This is an exciting time in your lives to be sure! We celebrate your achievement while beginning to experience a sense of loss as you prepare to leave us. However, we do not want you to stay one more minute than is necessary as your future work with children and young people is what our work has been about. We want you to get started because we know there will be many fortunate kids who will benefit from your contribution to their lives.

As you depart from us, I want you to carry three important words with you that can serve to keep you grounded through our career.

**Identity**

I want to encourage you to always be aware of what you do. In just a few short weeks, you will no longer be graduate students, but members of the counseling profession. Wear your identity with a sense of pride and humility. You have committed your life to service – helping children and youth in your charge to become all they can be – to enable them to succeed in school and in life. If you were looking for something meaningful to do, you have found it! You will be able to walk away from school everyday and know that what you do is significant and worthwhile.

You won’t always get the recognition you deserve, but you will know that you have entered a noble profession whose only purpose is to help kids on the path of becoming healthy, capable, mature adults. What you will be doing in the years ahead reminds me of a story I recently read about Charles Plumb.

Charles Plumb was a jet fighter pilot in Vietnam. One day in a restaurant, a man came up and said, “You’re Plumb! You were a fighter pilot stationed to the carrier Kitty Hawk. You were shot down.” Charles did not know the man and asked how he knew about him. The man said, “I packed your parachute. I guess it worked.”

As a school counselor, yours will be a supportive role. But it is a critical role in the lives of those who are trying to find their way. And, someday, someone will come up to you and say, “Hey! You were my school counselor! You helped me make a decision that changed my life.” This will be a moment when you will walk away feeling a sense of pride and humility in what you do.

**Integrity**

I want to urge you to remain true to who you are – your beliefs and values. We live in a complicated world with pressures to compromise and make decisions that are not in anyone’s best interest. Recently, I heard a great story about Frank Szymanski. Frank was a football player for Notre Dame in the 1940s. His coach was the legendary Frank Leahy. Frank had been called as a witness in a civil suit in South Bend. While on the stand, the judge asked him if he played for the Notre Dame football team. “Yes, your honor,” answered Frank. “What position do you play,” asked the judge. “Center, your honor,” responded Frank. “How good are you,” the judge wanted to know. Frank squirmed uncomfortably in his seat before finally saying, “Your honor, I’m the best center that ever played for Notre Dame.” After the trial had been recessed for the day, Coach Leahy was perplexed with Frank’s statement that he was the best center ever to play for Notre Dame. He knew Frank to be a modest and unassuming young man. Coach Leahy asked, “What made you make that statement?” Frank blushed and said, “It was really hard, Coach, but I was under oath!”
Here was a young man who knew who he was, and he remained truthful to himself in the midst of pressure. As a school counselor, you will have teachers, parents, administrators, and students wanting something from you. In terms of who you are and what you believe, you will not be able to be all things to all people, but you can be grounded in your beliefs, driven by your values, and true to yourself.

As a school counselor, you will be a role model for children. Who you are and how you behave under pressure is on their radar screen. Many believe that children no longer listen to their parents or significant adults but instead turn to their peers to figure out what to do and how to behave. The fact of the matter is that children look to other children to figure out how to be a kid, but they turn to respected adults to figure out how to be an adult.

You may be the only adult in a child’s life that demonstrates truthfulness, honest, and responsibility. It will be humbling in those moments when you realize that children in your charge were watching to see how you would respond in a particularly difficult situation. When you remain true to who you are, we call this integrity.

**Ingenuity**

Thus far I have talked about what you do and who you are. Now, don’t forget what you can uniquely do! You have been well trained by a competent, caring group of counseling professionals. They are seated all around you in this room. We know you can counsel a child in a difficult spot, consult with a teacher who needs another perspective, coordinate programs that benefit children and youth, teach children skills to succeed, and refer a family for help. We know this because we have watched you do these things.

However, each one of you brings a unique person to the role of a school counselor. Add to your learned skills your sense of creativity, inventiveness, optimism, energy and humor as you help children grow, learn, solve problems and resolve conflicts. There is no one else like you, and you will want to bring your special sense of self to your work.

Now, I want to end with one of my favorite stories told by Reuben Welch in his little book titled *We Really Do Need Each Other*. A group of college students were completing a program together and decided they wanted to bring closure by doing something together. They knew each other, liked each other, had gone through challenges and victories together. They decided to climb to Henniger Flats behind the campus and part way up Mt. Wilson, a hike than normally takes one and one-half hours to complete. So they loaded their backpacks, fixed the sandwiches, heated the hot chocolate, and brought the soft drinks. And, they started up the mountain.

As they made their way up the switchbacks along the trail, it didn’t take long until those who were the fastest and in the best shape were in the front, most were in the middle, and then the woman who was the most out of shape brought up the rear. The guy who was first in this long line snaking up the mountain could look down and see this woman struggling up the mountain. Although he liked to be first, he began to feel like he needed to go down and hike with her. And he did.

As they made their way up the mountain, those at the top would yell down, “Come on up! It’s great up here!” And the woman would yell back, “I don’t think I can.” They would yell, “Just try harder! It’s great up here!” And the woman would respond, “I can’t. I don’t think I can make it.”

The fact is, the group never made it to Henniger Flats.

Fortunately, those in this class didn’t want it to end this way. So they met and decided that they would hike the trail together. Either none of them would go, or they all would go. The day came and they
loaded their backpacks, prepared the sandwiches, heated the hot chocolate, and brought the soft drinks. And, they began the trek up the long trail again.

Only this time, they all made it to the top – together.

You have made it through this program together. You know each other, you like each other, you have experienced challenges and victories together. One or two of you will get jobs right away, and the rest of you will begin to get anxious that you may not find a job. And then you will hear that others have landed positions, and those of you remaining will fear that you will never become a school counselor. Travel this road together. You need not experience this time or your future as school counselors alone.

Once you are employed, stay in contact with each other! Support and help each other when the tough times come. Celebrate the victories! And, don’t forget to stay in touch with us. We are always happy to hear from you.

Finally, I trust that we have helped you prepare for service and leadership in schools and communities through the development of your professional competence and character. Now, it is your turn to help children and young people become all they can be.

Given by William Rowley
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