Graduation Day Constants

There are some constants to an FIU graduation no matter where it is held: happy students, proud administrators and faculty, satisfied parents, and a unity of purpose that is rejuvenating.

So it was this Sunday, May 18, at the Tianjin University of Commerce, our cooperative partner at our Marriott program in Hospitality and Tourism Management in Tianjin, China. (Tianjin is one of the country’s larger cities at 14 million people.)

Huang JieFie was the class valedictorian. She confidently delivered her class speech as if she were an accomplished English-speaking orator. Chaplin School of Hospitality and Tourism Management Dean Mike Hampton sported a wall-to-wall smile throughout the ceremony, as if he had personally given birth to each and every one of that glorious day’s graduates. Our FIU faculty were equally happy and formed the ritual greeting line as their charges left the stage with their diplomas in hand.
President Rosenberg presides over FIU graduation in Tianjin, China.

Annie Wu Suk-ching receives the FIU Medallion for her significant leadership in the Chinese hospitality industry.

Graduates pose for their class photo.

Then there was Annie Wu Suk-ching, who received the FIU Medallion for her significant leadership in the Chinese hospitality industry. Her request to graduates to get involved in their communities resonated – given her path-breaking leadership for more than three decades helping underprivileged communities throughout China. I will never forget the happiness and pride of countless parents and family members who asked to take a picture with me after the ceremony in the energized plaza fronting the graduation hall.

TUC President Liu Shuhan maintained his traditional reserve throughout, but I don’t think that I have ever seen a more satisfied look on his face than this graduation day. Perhaps it was relief at the culmination of our tenth anniversary of joint operations. Or perhaps it was the satisfaction that this graduation was his last given his pending retirement from active university leadership. We can never know how many hurdles he had to jump with the Chinese bureaucracy to make the FIU presence on his campus a reality.

Another program founder, Vice Mayor Wang, carried himself as stoutly as ever. The charismatic politico/academic/visionary uncharacteristically stuck to his script during the actual commencement but he clearly enjoyed plunging into the gaggle of graduates as they assembled for the traditional post ceremony group photo.
This commencement, like the hundreds that have graduated our 200,000 degree holders had its legions of unsung heroes — the honest workers who designed, staged and managed the event themselves. Too many names to mention here but certainly incredible professionals, including Dai Hui, Shu Fang, Lu Peng, Kevin Nie and Dania Rivero, Breny Garcia, Mike Asencio and our friend and FIU graduate Derek Capo, among many others.

Other unsung heroes of this graduation include the dozens of blue-suit ushers — first-year students who volunteered to help with the occasion only to understand that they too would soon be graduating themselves. I include “Sierra,” the shy, young first-year student whom I coaxed to tell me that she wanted to be a hotel manager when she graduated in three years. She unexpectedly lit up our “selfie” with an incredible smile, which had been preceded by a studied, much too serious countenance.

These constants of our latest graduation in China, underlie our passion for the life of the mind and our commitment to those students and family members who trust their future to our FIU and its dedicated professors, professional staff and board volunteers. Moments that give us a sense of purpose and mercifully transcend nationality and citizenship to bring us together as one. Priceless.