

## **Keynote speaker: Rehearsal is over; life begins**

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<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/2731/keynote-speaker-rehearsal-is-over-life-begins/>

Roy Hogle, chair of the theatre department at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, delivered the commencement address at the University's morning commencement ceremony May 15.

Here is the transcript of his speech:

"It was 1976 when I sat where you do now. I, too, thought that I had accomplished quite a bit in my time at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. I had completed my B.S. in art with an honors exhibition in the Priebe Art Gallery. I had been a tap-dancing sailor in the theatre program's production of 'Anything Goes.' I sang in several music concerts in the Music Hall through the music department's choral groups. I performed in three dance concerts through the University Modern Dance Club, Terpsichore.

"I studied, as you have, all of the necessary courses in humanities and the sciences, including a geology field trip that took me along the Klondike Gold Rush route through Glacier Park to Dawson City in the Yukon and, eventually, to McKinley Park in Alaska, where I developed a close relationship with the largest mosquitoes in the world.

"I also studied theater, which provided the opportunity for two trips to London, exposing me to European cultures, and one New Year's Eve, I spent the first hours of the new year in the top bowl of the main fountain in Trafalgar Square with a broad range of international colleagues — until they turned the fountains on.

"But when I sat where you do now in May of 1976, I didn't realize that those previous four years and the many experiences during that time were just rehearsals for what was to be my most important performances in my life: as a professor, designer, artist, family member and member of the community. This parallel between theatre and life has existed as long as theater itself. Socrates believed that the tragedies and comedies were not merely on the stage, but that they were reflected in life

"In theater, the rehearsal process is one of the most important elements in the production process, yet the audience is never aware of how valuable it is. You, too, are like members of a cast. You were chosen for your roles by a knowledgeable group of advisers and admissions professionals who, much like stage directors, brought you into the production when you were accepted in the University.

"Once here, much like the new actor, you had many things to learn. You first had to acquaint yourself with the other members of the cast, your colleagues, your roommates, those whom you would be spending long, and at times difficult, hours with.

"Early in the rehearsal process is the 'read through' of the script. This can be an awkward time and can almost seem clumsy, much like the first few months you were a student on campus. Getting lost, trying to find your classroom, asking what to you may have seemed like such silly questions. Maybe you felt those

directors just cast the wrong person for the role you were about to play.

“At some point, the actor must have all of his or her lines memorized or, as it is known in theater, being ‘off book.’ The actor’s work is not done at this point. In fact, as any director will tell you, that’s when the rehearsal really begins! It is now when the director can move you around the stage to all of the important locations in order to give three-dimensional legitimacy to your character.

“While going through this rehearsal process you were guided by experts. In theater, these would be the director, vocal coach, dialects coach, choreographer, dramaturge. For you as a student, it may have been your second or third year, guided by professors, counselors, and advisers. It is when you realized this is where you belong and you felt a comfort level with the environment and a trust with the faculty and your colleagues.

“And, most important, perhaps without even realizing it, you were becoming part of an ensemble. John Kander, Broadway composer, stated, ‘There is a kind of classlessness in the theater. The rehearsal pianist, the head carpenter, the stage manager, the star of the show — all are family.

“It is the relationships you develop with all the other members of the production team — your fellow cast and crewmembers, the directors, the team of designers of costumes, scenery, lighting, sound, special effects, and make-up and hair. Because in the world of production, you are not alone — you are part of a team. All members of that team are vital to the success of the production.

“Here on campus, as a student, you also had to develop that ensemble. You had to learn how to live with a challenging roommate, you had to listen to other members of a discussion group, or you had to take a really, really crazy idea for a group project and turn it into a successful undertaking. These experiences, especially the most challenging ones, allowed you to hone your creative problem-solving skills. So it is true with cast members and the development of relationships with other characters in the play.

“The rehearsal process is also the place in which you experiment or take chances. Directors will encourage you, as a cast member, to stretch and push your character. Some decisions you may make regarding your character development are the wrong ones. This is OK because the rehearsal is where you can explore these possibilities and make mistakes. It’s part of the learning process for both students and cast members. No great production was ever created without taking chances.

“The production process moves along until you at last reach the day of dress rehearsal, when the entire cast is in costume and make-up. It may, for some, be the first time all the elements of the production come together, and it can be the most challenging part of the process. As a cast member, you must learn patience and perseverance, and understand that some members of your production team have not had as much rehearsal time as you have. Nonetheless, in a good ensemble you stay focused, knowing that you need to allow for mistakes to be made before you really put what you have learned into practice.

“And, finally, it is time for opening night! The audience, consisting of your strongest supporters and your most discerning critics, arrives and excitedly awaits the performance. The overture is ending, the curtain is about to go up, and the lights will illuminate the stage. The moment that you have all worked for so many weeks has come. For you, as students, this is now the beginning of your first true performance, your career, your life.

“In theater, we have many traditions and superstitions. To wish a cast member good luck in the performance of a role, we use a funny, somewhat contradictory statement, saying, ‘Break a leg.’ Although there are many educated guesses as to the origin of this phrase, I believe the most plausible is that in the Renaissance, if an actor had a good performance, the audience would show their appreciation by applauding. The actors, in return, would show their respect and appreciation for the attentive audience by bowing. Bowing required the actor to place one leg back and bend at the knee. This process caused the actor to ‘break’ the line of the leg. To encourage someone to break a leg was to encourage them to have a successful performance.

“So, on behalf of all of your production team members — those in traditional regalia who sit before you, who have supported you and guided you through your rehearsal process — we ask the cast of 2010 to *break a leg!*”

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