



# Adelphi University 2005 Commencement Address May 15, 2005

**Building Adelphi,  
One Story at a Time**

by

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Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum*

## Introduction

Congratulations, Class of 2005! To all who today receive Associates, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees, as well as Special Certificates, we say, "Welcome to the world of Adelphi alumni - - a world of people at the top of their professions, ready to assist you."

Alumni represent the heritage of a university, and serve as a link between what was and what will be. You now join those imbued with the spirit of alma mater, who dream for the continuing enhancement of their Adelphi degree.

Today we are assembled to celebrate the consummation of a dream, the fruition of a hope of years. The imagined and the longed for has (sic) become real.<sup>1</sup>

With these words, as timely as they are uplifting, President Frank Blodgett - - yes, the one for whom Blodgett Hall is named - - greeted the assembly at the first Commencement held in Garden City in 1930, after 67 years as an Academy and a College in Brooklyn. He awarded 136 degrees, compared to the 2,647 this weekend. He awarded the Masters degree as the highest achievement. Yesterday, at our hooding ceremony, we awarded 42 doctoral degrees. I expect one graduate of 1930, Florentina Marie Leipniker, who heard Dr. Blodgett speak, to be at Reunion this June. The person who coordinated the

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<sup>1</sup> Blodgett, Frank D. Commencement Address, Adelphi College, June 11, 1930. Adelphi University. Archives.

1930 Commencement, Dean Ruth Harley, after whom the Harley University Center is named, and with whom I speak throughout the year, will be 103 years of age this week. Both are still connected to Adelphi.

During this past academic year, we celebrated Adelphi's seventy-five years in Garden City - - with churches joining us in ringing bells and playing chimes on September 30, 2004, anniversary of the first day of classes in 1929 - - and with proclamations by elected officials and civic organizations. Today, we complete this anniversary year by celebrating you.

In 1930, Adelphi had three buildings; the 400-plus students and 41 faculty had spent a year in what President Blodgett called "temporary competition with the sound of hammers, electric drills, and steam shovels."<sup>2</sup>

In parallel to the first year in Garden City, you, the graduates of 2005, also experienced the challenges and benefits of construction - - the new residence hall, the renovation of the Library, the installation of computer labs, creation of "smart" classrooms, and the addition of air conditioning to several residence halls, among other projects.

As with the first graduating class, you survived the turmoil and, as President Blodgett said, "Someday, perhaps, remembering even this will be a pleasure."<sup>3</sup>

Some of us, he said, may not be present to see but there will be those who will see the plans now started carried much further along the road of progress.<sup>4</sup>

How could he have known that what he said in 1930 would describe our contemporary experience? Who among us has not marveled at the pace of construction of the new Fine Arts building or been inspired by the stunning plans for renovating Woodruff; constructing a new Sports Center; developing a Performing Arts Center that will be a new home for dance, drama, and music; building the new Maiello-Hagedorn Child Activity Center; and creating space for over 300 cars to be parked beneath a relocated and resurfaced Stiles Field?

What Dr. Blodgett could not have envisioned is how far Adelphi has come. You, today's graduates, are a complex composition of traditionally-aged undergraduates, adult students returning for a degree, transfer students, and graduate students – from some 60 countries and 40 states. Yet, as in 1930, each of you has a personal story, a story of obstacles overcome and dreams yet to be realized. It is your story, and our small part in it, that forms our common bond and motivates the Trustees, officers, deans, staff, and our incredible faculty.

We have shared in joy on many occasions, both in class and out, and we have shared in sorrow, such as September 11, 2001 - - a day seared in our collective memory and still influential in our daily lives.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Translations and interpretations by Dr. Richard Garner, Dean of the Adelphi University Honors College, and Ryan K. Scott, Latin Teacher, Briarcliff Manor (N.Y.) High School.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

September 11 is a day we will always have in common. We will remember where we were, what we were doing, who we were with, and who we lost from our lives. We all know those who still sob and those who still cough from that day.

From this tragedy, we have learned more about the ideals behind which we stand united, and the values that led to the founding of our nation. We now more clearly see the consequences of sitting out elections and allowing others to speak for us. We now want to know the causes of turmoil in other lands before it spills over on us. Perhaps we see more clearly the truth of renowned educator and social critic Robert Hutchins's statement, "The death of democracy is not likely to be an assassination by ambush. It will be a slow extinction from apathy, indifference, and undernourishment" - - unless we act.<sup>5</sup> And act you must, for you are prepared.

In 1930, as now, Adelphi was concerned about advancing students' character and preparing active citizens, not simply training graduates for careers and commerce. Dr. Blodgett said of the College,

There will be - - I trust - - an ...ever deepening realization among us all that the fundamental purpose of an education is to enable one more intelligently and more potently to help - - not to hinder, to build - - not to destroy, to serve - - not to demand service.<sup>6</sup>

Look around and beside you, and you will see the many students who already exemplify this vision for intellect, compassion, and engagement.

