In the days and weeks ahead, remember that you are not alone here. You are part of UNM, and there are many people who are committed to helping you succeed. Don't hesitate to ask for help or advice when you need it.

Some of the greatest lessons you will learn are those that you can't get out of a book, and the are waiting for you outside this door.

LOBO Pledge

Go Lobos!



I will...

Lead with courage and integrity

Open my mind to the diversity of people and ideas that surround me

Be engaged in my community, making a difference in the lives of others

Own my future, through the pursuit of academic and personal excellence

I will take pride in The University of New Mexico

I am a Lobo!