



Address at the Belen Jesuit Preparatory School Graduation Ceremony

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on May 23, 2018**





Office of the President
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

This speech was presented to Belen Jesuit Preparatory School's Graduating Class of 2018 on May 22, 2018.

Good afternoon! What a joyous occasion. It is an honor to be with you here! Thank you for the invitation.

Thank you Father Garcia-Tuñon. We missed you so much when you were gone. We are thrilled that you are back! Father Willy is special in many way, but he is the first graduate of Belen in Miami to lead Belen.

To the faculty and professional staff of Belen – congratulations to you. Your dedication to your mission is exemplary. You honor the Ignatian tradition of excellence and commitment to justice.

I see so many friends here this afternoon. Special greetings to my friend and former Vice Chair of our FIU Board of Trustees, Jorge Arrizurieta!

Congratulations to Alec who essentially grew up at FIU! I know that you will enjoy Tallahassee!

At FIU, we are so proud of our connection to Belen! I want to congratulate the three dozen young men graduating who will be attending our FIU. From Wolverines to Panthers – sounds like something out of a recent movie!

This year, we are graduating from FIU over 60 Belen graduates – all of whom have a Worlds Ahead education.

Class of 2018 – this is the day that you, your families, your abuelas and abuelos have been waiting for! This is a day that you will never forget – your graduation from Belen!

Do you realize that today is likely the last day that you will all be together as a group?! Savor these moments. And as you face forward – each and every one of you will next take a special journey, as you get closer and closer to the adulthood of your parents, your faculty, and older brothers and sisters.

Your education at Belen both in and out of the classroom has given you special preparation, special opportunities to do well in life's journey!

At a recent graduation, one student had a sign on her graduation cap – “Can I be excused for the rest of my life?” Meaning hey – no more classes, ever. But this is the fast-paced 21st century! High tech is accelerating things. The world is at your fingertips. Knowledge is exploding. Guess what? Learning is now life-long.

Class – this next step is but one more in a journey of learning and growth that will never end. Parents and loved ones – understand this: like your graduate, you may want to be excused from classes forever, but learning will never stop. I know that you have great habits of learning – if not, you would not be graduating today from Belen – one of the most highly regarded schools anywhere in the world.

I must tell you that this year has been very difficult – one of the most challenging ever for our FIU community. Hurricanes Maria and Irma? We became a shelter for nearly 500 homeless people from the Keys. Then, we gave refuge to over 100 souls on dialysis from the Virgin Islands. Parkland impacted over 100 students attending or about to attend FIU. And the 8th street bridge accident is a tragedy that will never be forgotten. An instance where something intended to be so good becomes a nightmare from which you cannot awake. Our thoughts still linger on those lives lost and the continuing pain of the families involved.

Lessons can be learned young men. You learn so much in times of difficulty and pain. So let me share with you three elements that can help you on your journey. Just three –

1) Have high expectations of yourselves. Know your values. Understand your strengths and weaknesses. Understand that you have privileges and opportunities that most people your ages in the world do not have.

At FIU – we challenge our students to be Worlds Ahead – to do something great with what they are given. Honoring G-d, committing to your faith, and promoting justice are foundational to you. That is where your journey begins – but how it takes shape is in your hands.

2) Understand that there are no short-cuts. Everyone wants to be on the fast-track. But truth is, there are many lonely moments along the way. You build from the base. A strong foundation is invaluable, that is why it is important that you continue to get a very strong education – one that gives you critical thinking skills and one that gives you the competencies – both in relationship building, and in hard skills that will be necessary to carry you through the challenges that life’s journey brings. Take responsibility. People will notice. And by the way, good listening is a key quality that most of us lack. Become a good listener and you will go far.

3) So – high expectations, no short-cuts, and finally give respect! You want respect, you gotta give respect. Do not be quick to judge. Do not assume too much. Walk a mile in someone else’s shoes. Give comfort. Use your gifts and talents to create a more just and humane world. Build community with a foundation of respect. I promise you – what goes around, comes around.

I have every confidence in you Class of 2018. I am so encouraged by your values, your aspirations, and the promise of tomorrow largely because of the special experience you have had here at Belen.

So congratulations, Wolverines! Congratulations to you and your families.

The world will be a better place with your active participation.

Now go out and make your fellow classmates, your families, your church and your school proud.

Let’s go!