

Commencement Remarks
President Jerry MacArthur Hultin

June 1, 2009

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen; faculty; Trustees; our valedictorian, Richeng Zheng; President of New York University, John Sexton; and Honorary Degree recipients.

Welcome to the 154th Commencement Ceremony of Polytechnic.

Graduates—it is a pleasure to be here to celebrate this day with you and your family and friends. On behalf of the faculty, administration, and trustees—I offer our heartfelt congratulations for your success.

Every graduating class is special in its own right, but today we are particularly proud of the Class of 2009—the very first graduates of the Polytechnic Institute of **New York University**.

The alumni of this Institute—a group you are now part of—have accomplished great things in the service of this city, our country, and society as a whole... in the fields of science... engineering... management... and research... and they literally changed the world.

And this week, the world is watching with awe and pride as America's promise of opportunity is again confirmed, not once, but twice. Two women of color, both raised by single mothers in the housing projects of New York's boroughs—one educated at Princeton and Yale Law—my alma mater, too—the other at Polytechnic and Columbia—are rising to the top of America's judicial and corporate ladders.

One is Judge Sonia Sotomayor and the other is Polytechnic's own, Ursula Burns, the new CEO of Xerox.

Ursula Burns, Poly class of 1980—mechanical engineering—is the first African-American woman to lead a Fortune 100 corporation. Upon graduation, Ursula began her career at Xerox as an intern. Here's the latest *Business Week* featuring CEO Burns on its cover! Well done, Ursula Burns!

But we at NYU-Poly can only take so much credit for your success that we celebrate today. So before I go further, let us thank those who helped make this possible.

Parents, spouses and partners, family members and friends, will you please stand up...

Now graduates, I'd like you also to stand up... and honor those who have loved and supported you throughout your life.

Let me also take a moment to ask you to join me in paying tribute to our dedicated faculty—the heart of this great institute. Will the faculty please stand to be recognized and honored!?

Perhaps, whether you entered Poly four years ago, as I did, or in the years that followed, it was with a small amount of fear of what lay ahead. Not just about starting college at Poly but also concern about the world in which we lived.

In 2005, in Iraq, we were troubled by the lack of progress and mounting deaths. Then we were rocked by the next round of terrorist bombings in London. Eight months after the tsunami that flattened the coast of Indonesia and killed thousands, we were devastated by Hurricane Katrina and our inadequate response.

But it's also the year that we saw a "Return to Flight" with the space shuttle Discovery's successful mission. Following the tragedy of the space shuttle Columbia in 2003, this was NASA's first space shuttle flight in over two years—and on this return to space was Poly's own astronaut-engineer, Dr. Charles Camarda, Class of 1974.

Today Dr. Camarda is a Distinguished Engineer in Residence, on loan to Polytechnic from NASA. Here at Polytechnic, Dr. Camarda is working with our faculty and students to add innovation and invention to our programs.

Now, here we are in 2009—and perhaps you have new feelings of anxiety as you prepare to leave Polytechnic and meet new and different challenges.

Much of the world's economy is on its knees... foreclosures have rocked Main Street and nearly 100 thousand jobs have been lost on Wall Street.

The automobile industry—which employed both of my grandfathers and many of my high school classmates—is a shadow of itself.

Climate and environmental concerns permeate societies around the world and global population growth—from nearly 7 billion today to 9 billion in thirty years—seems unsustainable.

And here in NYC, we have a flu pandemic that may rise from this summer's respite to strike more harshly this fall.

I am reminded of President John F. Kennedy's commencement address in 1962 at Yale. President Kennedy was remarking on the times and changes witnessed by past Yale graduates and he said of the past,

“Their age is not our age. As every past generation has had to disenthral itself from an inheritance of truisms and stereotypes, so in our time we must move on from the reassuring repetition of stale phrases to a new, difficult, but essential confrontation with reality.”

“A new, difficult, but essential confrontation with reality.” Now, compared to President Kennedy's time, it seems new challenges appear with the frequency of the daily newspaper—or the political and scientific blogs.

I am convinced you will adapt to these new challenges and changes; in President Kennedy's words you will "*disenthral yourself from the truisms and stereotypes of the past.*" And to paraphrase President Obama: "Yes, you can!"

I am sure you will join us to invent and innovate in Polytechnic's spirit of i^2e .

On our campus, this year Poly students formed their own chapter of Engineers without Borders and two members of our faculty designed a new curriculum that features i^2e . In Poly's incubators in Brooklyn and Manhattan, we created new companies and jobs using science and technology. In India, I met with graduate students who were passionate about using their education to reducing poverty and improving the environment.

This past year, we held our second Inno/Vention Contest with students inventing technological breakthroughs with marvelous creativity.

Our faculty held symposia to explore, to name just a few: wireless hospitals, medical imagining, and bio-ethics; economic bubbles, financial risk; smart buildings, safe levees, and intelligent communities; and sponsored a concert by the co-inventor of the Moog Synthesizer.

This coming year, we are investing new resources from our affiliation with NYU toward expanding our faculty, improving our laboratories, funding new research, and drawing students from across the nation and around the world. By 2010, we will be teaching our first engineering students at NYU's new campus in Abu Dhabi.

This coming year, we will increase the focus of our scientific and technological research, here and abroad, with an emphasis on the future of cities, managing technology and financial risk, better healthcare, more efficient and secure information technology, and opening our \$2 million Center for Innovation in Technology and Entertainment in the Dibner building.

Certainly the world is searching for solutions. Indeed, with a world so broken, you have wider latitude to make your own opportunities and create your own solutions!

Fortunately you, as NYU-Poly graduates, are well-prepared to offer solutions. In this rapidly changing world, the best answers will come from what you know best: technology, engineering, and applied sciences... enhanced with a strong dose of i²e.

Finally, as the first graduating class of NYU-Poly, the Class of 2009 will hold a unique place in our 155 year history. No pressure there!!

Come back to Polytechnic to recharge your batteries and retool your skills. I encourage you all to stay connected with NYU-Poly by becoming active alumni and checking in on our progress—we're on Facebook! You can even Twitter me with your progress!!

As our merger with New York University moves forward, I'm confident you will be impressed by what your alma mater will accomplish in the next few years.

And, as we are proud of Polytechnic students and graduates since 1854 who have changed the world—as we are proud of Ursula Burns who became Xerox's CEO this week—I know in the coming years, we will be equally proud of you... and you... and you... and every one of you.

Again, on behalf of the staff, faculty, and Board of Trustees, I offer each of you congratulations and our best wishes.

Now go out there! Take on the world!! And make us proud!!!