

President McRobbie, graduating seniors, guests ...

It's an honor for me to be here to deliver today's commencement address.

In deciding what to say, I discovered that the letters of GRADUATION can be rearranged to spell NO DRAG AT IU.

And I hope this anagram proves accurate.

Well, IU has had a lot of famous and accomplished graduates over the years, some of whom have delivered commencement addresses here in the past.

- \* Jane Pauley -- TV journalist
- \* Actor Kevin Kline
- \* NASA's David Wolf, who was aboard four space shuttle missions and had an extended stay on Mir
- \* Sportscaster Dick Enberg
- \* Tavis Smiley -- talk show host and political commentator
- \* Mark Cuban, who owns the Dallas Mavericks
- \* Booker T. Jones of Booker T. and the MG's
- \* Secretary of defense Robert Gates
- \* Wendell Willkie, 1940 Republican presidential candidate

All of these people had what might be called predictable or unsurprising majors. For example, Kevin Kline majored, as you might guess, in Speech and Theatre. Jane Pauley majored in political science.

I'm more intrigued by the IU grads whose majors or degrees were in subjects you might not expect.

So, as is my wont, I've turned some of these more interesting examples into a quiz. I'm going to give you the names of four famous graduates of Indiana University. For each one I'll name four possible subjects in which they may have had their majors or degrees. You tell me which choice is correct.

Now, seniors, I'm not saying your score on this quiz will determine whether or not you receive your degrees today ...  
Let's just say there'll be another graduation opportunity in the future.

Here's #1:

Hoagy Carmichael -- composer, pianist; best known for writing the melody to "Stardust"

He graduated from IU in 1926 with a degree in what?

- a. Mathematics
- b. American Literature

- c. Music Education
- d. Law

[The answer is “d.” Hoagy Carmichael earned a Bachelor of Laws from IU. He actually practiced law for a short time in Indianapolis and Florida before devoting himself full-time to music]

#2

Robert James Waller Jr. -- author of the best-selling novel “The Bridges of Madison County”

He graduated in 1968 with a degree in what?

- a. Business
- b. Engineering
- c. Dentistry
- d. Art History

[The answer is “a,” Business. He got a PhD from the IU School of Business. Incidentally, Mr. Waller has left an estate gift to IU in a seven-figure amount as an expression of his appreciation to the university.]

#3

Jeri Taylor -- TV scriptwriter and producer. Best known for her contributions to the “Star Trek” series. She has also written for “Quincy,” “Little House on the Prairie,” “Magnum, P.I.,” and other shows. She has been nominated for both Writers Guild and Emmy awards.

Jeri graduated from IU in 1959. What was her major?

- a. Religion
- b. Astronomy
- c. Health, Physical Education, and Recreation
- d. English

[Answer: English. Incidentally, Jeri Taylor recently helped arrange Paramount Studio’s donation of the scripts for all 178 episodes of “Star Trek: The Next Generation” to IU’s Lilly Library.]

#4

Michael Uslan -- film producer, originator of the Batman movies

This question is a little different.

During Michael’s time as an IU student during the early 1970s, he did something unusual. What was it?

- a. He joined a sorority
- b. He founded the IU lacrosse team
- c. He created and taught the country’s first college-accredited course on comic books
- d. He wrote an animated short film that was nominated for an Oscar

[The answer is “c,” the course on comic books. Michael also wrote the accompanying textbook, “The Comic Book in America.” Michael has three college degrees: a Bachelor of Arts in History (1973), a Master of Science in Urban Education (1975), and a Doctor of Jurisprudence Law (1976), all from IU.]

Is there any graduating student in the audience who got all four answers correct?

...

Is there anybody who got all four wrong? ...

We'll have a makeup test for you later.

The point of the quiz is to show that what you studied at IU doesn't have to determine your career. You can do anything you want. Figure out what you enjoy most in life, and then go after it.

For me, my career path has been pretty obvious from my college major in Enigmatology. What I've always enjoyed most is making and solving puzzles. I created my first puzzle when I was 8 or 9. I sold my first one at 14 to my national Sunday school magazine. In the 8th grade, when asked to write a paper on what I wanted to do with my life, I said: professional puzzlemaker.

The problem was ... a career in puzzles didn't seem possible, because puzzles typically don't pay much.

In 1965, when I was 13, a classic book was published on wordplay and literary recreations -- “Language on Vacation.” I devoured it. So I wrote the author, Dmitri Borgmann, asking his advice about my having a career in puzzles. And he wrote back, basically, “Don't do it. There's no money in it. You'll starve.”

Well, I didn't give up my dream, but I did make alternative plans in case I failed, including a degree in law. I'll always have that in case the puzzles don't work out.

My advice for you is, first of all, figure out what you enjoy doing the most, and then try to do it full-time. Life is short. Follow your passion. Don't get stuck doing something you don't enjoy. Whatever your major was, you should have received a good, well-rounded education here at IU. Apply this to whatever you want.

Second, try to pick a career or activity in which you don't mind the least interesting parts. For me, the most prosaic part of my job is typesetting the crosswords for the New York Times. It takes me 3-4 hours a week to typeset and lay out the puzzles on my Macintosh computer. It would be sad to spend 3-4 hours a week doing something I hated. Fortunately, I enjoy typing, and it brings me satisfaction to make the pages as attractive as possible.

And third, use your brain. Constantly challenge yourself with new things. Studies have shown that people who use their brains in creative activities have the least incidence of Alzheimer's disease. Write articles or stories. Play games. Learn a language. One of the best ways to keep your brain active is by solving crossword puzzles, because crosswords test so many parts of the brain -- your vocabulary, your memory, your mental flexibility, sometimes even your sense of humor. Solving a crossword is the mental equivalent of going to the gym and working out on all the machines.

If I may, before closing, I'd like to pass along my philosophy of life:

1. Try to make the world a little better for being here. We're all humans together. Do your part.
2. Enjoy yourself. Whether it's your career, your family, or your hobbies, live your life to the fullest. You're here only once.
3. Do your best not to hurt anyone. Be respectful of others. Treat other people the way you'd like to be treated.

Finally, if you haven't noticed already, see the three IU-related brainteasers I wrote for the printed commencement program. They're on page 10\*.

And did anyone notice the hidden message in the program?

It's in the president's welcome on page 1.

The 25 italicized letters, in order, spell Indiana University's Latin motto and its translation -- Lux et Veritas, Light and Truth.

Incidentally, the letters of LUX ET VERITAS can be rearranged to spell EXALT VIRTUES. And light and truth are indeed virtues to be extolled.

Thank you all. And graduates ... congratulations!

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\*THREE BRAINTEASERS

by Will Shortz

1. First a simple one. Delete six consecutive letters from "Indiana University" to get a two-word phrase that describes an important way in which the IU student body excels.

2. Rearrange the letters of SLAM BASH YELL to name a place at IU where these three things occur.

3. The name of what classic movie is a rearrangement of the letters in A WAG BIKE YARN?

[Answers: 1. In diversity 2. Assembly Hall 3. "Breaking Away"]