

Class speaker: American dream the great reward for great work, support

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<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/15900/class-speaker-american-dream-the-great-reward-for-great-work-support/>

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh supply-chain management graduate and Chancellor's Excellence Award winner Marian Rothkegel ?????offered the following remarks as student speaker during the University's 47th Midyear Commencement on Dec. 17, 2011.

Good morning, and thank you Chancellor Wells. Good morning, Provost Earns, faculty, family, friends and especially my fellow graduates!

As you heard in my introduction, I am an international student, which has some unique challenges... especially when playing UNO: You're always being accused of stealing the green card. Well, this is not the only challenge I have faced, and of course, you have all encountered difficulties on the way to graduation day too. But we will all be facing many more obstacles on the road to living the American Dream, which is not just a belief or an idea that international students are striving for.

Today, December 17, 2011, all of you are living the American Dream. Look at what you have accomplished, look at all the sacrifices you had to make to get this spot, right here in Kolf Sports Center: some of you had to overcome the challenges of being a single parent, others lost loved ones, and some had to work three jobs to be able to pay for tuition.

But what is the American Dream all about? Is it becoming a successful businessperson, a good teacher, a caring nurse or a curious geographer? Let me tell you: It is absolutely everything that you set your mind to. When I first entered the College of Business, Dr. Godfrey told me: "With hard work comes great reward." He was so right. And that, my fellow graduates, is the key to the American Dream. And all of you must have lived by this philosophy, because otherwise you would not be here today.

But graduation is not just being and sitting here today; it was not just taking exams and working on group projects and papers. Graduation began from the very beginning when you came to UW Oshkosh and started studying: When you moved into those dorms, when you made small talk with your professor, when you joined the various clubs and made of all these memories that nobody can ever take away from you.

Thank your family, your friends, your professors and the entire staff here at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. No matter how hard we tried, no matter how hard we worked; it would not have been possible without the support during our endeavor. Whether it was an "I love you" or "let me give you a long distance hug" or simply "get off your rear end;" we each have experienced true support from so many people. I am sure that all of us have been in a situation where we would just want to bang our head against a wall. I can clearly remember these days: Oh, the term paper is due the same day we have our

final, and two other professors had the same fantastic idea. At this point I would also like to thank all coffee growers and manufacturers of energy drinks.

Remember though, you always had somebody to rely on. And as you move forward from this graduation day, honor the connections that you made over the past couple of years. The business students know exactly what I am talking about when I mention “networking!”

Despite the fact that we spend several years here learning about material requirements planning, geographic information systems, advanced human anatomy or early childhood education: Often, it is not only what you know, but also who you know; and the quality of those significant and supportive relationships is vital to our continued pursuit of the American Dream. As a UW Oshkosh graduate, you have a one of a kind support network. And you will need this support in the future, because on Monday, you will be a freshman again: in the school of life.

Use your strengths and skills, whether you are from Oshkosh, somewhere in the Midwest, other parts of the US or even a different country: Dream big, because UW Oshkosh has equipped you with the tools and supportive connections to live this dream.

A dream that I am able to live now, because about five years ago, I broke my thigh, my shin, my hip and injured my spine during a skiing accident. I had to leave officer school in Germany; I had no further education and no clue what was going to happen next. After many surgeries and a lengthy recovery, I decided to come back to the United States, where I had spent a year as a foreign exchange student during high school. As Chancellor Wells mentioned it in the introduction, I literally arrived with two suitcases, a scholarship, tremendous support from my family and friends and the will to live the American Dream, right here, at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. Today, I have the privilege of moving forward into a position working at the NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, managing multimillion dollar operations.

Graduates, I know each one of you has a story to tell, a story that includes struggle and support, a story that has led you to this point of your own American Dream, and that dream will lead you forward into opportunities of leadership and service. As graduates of UW Oshkosh, we are a phenomenal group of connected people.

As you leave this place, diploma in hand, imagining what we can accomplish, remember the words of Margaret Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Congratulations, graduates!

- [1,000 graduates to be recognized at Dec. 17 Commencement](#)
- [Alumna, conflict resolution leader honored Dec. 17](#)