

PRGS GRADUATION SPEECH – JUNE 12, 2010
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Good morning. As the student speaker, I've been asked to talk a little bit about who we are and what PRGS is all about.

We are a collection of unique and diverse individuals. We come from every part of the globe representing North and South America, Europe, Asia and Africa. Some of us came to PRGS straight as an undergrad, some with a graduate degree and others with significant work experience. Our backgrounds are varied and we have a wide range of interests. Where else but at PRGS would you find dissertations ranging from erectile dysfunction to counterinsurgency? And to give a little shout out to all of us who've worked so hard get to where we are today, I'd like to briefly mention the other topics our dissertations cover including inter-generational living arrangements, military training and personnel, flood management in New Orleans, social networking, obesity, international relations, public-private partnerships, older workers, innovation in transitioning economies, Hispanic health, teen moms, fuel efficiency, pharmaceuticals, child care, AmeriCorp volunteers, strategic decision making, and educational achievement gaps.

As individuals we have come together to form a community here at PRGS. And it, too, is unique. Unlike other academic institutions, we foster collaboration, not competition. There is room for everyone to succeed. When I came to PRGS, it was as a practicing attorney used to working with words, not numbers. That I am standing here on this stage about to get my PhD today is a testament to the support I received from my fellow classmates. I can honestly say that I wouldn't be here if it weren't for them.

We are also unique in that we aren't confined to learning in an academic ivory tower. Part of the PRGS experience is working with RAND researchers on real projects. Through our work we've already started changing the world. We've improved awareness of teen depression, combated terrorism by mapping Jihadist networks and helped saved the environment by developing innovative approaches to water efficiency.

But we are not all work—we also like to play. Whether it is our Fridays at Five happy hours, beach volleyball, playing darts at the local pub or just hanging out in the student lounge watching TV and eating pizza after a particularly long study session.

So that's a little bit about who we are. What is it we've been trained to do? In a nut shell: We've been trained to seek and to speak the truth. To quote the novelist Leo Tolstoy, "Truth, like gold, is to be obtained by washing away all that is not gold." That's what we do. Using rigorous analytic techniques, we wash away the muck and the mire of prejudice, political rhetoric and ignorance, leaving a shiny nugget of truth.

But part of our training has also been to recognize the limitations of the nuggets we uncover. We are honest and clear about what our analysis says and, more importantly, about what it doesn't and can't say. We don't make grandiose claims that the nugget of truth we've uncovered provides a complete answer, or even the only answer, to question

we are asking. To paraphrase the writer Anais Nin: You don't receive the complete truth by instant illumination. Instead, it is acquired fragment by fragment, like building a mosaic.

Through our training we've also learned to avoid the pitfall of allowing an agenda to drive our analysis so we don't confuse the search for truth with the pursuit of political power. Although we all have our biases and opinions, we put those aside and let the data tell us what it has to say not the other way around.

Finally, in speaking the truth, we've been trained to make it relevant and accessible. Knowing a truth isn't enough. You have to communicate it in a way that is tailored for the audience so they want to hear what you have to say.

What will we do with all the training we've received? We will be artists, using data as a medium and the tools of economic, statistical and policy analysis to build a truth mosaic over the course of our careers that will stand the test of time.

But we will also be warriors. On a quest for knowledge not power, we will battle against the partisan analysis that pervades politics today and expose the clever sound bites and polarizing rhetoric for the fool's gold of truth that it is.

As with all artists and warriors, however, we can be obsessively single-minded in our pursuit, working on weekends and late into the night. I'm sure my husband isn't the only one here who's heard: Just 15 more minutes—only to have me arrive home several hours later. So to help us all remember what's important in life, I'd like to close with my favorite poem about what success really is.

Success:

*To laugh often and much;
To win the respect of intelligent people
and the affection of children;
To earn the appreciation of honest critics
and endure the betrayal of false friends;
To appreciate beauty, to find the best in others;
To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child,
a garden patch or a redeemed social condition;
To know even one life has breathed easier because you have
lived.
This is to succeed.*

May we all experience such success.