

Marietta College Commencement Address

“Marietta College in a Flat World”

**by Chancellor Roderick G. W. Chu
May 20, 2006**

I. An Honorary Pioneer

- A. President Scott, Trustees, faculty and staff of Marietta College, family, friends and members of the graduating class of 2006: With the receipt of this honorary degree, I am pleased to be able to call myself a member of the Marietta Class of 2006.
- B. This is my first talk since I left the office of Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents yesterday. So today's graduation is a commencement for me as well as my fellow classmates here at Marietta.
- C. Looking back at the concerns of a chancellor for over 8 years from the perspectives of this beautiful campus, I am struck by how vitally important the education my classmates have received at this wonderful college will be not only for them, but for all Ohioans and Americans.

II. The Perspectives of a Chancellor

- A. For the many of you who might not know what a Chancellor is, let me caution you not to be overly swayed by the definition of the term given in the Oxford English Dictionary as being first used in the year 1388 as “A petty official in charge of children, idiots and lunatics.”

- B. Well, on second thought, maybe it's not too far off, since Ohio law states that the job of the Regents and their full-time Chancellor is to advise state policy makers on higher education policy.
- C. Seriously, given my background in strategic consulting, for my 8+ years as Chancellor I've taken policy advice beyond funding and approval of academic programs in Ohio's colleges and universities to the fundamental issue of examining the performance and needs of our state and nation's entire educational system.
- D. Some of us have known for years that we need to change the role of our country's system of elementary, secondary and higher education from its industrial age mission of sorting and filtering: making sure only the very best make it through. In this 21st century knowledge economy, we need to ensure that all students make it through. We simply must better educate many, many more Ohioans.
- E. Last year, New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman published his book *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century*. In that book – which has been on the NY Times best seller list for the past 57 weeks – Friedman provides an insightful description of what has caused the world's economic playing field to flatten, generating enormous new competitors to American workers – and this has occurred in just the past few years.
- F. With the global Internet and millions of individuals getting good educations elsewhere in the world, there simply is no way to close our economic borders to keep jobs from going to others out of America and sapping our quality of life here. The only real way we can hope to keep well-paying jobs here for ourselves and future generations is to ensure that we in Ohio and America know more,

can do more, and will do more than competing workers elsewhere in the world.

- G. What does this hugely competitive new challenge mean for education policy?
1. It means we can no longer be satisfied with educating our kids for our past. We must determine how to educate our kids for their future.
 2. It means we must find ways to educate ourselves as adults to retain an edge over growing competition from technology and from abroad.
 3. It means we must examine the very objective of education. We must focus on educating ourselves so we will continue to learn in this ever more rapidly changing world.
 - a) As American philosopher Eric Hoffer has noted: “In a time of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.”
- H. These are examples of the heady types of issues I have faced as Chancellor.

1. I am grateful to Marietta College for sharing your President, Jean Scott, and Provost, Sue DeWine, with us in Columbus to help us tackle the important work of advancing higher education policy and improving education results in the state of Ohio. While this work has taken much of their time and attention away from what they might devote here in Marietta, on behalf of all of Ohio's citizens, I thank you for their leadership, perspectives and insights that have been invaluable in helping us tackle the serious issues with which we are engaged.

- I. Considering these issues, I found it a delight to come to Marietta to see first-hand how this college is preparing its students not only to compete and win in the knowledge economy of a globally competitive, flat world, but also to be well-rounded citizens, fully prepared to participate in our free and democratic society – to be the kind of people any of us would be delighted to have as a neighbor in our communities.

III. The Marietta College Class of 2006

- A. I've always felt that becoming an instant alumnus brings with it the responsibility of getting to know something of one's new alma mater
 1. So 5 weeks ago, I came to campus and talked with almost 20 faculty, staff and students – including 7 of you who are graduating here today. Through the generous sharing their time, their experiences and their insights, I got a crash course in what it means to be a member of this Marietta College community

2. It was a true pleasure for me to learn what a special place my new alma mater is and what a special class the Marietta College Class of 2006 really is.

B. The faculty, staff and students with whom I spoke agree this has been an extraordinary class.

1. 4 years ago, you entered Marietta College as its smallest freshman class in years.

2. You have seen and experienced tremendous change in this campus

a) You have endured through the most construction this campus has seen in at least 3 decades

b) You have endured through major floods which inundated this campus and the Marietta community

c) You have endured with the most stringent academic standards this college has advanced in memory

d) You have endured through the unfathomable loss of a classmate who was beloved by all

(1) Having heard so many of you speak so fondly of him, I am sorry I will never have the opportunity to know Michael Conte and enjoy the glow of his smile and caring.

