Thank you, Dr. Steger. Members of the Board of Visitors, my colleagues on the platform, faculty and staff, parents and other family members and friends, and, most especially, students who are graduating today. This one’s for you!

I am very honored to have been chosen, through student nominations, as your Commencement speaker. But, I would also tell you that writing a Commencement speech is a challenge! Cartoonist Garry Trudeau suggested that Commencement speeches were invented largely in the belief that graduating college students should never be released into the world until they have been properly sedated! (I’ll try not to put you to sleep!) Likewise, comedy writer Robert Orben noted that a graduation ceremony is an event where the speaker tells hundreds of students, dressed in identical caps and gowns, that “individuality” is the key to success! (Now, there’s a challenge!)

Well, let me share with you some thoughts and reflections. Today we are celebrating your completion of an undergraduate degree and your embarking on the next phase of your life, whatever that may be: graduate school, gainful employment, travel, the military, returning home, time out, or whatever. So, as you take this next step: what key things have you learned during your years at Virginia Tech and what, from that, will you take with you?
We often talk about our emphasis here on educating the whole student, both in and out of the classroom. As part of that education, the Student Affairs Division developed five Aspirations for Student Learning, five things which we aspire that students will learn and adopt during their time at Virginia Tech. Let me get you to reflect on these five aspirations, what you have learned here, and what you will then take with you as you move on in your life.

Our first aspiration has been that students will commit to unwavering curiosity. I hope that we have piqued your curiosity as you have taken a challenging course, worked on a research project, read an extra chapter, studied abroad, joined a student organization, interacted with someone from another culture, changed your major, or took on a second major or a minor.

I hope that we have inspired you to go forth and lead a life of curiosity and to embrace a life-long commitment to intellectual development. I challenge you to earn advanced degrees, to study something you have always avoided, to travel through other countries and cultures, to find a cure for cancer or another insidious disease, or to join an organization which intrigues you. I challenge you to take that curiosity and focus it on helping to resolve some of our other dilemmas: economic disparities that have brought about the Occupy Movement, a Congress that seems to have lost the art of compromise, and a society that has become what I call a society that cannot afford itself! So, always be curious!
The second aspiration we have had is that you will pursue self-understanding and integrity. I hope that your years at Virginia Tech have given you the time and opportunity to better understand yourself, to develop a set of values, and to integrate those values into your daily life as you face decisions which must be made. Too often, and indeed recently, we have seen public figures who have not developed a true understanding of themselves and whose lack of integrity and values is appalling. I urge you, as you leave Virginia Tech, to constantly question yourself, to re-examine your values, and to ensure that your decision-making is, in fact, value-based. Keep in mind the words of Albert Einstein who said: “Setting an example is not the main means of influencing others; it is the only means!”

Our third aspiration has been that Virginia Tech students will practice civility, that they will understand and commit to civility as a way of life in their interactions with others. Frankly, when I surf television channels searching for a program, I absolutely cringe at the way some hosts and guests interact with each other. I find myself doing the same cringing when I listen to some political candidates, allegedly debating the issues, but instead doing their best (or worst!) to “out-shout” and “talk-over” each other.

Our aspiring that you practice civility is clearly rooted in the first two bullets of Virginia Tech’s Principles of Community:

1. We affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect and understanding.
2. We affirm the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely. We encourage open expression within a climate of civility, sensitivity, and mutual respect.

So, take our Principles of Community with you and show others, by your own actions, what Virginia Tech and its alumni are all about!

Our fourth aspiration has been that you will be prepared for a life of courageous leadership. Many of you have gained from participating in our various leadership programs such as the Residential Leadership Community, Leadership Tech, and the minor in Leadership Studies. Some of you have served in major leadership roles in various clubs and organizations and in community groups here and at home. Hopefully, you have been stretched by these experiences and probably many of you have also had your courage tested under fire.

Leadership is not easy and courageous leadership is a real challenge. In recent weeks, we have seen leaders fired or stepping down for failing to exercise strong and courageous leadership. We hope that we have prepared you to challenge the status quo in pursuit of a more humane and just world. We hope that you will have the fortitude to speak up if and when you witness an injustice and reach out to those who are vulnerable, marginalized, or in need. And remember that you do not have to be in an official position to exercise leadership and responsibility. Courageous leadership can be demonstrated by anyone who cares to do the right thing, rather than just the required thing.
Our fifth and final aspiration has been that you will embrace our motto, Ut Prosim (That I May Serve), as a way of life. Back in the year 2000, Neil Howe and Bill Strauss began to write about your generation, Generation Y, and they renamed you to be the Millennial Generation in their major book: Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation. Your generation was officially arriving on college campuses for the first time that fall. Howe and Strauss predicted that you would become an optimistic, socially conscious, team-oriented, and civic-minded generation. They said: “Only a few years from now, this can-do youth revolution will overwhelm the cynics and pessimists. Over the next decade, the Millennial Generation will entirely recast the image of youth from downbeat and alienated to upbeat and engaged---with potentially seismic consequences for America.”

And you know what? Howe and Strauss were right! You have inspired me with the commitment to others which you have shown through your work and teamwork with such programs as VT Engage, the Center for Student Engagement and Community Partnerships, Bridges to Prosperity, the Big Event, and Relay for Life. Last year, during the Big Event (the second largest such program on a college campus), over 6,700 volunteers carried out about 950 projects in the local area as a means of giving back to our surrounding communities. Similarly, many of you participated in the Virginia Tech Relay for Life to raise funds for cancer research. In fact, so many of you participated that for the third year in a row, Virginia Tech had the most successful Collegiate Relay in the United States, raising $630,000. This total far surpassed every campus in the country.
I had the opportunity at last spring’s Relay to talk with the American Cancer Society’s National Director of Collegiate Relays when he visited with us. I asked him why it is that schools which are far larger than Virginia Tech---schools such as Ohio State, Texas, Arizona State, and Minnesota---do not raise more money in their Relays. He looked at me and said: “You know, having visited this campus and those campuses, I have concluded that it is this special thing you call the Hokie Spirit. That’s what really makes the difference!”

So, as you leave this place, take that Hokie Spirit with you, in times of triumph and in times of tragedy, and show others what it is all about. In the words of Anne Frank: “How lovely to think that no one need wait a moment, we can start now, start slowly changing the world. How lovely that everyone, great and small, can make their contribution...how we can always, always give something, even if it is only kindness.”

Thus, just as we have had these five aspirations for your learning as a Virginia Tech student, so, too, do I have these aspirations for you as you become today a Virginia Tech alum. I hope that you will always be curious, that you will continue to enhance your self-understanding and integrity, that you will practice and model civility in all that you do, that you will make us proud of your courageous leadership, and that you will embrace Ut Prosim and enrich your life and inspire all through service to others.

As you journey through your careers and lives, I wish for you a loving companion and the kind of supportive family, friends, and staff who have blessed my life. Thank
you for the enormous privilege of serving as your Vice President and thank you for all
that you have shared with us during your years at Virginia Tech.

On behalf of all the faculty and staff, congratulations on your successful
completion of your degrees and best wishes as you move on from this special place. So,
**GO**, Hokies, **GO** out and spread the Hokie Spirit into all the places you will go throughout
the world! Indeed, I say to you: LET’S GO! (HOKIES!) LET’S GO! (HOKIES!) LET’S GO!
(HOKIES!).

Thank you very much!