They include Shelly-Ann Anderson, who served in Iraq and is graduating Cum Laude; September Portuondo-Smith, an "America Reads" tutor in the Roosevelt School System; Tiffany Tucker, who with friends created the "Redemption" packet, a beginner's guide to the college admissions process; Jessica Beattie, who persevered despite major obstacles to be here today; Stephen Unger, a transfer student who started his professional life as a construction worker, and last year won the Jay B. Nash Outstanding Major Award in Education given by the New York State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance; Robert Nugent, Marine Corps veteran and aspiring entrepreneur; Olufunmilay (Funmi) Taiwo, Student Affairs Student Employee of the Year; and Shahram Hashemi, a national finalist in the Elie Wiesel Prize in Ethics essay contest, founder of the World Student Assembly on campus, and co-creator of the teleconference with university students in Tehran.

Also included are Alexandre Manor, accepted in a large number of prestigious Ph.D programs in Physics; Dobromira (Dobi) Banova, who will pursue Ph.D studies at the University of Michigan; Jennifer Baldwin, Kelly Spada O'Keef, and Christopher Morrell, who completed the Masters Program in General Psychology with distinction, and perfect 4.0 grade point averages; Joe Sarno, keeper of the Panther Web Radio signal; Scott Urgola, who completed an internship at The Woody Guthrie Foundation and is already, according to his professor, "a considerable presence as singer-songwriter in the New York jazz club scene"; Tal Sheinfeld, from Israel, star student-athlete, who says he found his second "skate" at Adelphi; Alero Akuya, from California, class president, Orientation Leader, and aspiring lawyer; Scott Pursner, active student leader, winner of the Parents Association Annual Senior Award, and a fixture on campus who helped us all grow; and Diane Liriano, president of C.A.L.I.B.E.R.

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<sup>5</sup> Hutchins, Robert. Educator. 1954

<sup>6</sup> Blodgett, Op.cit.

Finally, I would cite Sean McGrath, Homecoming King and Prize-winning History student; Ryan Soltan and Kathy DiPietro, star scholar-athletes; Daniel Rivera, who created Operation End Hate; Katherine Hock, three-time All-American, whose lacrosse team won the national championship last year, who last week scored the goal to send her team to the Final Four again, and whose four goals yesterday were not enough to prevail, but she is our hero; Jamie Perella, Josepha Pace, Dina Cali, and two-time All-American Jo Jo Coiro, all co-captains of our exciting soccer team who taught us about leadership; and Anna Elwood and Jenn Susi who this month brought “Excellence in Acting” awards home from the American College Theatre Festival.

These students represent the many others with equally compelling stories who deserve recognition for what they scored in the classroom and lab, and on the field, the court, the stage, the screen, and at the easel. They, too, are the outstanding graduates of 2005.

However, students are not the only ones we salute today. In addition to you and our distinguished honorary degree recipients, Amy Hagedorn and Bob Willumstad, we recognize seven faculty members who are leaving our active ranks to attempt retirement. To them, Harry Davies, Morris Eagle, Michael Givant, George Stricker, Ellenmorris Tiegerman, Hugh Wilson, and Caryle Wolahan, we say “Thanks, farewell, return.” Also, two trustees are leaving, Steve Fischer and Bernard Ashe. Each helped make Adelphi what it is today; we bear your stamp, we are grateful for your service, we will not forget. Nor will we forget those who, like Susan Martinez, passed from us on their way to this day.

We also bear the stamp of Adelphi’s early leaders and faculty. Listen again to Dr. Blodgett,

In this rapidly changing and swiftly advancing age it is difficult to secure agreement as to what constitutes education for there are many surface changes that must be made from time to time. But it is my hope that you remember that with all those changes there are some principles that are abiding and eternal.<sup>7</sup>

He then talked about topics we continue to discuss today - - character, honesty, generosity, kindness. He called these, “not new things but judging by the past they are likely to be of value in the world as long as the world shall be.”<sup>8</sup> As educators, we believe we can make a difference in preparing graduates who will act with integrity and who will desire to be known by their good character. For it is integrity, character, energy, imagination, and knowledge - - especially a knowledge of what came earlier - - that provides the foundation for community progress and individual success in rapidly changing times.

As many of you know, I meet regularly with students and faculty to ask what they hope we never change and what they wish we had changed last week. Recently, I asked bachelor’s and master’s candidates what they would like to hear today at Commencement. I was impressed and inspired. What these students want us to preserve, and what they most love, is Adelphi’s size, personality, and commitment to nurturing students. They talk of Adelphi as a place where students are known by name, and where faculty want to be called by name.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Students suggested that I be encouraging about the prospects for jobs, careers, and graduate school, and I can be. The record of our alumni and the talents you exhibit give me confidence. Others wanted me to remind you that it is never too late to start anew. One 54-year old Master's degree candidate, who dropped out of high school at age 17 and today aspires for a Ph.D, told me how much she has grown with her colleagues here - - both the twenty-year-olds and the faculty, some of whom are younger than she is.

Others emphasized that a degree is a milestone on a journey, not an end, and that we are the only ones who can stand in our way. Still others recounted how they would never, in their home towns, have met the diversity of nationalities, cultures, ethnicities, religions, socioeconomic status, and belief systems they encountered at Adelphi. They value diversity, and know sadly that many do not. Their world is now larger, and they want to play an active role in it.

