

Commencement Address by Nancy Fugate Woods
May 19, 2018
Zorn Arena

9 a.m. - College of Business, College of Education and Human Sciences
2 p.m. - College of Arts and Sciences, College of Nursing and Health Sciences

University of Washington School of Nursing, Dean Emerita Nancy Fugate Woods, Ph.D., R.N., F.A.A.N, and graduate of the UW-Eau Claire BSN ('68) program, will deliver the "Charge to the Class" address at commencement, Saturday, May 19th, 2018.

I am honored to be here with you today to give the charge to the graduating class of 2018!

I am a member of the UWEC family, proud to be a second generation graduate. My mother graduated from the then Wisconsin State College in 1931 in the midst of the Great Depression. Although my grandparents lost their house for lack of \$500, they insured that both my mother and her sister were able to attend college. My mother and father valued education highly: We frequently heard: "education is something that no one can take away from you" and were advised to "finish your education first, then you can...(fill in the blanks)"

Although I enrolled as a music major, I had a half time job at a local hospital and grew to admire the important lifesaving contributions that nurses made and with how much nurses needed to know to provide excellent care. When WSUEC established a Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program my sophomore year I changed majors and earned a BSN degree.

YES, I graduated from this university 50 years ago. The last century! A time of great social turmoil. Sound familiar?

As students of the sixties, we witnessed and engaged in **The Civil Rights Movement**. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed segregation in schools, public places and employment, The Fair Hiring Act of 1965 prohibited discrimination in hiring, the Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965 opened entry to the US to immigrants beyond traditional European groups, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 outlawed discrimination in voting, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 banned discrimination in housing sales and rentals.

The Great Society – a set of initiatives from Lyndon Johnson's administration –gave us not only the Civil Rights Legislation, but also the Wilderness Act of 1964, legislation advocating equality of women, and Medicare legislation providing health care coverage to older Americans.

The Second Wave of the Feminist (Women's) Movement focused on changing cultural and social norms and challenged inequalities associated with being a woman. A Presidential Commission on the Status of Women prompted the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title IX, breaking down legal barriers to women's professional success and personal freedoms. Betty Friedan's book **The Feminine Mystique** questioned views that limited women in public and private life. The **National Organization for Women** advocated for changes in the status of women and sexual equalities.

The 60s also brought the sexual revolution: sexual freedom grew, enhanced by access to oral contraceptives. At the same time we were challenged to control the rapid growth of our population and to practice family planning.

By the end of the 60s, **Gay Pride** had supplanted the earlier efforts promoting LGBT equality with heterosexuals and the **gay rights movement** became prominent at the end of the decade.

Escalation of the Vietnam War and the draft, resulted in over 500,000 young men – including many students from WSUEC – being sent to war for reasons that were hotly debated at home. **The Anti-War movement** simmered to a frequent boil on college campuses and we students studied and practiced civil disobedience as an important instrument for change.

Protests were common on college campuses and one at Kent State ended in tragedy. After days of rioting in the community and on campus about the US bombing of Cambodia, the Ohio National Guard fired shots into a crowd on campus, killing 4 students and injuring 9. WSUEC students also protested the war, but President Haas encouraged peaceful, non-violent dialogue and respect for other students who wanted to attend classes which some students chose to boycott. Do visit the memorial to the Kent state students on this campus near the Davies Center.

The Kent State Event grabbed the attention of the nation through its newly established communication vehicle, television. Nightly news reports including graphic photos and tallies of American soldiers killed each day in Vietnam became part of everyday life. **Television** transformed our understanding of events half a world away, often within a day of their occurrence.

We were encouraged to **question authority**, especially government: everyone and everything was a fair target!! We asked one another what we were doing besides taking up space on the planet.

Folk music had a resurgence, with many songs having subtext about the Vietnam war. The Beatles transformed rock and roll and introduced musical commentary about social issues.

Then, in May of 1968, we graduated from our student roles into the world of emerging adults and employment – all in the midst of great political and social turbulence.

Fast forward 50 years. You are graduating in the midst of similar turmoil.

