

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
January 1994
Presented: by Julio Soto

I am happy to be here today to share a few observations about what a Lewis education has meant for me and what I hope and trust it has meant for you. First, I want to address the causes of our celebration today. Later I will want to ask you to reflect on the meaning of this celebration and how you will share your talents and gifts with others in need- tomorrow and throughout your life.

Look around this assembly today. You will begin to feel the power of the dream that all of us here are sharing. A hard, well-earned dream. Our dream of graduating from a high quality academic institution in preparation for our life's work has today become real for everyone of us. We are here celebrating this first important goal of many goals to follow. In achieving our dream, many of us have to struggle through with worries, put aside personal anxiety and nervousness and overcome academic and personal disappointments. Some of us sacrificed food in order to complete an assignment on time, and many others sacrificed sleep. It has taken a strong and dedicated effort to earn a seat here today. This afternoon's ceremony is a sign of our achievement, our personal victory for our family and friends as well that we were able to fight for and we were able to win.

To reach graduation, we realize that it has taken both a lot of work and stretching of ourselves to new ideas. (Ideas that start off as good, challenging or puzzling and gradually become great.) Through working together inside of the classroom and outside of the classroom, we have come to know that "one great idea comes from many ideas". We can

better understand that many opportunities - both academic and non-academic - have, through group effort, teamwork and cooperation between many people here at Lewis led us to learn more about ourselves. We have become stronger and more caring by broadening our views and learning many different approaches to solving shared problems.

While attending Lewis, I was like you, given many opportunities to grow and share. My work with computers is a good example of growth and sharing. As a computer lab assistant, I was able to help some of you navigate through our changing computer opportunities. On the other hand, you taught me many new aspects and approaches to problems we solved together. I was able to use your instincts and ideas and to better do my job. Later as my talent with computers grew as a computer programmer and data analyst, I constantly looked forward to the new ideas and comments you provided and applied them to develop new formats and procedures benefiting Lewis's project Upward Bound program aiding college transition academically and environmentally for high school students by raising their aspirations, building their confidence and assisting their skill development.

Finally, as a computer science instructor in the summer for the Upward Bound program I combined all the help you gave me through your questions and projects to help my students take on the positive challenge of learning the use of computers.

I hope that my personal example about computers and Upward Bound has brought you to reflect on your growth, your teamwork experiences, and your learning from one another. Lewis students and Lewis faculty teaming together, caring together, experiencing together and searching together have benefited our personal development. The academic

challenges and the personal challenges implied in the University's Mission and Lasallian tradition.

Everyone here has experienced the Lasallian tradition in one way or another. Some of us have attended the Koinonia retreat learning about building unity and demonstrating responsibility for others. Some of us have participated in a shelter for the homeless and learned and experienced how hard life is for some and how we must expand our sympathy and concerns for others. It has shown us how we must step up with willingness – a genuine willingness- to help in any way we can- talking, laughing and providing support. Some graduates are athletes, and they have had to learn and re-learn the meaning of teamwork, sacrifice and trust for the good of the team and each other. Others have participated in the hunger week, peace teach-in and other social awareness experiences. The opportunities to participate have been there and so many of us have – whether in classroom debate or in college service or in community service taken advantage of these opportunities. You and I have had the opportunity to learn about group effort, about teamwork, and about academic achievement- all in the Lasallian tradition of association. The idea of association which centers our joint actions on forming a community of mutual respect, collaboration, and service has been encouraged and supported by Lewis faculty, administrators and students alike.

These opportunities have encouraged us to grow in wisdom and seek justice in our relationships. How can we bring together our experiences, academic, social, cultural and Lasallian at Lewis University? Where does the degree and our educational experience at Lewis lead us? Many of us here today are being referred to by the media and others as

“Generation X”. This is a stereotype defining our current generation as primarily self-centered. We are supposed to be only looking out for ourselves without much concern for the world around us. My experiences at Lewis paint a different portrait of our generation. As the graduating class of 1994, I ask you to take up the challenge to make a difference. Through your academic and other campus experiences, and the special Lasallian educational traditions involving wisdom, association and justice, we should become known as the “inclusive” generation. At Lewis we have seen that every generation and every individual has many talents. We must become leaders in spreading tolerance. We must become leaders in including everyone’s dreams.

By working at being the “inclusive generation”, we allow ourselves the opportunity- just like my experiences as a computer lab assistant- to learn from and grow from the many talents that each person we know can make available for us if we only open ourselves to their gift. We learn to become more sensitive and understanding of any challenges or problems that may come our way. We also become the “better” person we have always wanted to be. We can leave Lewis confident that we will be able to conquer life’s many challenges.

Our experiences at Lewis have given us the opportunity to work with many diverse backgrounds and talents to overcome obstacles. What is the proof? Your attendance here today. Reflect on this and you will see that it is true. Our goals and dreams have become real thanks to your determination and the help and support of your family and many different friends.

As we physically leave Lewis today, then, let us carry forward the Lewis spirit and Lasallian traditions in our life. Let us use all our academic, intellectual, social and Lasallian experiences at Lewis to set and accomplish more dreams for ourselves and for others. Let us not forget the road we have traveled – our memories and our struggles. Instead, let's apply the best and worst of those experiences and make a space for ourselves thorough our inclusiveness - openness to others. Then the so-called "X Generation" will take its place beside all other generations. We will teach and learn from one another. The challenge is there and I for one intend on making it my life's work.

May the Lord's blessings be upon all of us and may his life of courage inspire our life (in some small way).