Most talked about how difficult it will be to leave this place that has become a second, and sometimes "first," home. One said she sleeps at her house only twenty minutes away, but "lives" on campus. "My friends and I are family," she said. Another commented, "after my last class I drove around campus in circles, because I didn't want to leave." Still another said, "I feel so comfortable here."

Students told me about faculty who are both challenging and caring. One quoted an advisor's constant theme, "You're never truly successful unless you are happy in what you do." Each student agreed, saying, "I'm not the same person I was when I entered." "I was never so active as I have been here." "I learned how to be harder on myself, set higher goals, and try again." One talked about his graduate student audition at Columbia. Asked to perform a script he had just been given, he "heard" his advisor's voice on his shoulder saying, "You are not dyslexic today." He earned admission and will enroll this fall!

Some commented on how Adelphi gave them the chance to assume leadership responsibilities and how Adelphi brought the world to campus, making it possible to talk in person with U.N. diplomats. Others commented on their first experience at public speaking, how they were shy but overcame it. They learned not to give up, not to stand in their own way.

And what do these students aspire to do? Everything! We have graduates today ready to pursue nearly every profession. They have received great job offers and acceptance letters to major graduate and advanced professional schools, including Columbia, St. John's, Michigan, Tufts, Syracuse, NYU, and Adelphi, among many others.

You are facing a world filled with enormous possibilities as well as momentous challenges, including continued globalization and the emergence of China and India as modern powers; the elusive goals of sustainability, equity, and social justice; growth in religious fundamentalism and terrorism; the aging of populations and challenges to social policies; advances in and opposition to breakthroughs in science and technology; declining involvement in civic activities such as voting; global climate change; possibilities for peace; and the blurring of distinctions between fact, faith, and fear.

In 1930, young Nazis at the opening of the Reichstag; famine in China; the "Hindenburg" in flight; the Great Depression; and Babe Ruth at bat filled the headlines. This was a year bracketed by Prohibition and gang warfare in Chicago on one side, and Emperor Hirohito in Japan on the other. Yet Adelphi graduates excelled nevertheless. Today's challenges vie for attention with entertainment and personal interests, but

we know we must be engaged in the issues of the day if we are to find fulfillment in our lives. Opportunities abound now, as they did then, for those with imaginative solutions to enduring problems.

The graduates of 1930 went on to distinguished careers and fulfilling lives. They joined earlier graduates in education, medicine, publishing, business, law, and public service. The same will be said of you, the class of 2005.

They, like you, kept asking, what can I learn from this experience, what can I do better, what questions should I ask? They sought to clarify the difference between what is legal (and illegal), what is moral (right and wrong), and what is ethical (just and unjust, fair and unfair). They knew, as we know, that what is legal and moral may be unethical, that character and citizenship - - positive civic engagement - - are as essential to our institutional and personal priorities as are careers and commerce.

Adelphi is the “engaged” university, and we thank you for your contributions to fulfilling this mission. We seek engagement by being active as scholars and volunteers in our community, whether as tutors, letter writers, or activists. Our students have had the opportunity to examine how our society is engaged in important policy debates while serving as interns and aides with U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton, U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer, Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy, State Senator and alumnus Michael Balboni, Assemblyman Joseph Saladino, and County Controller Howard Weitzman, among many others.

I hope you have gained knowledge, Dr. Blodgett said, and have laid the foundation for even greater knowledge but even more earnestly I hope that you have gained those other essentials of a worth while education without which knowledge regardless of its magnitude cannot be of stupendous worth.<sup>9</sup>

We believe, with teacher-author Beverly Conklin, that we can encourage “others to think, to dream, to learn, to try, to do.”<sup>10</sup> We believe that we can help you differentiate between what you want and what you need, what you look at and what you see. Our goal was not to teach you everything, but to prepare you to learn anything.

Today, if you leave with nothing else, we hope it is that you have learned how to listen and learn, and how to use your learning wisely and justly, with empathy and imagination, humility and humor.

Dr. Blodgett concluded his talk as we conclude our ceremony each year. He said,

Come back to see us as often as you can. Keep in touch with the material development so sure to come on this splendid site. Do your share to bring the college a reputation which it craves - - the only kind of publicity of lasting worth - - a record of the accomplishment of worthy deeds.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Blodgett, *op.cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Conklin, Beverly. *The Language of Teaching*. Boulder, Colorado: Blue Mountain Press, 1999, unpaginated.

<sup>11</sup> Blodgett, *op.cit.*

Adelphi continues to be a place striving for excellence, made richer everyday by the legacy of the good deeds of our alumni. I invite you to come by often, witness the developments that surely will take place on our beautiful campus and extension sites, sustain your networks with classmates and friends, tell us of your worthy deeds, and advise alma mater just as those who were here before you advise us now.

Finally, send us your stories of goals accomplished and dreams realized, and we, with you, will continue to build Adelphi's future, one story at a time. Congratulations, Class of 2005!

Thank you.