The Civil Rights issues of my generation have taken on new meaning, with the **Black Lives Matter** movement and turmoil over the immigration status of many in our communities, especially Mexican Americans.

The feminist movement of my generation has experienced a resurgence in the **#Me Too movement**. Women who have been quiet about their experiences of sexual harassment and rape are going public and global!

Our **anti-war movement** was focused on Vietnam. We now have multiple sites of conflict in the Middle East, potential conflict looming with North Korea, and looming trade wars with China and other parts of the world, just to name a few sources of worry.

Voting Rights established in the 60s, are now being challenged with redistricting.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 is being challenged, along with the EPA regulatory authority established by President Nixon. We continue to debate the reality of global warming and climate change while tracking the melting glaciers in the Arctic.

Marijuana is legal now in several states and new research is revealing risks associated with its recreational use, especially during pregnancy. We grapple with the opioid crisis and related deaths, much of it related to prescription drug use.

The **Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act**, passed in 2010, began filling the health insurance gap experienced by many working poor, but the national debate over having a national health plan continues. We still have not created the community mental health services promised with de-institutionalization of the mentally ill decades ago.

In my city, we are facing the challenges of an affordable housing shortage resulting in over 11,000 people living on the streets or in their cars. All of this exists against a dramatic backdrop of **income inequality** in a community where the number of billionaires has escalated along with the number of homeless school-aged children.

My generation has left you with some **wicked** problems – problems with no easy solutions or quick fixes! These require multiple perspectives, communication across different disciplines and sectors, collaboration with people with competing ideas, imagination of novel solutions, and commitment!

Looking out at the graduating students here today, I remain hopeful. We are beginning to see a resurgence on university campuses of some of the passion and commitment that I had experienced in the 1960s while a student here.

And what can you do?

You are finishing a rigorous university education that has emphasized your ability to **think critically**. **YOUR Thinking** is important to the future of democracy, not just an academic exercise! How do you evaluate the truth value of a tweet or a blog post? How do you evaluate the validity of science vs personal opinion? How do you imagine solutions to some of the wicked problems confronting us?

You will need to go **beyond your comfort zone**. This doesn't require risking your life or traveling the globe, but **involves growing your understanding of people who are different from you**. Volunteering in your community, perhaps by teaching reading to adults, helping new immigrants learn English, or serving in a food bank can provide opportunities to expand your world. **Listening with respect to people whose beliefs differ from yours** prepares you to contribute as part of a multicultural nation and global communities.

Listening is a critical part of communication. Listen, then think again. Share **your** ideas in your **written and oral forms**. **Speak up!** Don't be **afraid** to express these ideas with people

whose opinions differ from yours – **with respect and civility. Use social media for social good! Speak out for those who don't have a voice!**

As you **engage** others, you will build **expertise in working across differences**. Most of us don't have this expertise as we leave college. In Outliers, Malcolm Gladwell estimates it takes roughly 10,000 hours to achieve mastery in one's field – about 5 years according to my calculations. That's a lot of listening and thinking and communicating!

Democracy is not a spectator sport. Engaging means taking some risks and learning from failures as well as successes. Participate in a local city or county council meeting or in state government processes as a citizen, and perhaps in government service. (Your work in the world is more encompassing than your job)

Commitment and persistence have always been linked to solving complex problems. **Grit** is a characteristic now used to predict success in some contemporary workplaces. Grit means you not only have self-discipline, but also are determined to reach a goal, regardless of obstacles.

Cultivate **balance**. For me that was and is combining my academic work with playing music, going to the gym (it's either that or physical therapy once you get to 70), traveling with my husband, and hanging out with my grandchildren who teach me all sorts of things, such as new dances and popular music (3, 6, and 8 year olds offer some interesting perspectives!)
Do make time to have some fun!

And don't forget to **ask for help** when you need it – from peers, your employer, family, friends and other UWEC alumni. Many of us volunteer as mentors.

And now, my wishes for you:

I wish you **joy** in the work you do in your employment as well as in the work you do in the world;

Love and happiness with family and friends; and good health as you begin authoring this next exciting and challenging chapter in life. Thanks for the privilege of addressing you!!