Valedictorian Speech 2011 FML

First of all, on behalf of the graduating class of 2011, I would like to thank all of you for coming. Family, friends, and faculty: without each and every one of you, we could not have been where we are today. And without all of us graduates, you would not have been stuck here listening to people like me today, but you’re here to support us, and we thank you for that.

The engineer in me couldn’t help but do some calculations. I estimated that each second I spend talking to you all equates to about one full man-hour of listening. That’s a lot of time, so I’ll try to keep this brief… Let me first say that I’m extremely honored to have been awarded the title of Valedictorian. Only six years ago, I had no idea what that even meant, and much less that I’d be standing here today. Six years ago was when I first came to the US as an exchange student from Norway. I didn’t know ANYONE, I didn’t speak English fluently, and I didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life. Today, I have gotten to know a lot of great people here at San Diego State, I speak English very well, but I still don’t know what to do with my life. In fact, I think I speak on behalf of many of the graduates when I say: “we’re graduating – now what?”…. I recently talked to an engineer who graduated back in the 70s. His commencement was on a Saturday, and he bought his first sports car and drove it to work the following Monday. Unfortunately, this isn’t the case for most of us. Many of us don’t have jobs waiting on Monday, even less of us can afford a new sports car. We all know that the last few years have been rough. The economy took a dive while tuition skyrocketed. Many of you have had to work several jobs just to stay in school. I don’t know how you did it – keeping up in school was enough for me.

Although it’s not perfect out there, there are plenty of things to be excited about as well. The economy seems to be recovering, and jobs are slowly returning. More importantly, we had the best basketball season in the history of SDSU, and we’re finally getting an awesome new Aztec Center and a new machine shop, … that none of us will ever get to enjoy…

Now, for the thank yous: I’m sure most of you remember the mandatory furlough days a while back. I’d like to take the opportunity to thank those professors who scheduled their furloughs around lecture days, to make the impact on students as small as possible. Some even refused to take days off at all. It’s dedication like that, that makes this university great, although a day off or two would have felt really nice at the time. I’d also like to thank my family for all their support – my mom flew 14 hours from Norway to be here today.., my girlfriend of almost 6 years for putting up with me for so long and her family for always being there for me.

Now, I won’t bore you with the standard clichés about graduation, but I’d like to leave you with the best piece of advice I got in my 4 years at SDSU, from our own Dr. Ronald Kline: “don’t EVER sell yourselves short. There are plenty of people that will do that for you”. So get out there, fight on, and you’ll soon be driving a new sports car on your way to work. Now give yourselves a well-deserved round of applause, and congratulations class of 2011!