Special Remarks by President Steger

As you graduate and leave this stadium tonight to the cheers and delight of family and friends, I sincerely hope that you will reflect on the tremendous opportunities that have been presented to you. Opportunities to learn, to develop relationships with people who are different from you—from a different part of the state or even the world—and, perhaps most importantly, to serve.

You have worked hard to get where you are tonight, but you have not traveled this path alone. In order that you might stand here tonight, many others have worked hard along with you – your faculty, your family, and, in many instances, people you don’t even know and may never meet. They have assisted you along the way because they believed in your potential. As you go forward to pursue your careers and your dreams, remember them. And remember to give back, just as so many have assisted you along the way.

A colleague recently posed the question: What makes a university great? I can stand here this evening and tell you it is the staff, faculty, students, and alumni—and the impact they have on others.

I saw thousands of you coming forward in a cold, dark rain a few weeks ago for the Relay for Life fund-raiser to fight cancer. Although you were soaked and uncomfortable, you slogged through the night and raised more than $600,000, more than any other college or university in the country.

And, thousands were here early on a Saturday morning for the Big Event, fanning out into the community to assist hundreds and hundreds of people and organizations. Our Big Event was also one of the nation’s largest.

In January, hundreds of you, as part of the Martin Luther King Child Care Facelift, painted, cleaned, and helped with maintenance projects at 20 different child care facilities in the New River Valley.

Two weeks ago, residents from Barringer, Vawter, and O'Shaughnessy Halls got up early on Saturday morning and traveled to Roanoke to help with a Habitat for Humanity project, helping give some deserving family a home – a precious gift.

The baseball team is helping some young men who are waging a valiant fight with brain cancer.

And what can I say about Hokies United, which has helped thousands around the world recover from horrible disasters – giving not just sustenance, but the gift of hope. They gave this same marvelous gift to our community in some of the darkest days in our history. We are indeed grateful for their service.

Another group of students traveled several times to Haiti to help construct a bridge over
a river that during the rainy season could become impassable – so dangerous that children were swept away while just trying to get to school.

And, a few weeks ago, I received a letter from a man in New York who wrote to tell me of a Virginia Tech student who during spring break rescued him, his niece, and their first mate when they were washed away from their boat in Key West when a storm struck suddenly.

Of course, this tradition—this commitment to service—began with the Corps of Cadets, which is now the largest Corps we have had at the university in 40 years. The Corps of Cadets is the largest non-corporate sponsor of the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, having donated more than $180,000 to honor those who sacrificed so much for all of us. In 2009, the Corps won the Governor’s Volunteerism and Community Service Award. I think they reported more than 3,500 hours of service, but actually by the end of the year, the true total was more than double that amount. And it was even greater the following year.

There are hundreds of other examples where Hokies are impacting people’s lives here and abroad. There is not time tonight to talk about all of them. But we are extremely proud of your service to others. And, in a few minutes, we will be honoring four Hokie alumni for their service to our great university, and to society.

For Virginia Tech, for Hokies everywhere, the motto, Ut Prosim is more than just a Latin phrase, carved in stone or printed on official documents. The concept, “That I may serve,” is a part of who we are.

I am proud of what we stand for, and I’m proud of you. Keep that commitment to and spirit of service as you leave here tonight. You will make a difference in this world.