**14699, Samuel Rodriguez**

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen

As a graduate and former student in this honor’s program I am here tonight to welcome you into the program and offer you some encouragement and wisdom from my experiences.

The program you’ve been accepted into is unique both in practice and in scope. It is designed to achieve the maximum development of exceptional undergraduate students. Being admitted to this program is a testament to your academic accomplishments up to this point, as well as your involvement in student development activities. Another unique aspect of this program is that it aims to attract students who prefer an interdisciplinary approach and thrive when able to exercise critical thinking. Those attributes tell me that you are committed to learning and growing throughout your entire life. This program will offer you opportunities for expanding your talents and continuing your professional development.

This program will also offer you the opportunity to do independent work and research. It is uniquely designed for students such as you who require and thrive upon greater individual responsibility to achieve. Each of you has your own personal motivation that drives you to strive for the best at all times. That motivation will be encouraged in this program and further developed, as will your leadership capabilities. I can tell you from personal experience that you will receive unprecedented opportunities in this program.

When I was in this program I decided early on that whatever my professors asked of me I would do more. During the time I was in this program I consistently went the extra mile. I did that for many reasons. First, and foremost, it is who I am. I never knew how to do anything half way or even with less than my best effort. For me to do what was required was incomplete effort. To do my best was to go above and beyond the requirements. That is what I encourage each of you to do. The personal satisfaction and professional growth that you experience will follow you throughout your career.

My own commitment and dedication to my education earned me some excellent career opportunities. At one point I was given the opportunity to train professors on the use of computers. I was also able to teach a class to incoming freshman students. This program helped me to work my way up through the ranks in the university. I began as a tutor, then after graduation I became part of the administration. Now I am a full-time faculty member. I built relations with my teachers while I was an honor student in this program who are now my colleagues. Those relationships were a direct product of participating in the honor program.

You are being given a unique and wonderful opportunity by participating in this honor’s program. You will have greater responsibilities but you will also have greater freedoms. I can honestly say that this program was a foundational part of my career journey. I want to encourage each of you to give your all and more to each step of your education. It is, after all, your education. You are not going to college to satisfy your parents or your teachers. This is for you.

You will not be simply given assignments to carry out, books to read and tests to take. You will be mentored and guided throughout your plan and given challenges that will give you the opportunity to grow. You will be able to do independent study in a wide variety of topics that you can help choose. There will be projects to work that you will be able to see through and even supervise from beginning to end.

In addition to your educational opportunities, you will be expected to develop your leadership capabilities and you will be provided guidance and challenges to assist you in that development. By meeting and exceeding the challenges presented to you in this program you will have ample opportunities to reach your greatest potential personally and professionally.

Each of you possesses unique, individual skills and talents in a variety of areas. In this program you will have unique opportunities to develop those skills and talents to their fullest potential. With the individual attention you will receive in this program you will be able to create a plan for beginning your career. But, it will also teach you how to continue your career planning throughout your lives.

Most educational programs teach you how to prepare for a specific career path. Then, if you want to change your career path drastically you have to start over from scratch. With this educational program you will learn how to decide a career path as well as how to plan your journey to any career path. Basically, you will start with your present level as your foundation. Each of you has a different foundation. Each of you has a unique set of skills. Each of you has a unique set of desires. When you combine these unique sets of foundation, skills and desires you can discover a wide variety of career destinations. Add to that the training you will receive in this program and your futures are without limits. Not only can you use this program to help you launch your initial career, but you can use it throughout your career to move within a career path or to change career paths along the way.

There is an old saying that, “If you give a man fish he will eat for a day, but if you teach him how to fish, he will never go hungry.” This honor’s program is along those lines. The professors here will not simply help you prepare for a specific career; they will help you to prepare to go out into the world of work. You will learn how to keep a plan for where you are now, for where you have been, and for where you want to go. One of the greatest things you can develop while still in school is to be a lifelong learner.

That attitude of lifelong learning will serve you no matter what path you choose for life. You will never feel “stuck” because you will always know how to make the necessary changes to move on and you will know how to make the difficult decisions because you have learned the processes of planning, development and decision making under the supervision of professors in school. While you are in this honor’s program you will grow into your best self by the time you graduate and have a better idea of who you want to be and what you want to become.

The greatest success stories in life have been accomplished by people who learned how to flow with life and did more than learn what to do. They learned how to do. If you learn the process, then you can repeat it whenever you need to repeat it.

As I shared earlier, I actually taught professors and freshman as part of my program. I would encourage each of you to aspire to planning projects from beginning to end. Even more, I would encourage you to teach one or more classes. If you know a subject well enough to teach it, then you know it fully. And, if you learn how to teach, then you can teach a variety of subjects because you have learned how to break a subject down into its most simple components to help someone else learn.

This honor’s program made the difference in my career. It made the difference in how I prepared for my career. It made the difference in my career choices and in my career plans for the future. But, I have to say that part of the reason this program made such a difference is because I didn’t just come to school, do my lessons, and pass my tests and graduate. I made a decision that I was going to make the most of the very unique opportunities available in this program.

I encourage each of you to decide what you want from this honor’s program. Set your goals and go after them. Don’t short change yourself. Set your goals high because you can’t rise any higher than you aim. You are all exceptional students. You have already proven that, which is why you were accepted into this program. You have wonderful futures ahead of you because of your natural gifts and talents and the educational foundation you have already earned. The sky is the limit at this point in your life.

Take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to grow to your full potential. I remember being so excited when I first began this program but now that I have graduated and worked in my career for a time, I can see that this program had even greater value than I saw when I was first accepted into the program. You stand on the brink of greatness. Your greatness. The greatness that you can achieve if you allow yourself to grow under the unique tutelage that you will receive as honor students.

Congratulations and good luck in your future.