

Following is the transcript for the speech Patrick Belmont gave at Lehigh University's commencement ceremony, May 21, 2007 in Stabler Arena, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Good morning and congratulations,

I will only be speaking for 3 minutes, but in that short time a lot will happen in the world surrounding this stadium. Every the 3 minutes, about 1,000,000 GB of digital information is generated or replicated worldwide. 30,000 tons of carbon dioxide is produced in the frenzy of our global fossil fuel economy and only one third that amount is taken back in by plants. In these 3 minutes, 750 babies will be born...60 children will die without access to basic medical treatment and nutrition. 48,000 people will place an order at McDonald's. Over 15 million shares will be traded on the NASDAQ. The world is a busy place and there is no question that humans are the dominant force shaping it, for better or worse. And I don't mean to understate the importance of the other 15 million species with whom we share this planet.

So in this busy world, what are you going to do? You probably get asked that question a lot these days. But that question doesn't just pertain to the money you are going to make...you're a Lehigh graduate, making money will not be a problem! But how will you make your living? Hopefully you have seen a few examples of how to do great things here at Lehigh. This past year Lehigh's Environmental Initiative developed a new Masters program for proactive Environmental Policy Design. This program is the first of its kind in the nation to consider scientific understanding, technologic feasibility, and human values that drive policy decisions and their impact on the environment that sustains us all. The College of Education implemented an extensive program to enhance teaching and learning in local Bethlehem-area Middle Schools. Members of the English Department worked with Alzheimer's patients at a local assisted-living facility to tell collaborative stories based on imagination rather than memory, tapping in to the patient's often overlooked, but considerable emotional and imaginative capacities. Members of the environmental engineering program helped develop a sustainable process to provide arsenic-safe drinking water to over 150,000 people in remote villages of the Indian subcontinent.

But one question you are not often asked is 'what are you going to undo?' There are plenty of opportunities to make the world a better place by undoing old habits and legacies that hold us back. Undo the political fallacy that you can bomb the world into peace. Undo the economic practices that promote poverty in different parts of the world. The effects of unfair trading regimes hold us all back. Undo inefficient economic paradigms that don't account for costs of environmental degradation and climate change. These costs are real, yet we often attribute to them the only dollar value we know not to be correct...zero. Undo the culture that could live with genocide in Rwanda, the culture that turns its back on Darfur. Undo the culture that only looks to point the finger...only looks for fault elsewhere. Scapegoats abound...solutions take courage, persistence and compassion.

Finding solutions will require us to develop a new perspective. As humans we only think so far into the future and we have very limited appreciation for the effects of our actions. At the same time, we can look at a map and easily delineate a plan for global conservation, economic progress or social prosperity. But I believe the problem and the solution comes when we put those two scales together...sustainable global solutions, carried out 6 and a half billion times over at the scale of you and your life. Right now, that is the challenge before us...that is the responsibility that comes along with being human, not to mention a Lehigh graduate, at this wonderful point in history. I believe this is a challenge we can meet.

So this is a new beginning for you. These are the days when you feel a little lighter...like gravity has released you for a short time. Go do great things...and do them with passion. Things that need undoing...undo them with devotion. Do or undo things in this busy world, whatever you think is best, but act. Indifference is our biggest obstacle to progress. Walk humbly and be sure to smile along the way. I wish you all the best of luck.