

Ramen Noodles for ND POLS Graduation Celebration

Dan Lindley

May 17, 2009

1. Welcome to the Political Science class of 2009! A day when Notre Dame honors what you have learned and how much you have grown since you arrived here. We give you a degree to certify your educational and intellectual accomplishments, and to send you on to make your way in the world.
2. (Somber.) Last year when I gave this speech, and despite the fact we were in two wars, graduates were pretty much unconstrained in the choices available to them. But this is much more somber year because of the economy. Some of you have had a very hard time finding jobs, some have no jobs.
3. It is easy, and true, to say that you are among the best students in the world at one of the best universities in the world. That is a great privilege, a call to service, and it gives you more options and more power over your life than almost any graduate in the world. But it was hard to think of what to say to you today.
4. I was tempted to say that in times like this, there is “only one course of action open: total commitment” But that is a Dr. S quote, and thus a joke, and should we joke in times like this? Maybe we should, maybe we especially should.

Or not.

5. So I began to think that each generation has defining characteristics, and some even gain names like Generation X, MTV Generation and so forth. Because of the economy, in a single new class, YOU, you are a new generation.
6. So what generation are you?
7. Let me consult the Star Trek oracle....
8. (not somber) I hereby dub you the Ramen Noodle generation. Far from being somber, I am here to celebrate, cherish, and cheer on the Ramen Noodlers!!!!
9. Why would I name you the RN Generation? And what is there to celebrate about the Ramen Noodle?
10. Let us consider the characteristics of the Ramen Noodle.
 - a. Globalization. RN's were on the cutting edge of globalization. Not too long ago, the RN pretty much WAS the Asian section of the supermarket. And now you can get fresh sushi (and I wouldn't want it any other way) at the local supermarket here in South Bend!
 - i. And if it wasn't clear before the economic crisis, the world's economies are tightly enmeshed in a globalized world. Your jobs and the environment you live in will in crucial ways intersect with and depend on our globalized world. (wave the RNs)

Uphold the legacy of your role model: Ramen Noodlers: go forth, conquer, and do good.

ii. Also, Globalization highlights cultural diversity. Again, the RN was on the cutting edge in this department. Like I said, the RN helped bring Asian food to America, often the first “foreign” (aka non-European) food many of us enjoyed. Now there are Thai, Indian, Ethiopian, and many other sorts restaurants. (wave the RNs) Uphold the legacy of your role model: Ramen Noodlers: In this globalized world, go forth and cherish cultural diversity.

b. Portability. The RN is a complete meal in a small package. Wonderful. It moves with ease in a backpack, pocket, lunchbox. And in this globalized world and this economy, people increasingly have to build skill sets that move from job to job, and this movement seems to be occurring at increasing rates. Many of you will have to confront portability and turbulence as you progress professionally. Just remember that you are the RN generation, and you will move forward with aplomb..

c. Tough and resilient. The RN is tough and resilient. After all, if there is ever a disaster, don't you want a case of these babies in your basement? These times call for toughness and resilience. You have no choice. And it's not such a bad thing. When I started at ND, it was

still the pre-9/11 Clinton boom/ dot com bubble.

Students came to ND, graduated, and it was easy just to go off and quickly climb a lofty career path. Which is great in many ways. But you will be a tougher and more resilient generation right from the get go. The school of hard knocks is knocking, and that is not so bad. I salute your resilience and consequent wisdom.

- d. But what is the number one characteristic of the RN? They are cheap!!!! 20 cents! (carbon footprint??) You can live for much cheaper than you may have imagined. Which is wonderfully liberating. So you can't get the professional track job right out? Well do some service and eat Ramens. Work or intern in Washington or elsewhere for a cause you believe in, and eat Ramens while living in a group house. The RN generation is liberated in several ways. As more typical tracks are harder to obtain, necessarily you have to explore tracks you may not have imagined. And in fact, more students than ever before are thinking about service or graduate school. That is liberating. And if you are willing to eat Ramens and live cheaply you have tons of great options that will open even more doors down the road, or teach you life skills. If you eat Ramens, you can pay off your debts more quickly or avoid them altogether.
- e. The bottom line is this: If these tough times teach you to live cheaply you will gain enormous power over your life.

- f. In sum, you are the Ramen Noodle generation. (Wave noodles). You will embrace globalization, you will cherish cultural diversity, you will be portable, you will be tough and resilient, or you will have a harder time reaching your potential. Crises represent both danger and opportunity. And if these times teach you to live cheaply, you will gain great control over your life, and enjoy more choices and options. Oddly enough, you have more choices and options than those that came before. Which is simply wonderful.

- g. Hat's off to the RN generation (applause).