UBP Commencement Address

Professor Nicholas Didow

May 11, 2019

Dean Shackelford, Dean Gilland, Ms. Millar, Undergraduate Business Program staff, my distinguished faculty colleagues, members of the Graduating Class of 2019, family and friends gathered here this afternoon. Thank you for inviting me to share a few thoughts with you on this special occasion.

Members of the Graduating Class of 2019, my governing thought is how happy I am for you, your family and friends, and how excited I am for you. Now is the time in which you transition from your undergraduate days at Carolina to what comes next. Now is the time in which you begin the exciting next chapter in your life’s journey.

Today I am thinking of three significant numbers -- 225, 100, and 1.

225, 100, and 1.

The University, the business school, and you.

225 – this is the 225th year of the University of North Carolina, our Quasquibicentennial year.

Occasions like this remind me of previous notable addresses given on special occasions at this University. One of my favorites is the address given by UNC undergraduate Charles Kuralt on University Day in 1993. If I were to adapt his comments to today’s occasion and to today’s context, I am thinking he might say the following:

What is it that binds us to this place as to no other? It is not the Well, or the Bell, or the stone walls, or the crisp October nights, or the warm May afternoons, or the memory of dogwoods blooming. It is not TOPO, Sup Dogs, Al’s Burger Shack, or Franklin Street. Our loyalty is not only to William R. Davie though we are proud of what he did 225 years ago. Nor even to Coach Roy and Luke, though we are certainly proud of what they and others accomplished, too. No, our love for this place is based on the fact that it is as it was meant to be, the University of the People.

The University of the People. We as an institution are challenged to live into this every day in our research, our teaching, and our service and engagement with the people of North Carolina and beyond. You have partnered with us to do so over the past four years, and for that we are most grateful.

225, 100, and 1.

100 – this is the 100th year of the business school, our Centennial year.

It is true that every graduating class is special, yet your class is graduating in the 100th year of the business school. Your class will forever have the distinction of being the Centennial year graduating class in the history of the business school.

Graduation is bittersweet, for you and for us. We miss you already and wonder, what will be your favorite memories from your days here at KFBS?

Will you remember the first time you climbed the 62 steps leading up the steep hill above the Dean Dome to enter the Kenan-Flagler courtyard, Koury Auditorium, or the McColl Building just minutes before your early morning class?

Will you remember the massive expanse of red clay bricks in the Kenan-Flagler courtyard, many inscribed by your predecessors with names, dates, and special sayings? Will you now add your own brick to the expanse with your name, date, and special saying?

Will you remember the friendships renewed and quick conversations while going up and down the massive circular stairway inside the McColl Building?

Will you remember the delightful chaos of class changes at 9:30, 11, 12:30, 2, and 3:30?

Will you remember the faculty, staff, and friends who helped you get better and grow personally and professionally every day?

225, 100, and 1.

1 – You. Today you begin the next chapter in your life’s journey as you transition to places across this great state, nation, and world.

What is my wish for you? And what is your obligation -- your duty -- to this University and to this business school?

Perhaps the challenge of your duty was best articulated by former UNC President Bill Friday years ago when he said,

“Every morning a million North Carolinians get up and go to work for wages which leave them below the poverty line so they can pay taxes that finance the education you receive at Carolina. Your job is to figure out how you’re going to pay them back.”

Your job is to figure out how you’re going to pay them back.

How you’re going to pay them back…

Certainly, as a proud graduate you will continue to support the University and Kenan-Flagler in every possible way for the rest of your life, but what did President Friday mean and how will you pay back the people of North Carolina and the many family and friends gathered here today who have supported and enabled your education at Carolina?

How will you pay everyone back?

May I suggest you can pay everyone back by living into three priorities – find your purpose; do well; and do good.

Now is the time for you to begin to pay everyone back.

Now is the time for you to find your purpose, to do well, and to do good.

Find your purpose.

Why are you here? What are you called to do with your life? What is important to you? What is your purpose?

Purpose can guide your life decisions, influence your behavior, shape your goals, offer a sense of direction, and create meaning. What gives you joy and satisfaction? When do you feel most fulfilled, alive, and inspired? When you will look back on your life after the next 40 or 50 years, what will give you the greatest sense of pride and accomplishment?

Now is the time for you to find your purpose.

Do well.

Succeed in your chosen profession. Do well.

You came to us four years ago already with remarkable experiences, impressive skills, and thoughtful ideas. You entered into a covenant with us wherein we promised not to just celebrate what you already do well, but to help you get better – if you would let us do so. This is what we have done in partnership with our students as a business school for the past century. This is why Kenan-Flagler’s undergraduate business program is always in the top tier of every national and international business school ranking.

You let us help you improve your soft skills and your hard skills, and you are prepared to do extremely well in your chosen profession.

Now is the time for you to do well.

Do good.

Be kind to every living thing. Do good to others. Practice intentional and thoughtful acts of kindness.

Some acts may seem small to you, but they matter to others. Other acts may seem large and impossible to you, but they are worth trying. Small acts or large acts -- they are all important.

Hold the door open for someone, pick up litter, take time to talk with an elderly neighbor, adopt a dog or cat from the local shelter, mentor a young person, smile just because, serve weekly meals at the homeless shelter, call your parents on an ordinary day to say, “I love you”.

In a quote often attributed to John Wesley, the British theologian and founder of the Methodist Church,:

Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.

Now is the time for you to do good.

225, 100, and 1.

The University, the business school, and you.

Now is the time for you to begin the next chapter in your life’s journey.

Now is the time for you to begin to pay everyone back.

Now is the time for you to find your purpose, to do well, and to do good.

Congratulations and best wishes to the Graduating Class of 2019 – our Centennial year graduating class in the life of the business school!

Peace and love.

Go Heels!