(2) Mr. & Mrs. Conte, I am glad you are with us here today to again see how much of an impact you son had on his classmates and this college.

3. Yet through these challenges, the Class of 2006 has persisted and grown.
 - a) You have been the most cohesive class in memory, retaining a larger proportion of your fellow students to enjoy this graduation day
 - b) You have seen the beauty of this campus grow with its new science center, recreation center and housing facilities, and the anticipation of the new library and learning resource center.
 - c) Like no other class, you have become involved in this campus and city, leading efforts and initiatives wherever and whenever needed.
 - d) You have shown what it means to be a member of a community, helping your fellow students, families and neighbors in Marietta in their times of greatest challenge and need

IV. Your Marietta Education

- A. You who are graduating today have grown in an environment in which your faculty and your fellow students have nurtured your development as individuals
- B. Your fellow students told me of how Marietta's professors and staff care about you – and how that caring has created opportunities for you
 1. You have been challenged and sharpened your knowledge and abilities through spirited discussions with your faculty.

2. You've been to dinner at their homes – and had them serve you midnight breakfasts before your finals
 3. Your professors have treated you more as colleagues than students, guiding your education and growth.
 4. They've taken the time – day and night – from their ridiculously busy schedules, going the extra mile to help you out and developing personal relationships with you
 5. You have come to know their kids and become parts of their families, with a personal connection that will persist through your lives as Marietta alumni
 6. You have learned that a Marietta education is more than just going to class and teaching. Your experience has shown the wisdom of the German philosopher Goethe who observed “Everywhere, we learn only from those whom we love.”
- C. You have made close friendships with your fellow students as well
1. They have been caring, kind and informative. Marietta sounds like Cheers, where everybody knows your name, but also where everybody really cares about you and what your future lives may be
 2. You have opened your minds and grown not just intellectually, but socially
 - a) You have learned from the faculty and from your fellow students, but also through your service in the community

3. Of course, your Marietta years have been about more than just study.
 - a) From your outdoor Matriculation Ceremony and white water rafting when you first arrived, to your last Doo Dah Day, to your event-packed Senior Week ...
 - b) From slogging through 4 feet of water in your room, to sandbagging, to moving antiques in the downtown stores up to the second floor, to having brownies and pepperoni rolls ...
 - c) From competing in sports, to cheering on the Etta Express and the Pioneer Navy ...
 - d) From river boat cruises, to whipped cream birthday pies, to the Tampico Challenge ...
 - e) From hanging out on Saturday mornings, to checking out the latest in Facebook, to simply enjoying the beauty of this campus in the evenings ...
 - f) ... you have received, in the best sense, a very liberal education that has prepared you well to embark on your careers and become full-fledged members of the communities in which you will live, work and play.
 4. If you are like those who have graduated before you, you will return to this small, beautiful campus, feeling like you're coming home, with a real sense of ownership in this very special college
- D. But while your liberal education has been important, it is your families and the family environment of Marietta that have enabled us all to celebrate your achievements this day

1. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall once observed:
“None of us got where we are solely by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. We got here because somebody – a parent, a teacher, a crony or a few nuns – bent down and helped us pick up our boots.”
 2. Recognizing Justice Marshall’s sage observation, I would like each of our graduates turn and look at the family and friends, students, faculty and staff who are gathered here today, and pause to think of those who could not be here. Consider how many, many people love you. They are the ones who have supported you financially and emotionally as well as educationally to get you where you are today. Many of them have sacrificed a great deal to enable you to succeed.
- E. Today, perhaps more than any other day you have yet lived, you are the pride and joy of your parents, your family and your friends and the faculty and staff of this college. I know their feelings of pride today are like those that I have felt at commencement ceremonies for my family members – a pride so big I thought my heart truly would burst.
1. All of us are here to honor and celebrate your achievements and to share in the joy of seeing you cross this stage and walk proudly into your bright futures.
 2. Your achievement is the product of a mutual commitment in which your immediate family and your Marietta family have joined to enable you to develop into all that you will be.

- F. Here at Marietta College, you have learned that there is nothing you can't do, if you want to and have a passion to do it. It's never too late.
1. Your years at Marietta have provided you not only with knowledge and skills, but also shaped your abilities and beliefs, motivation and behavior.
 2. Your education has given you a solid foundation not only to learn and succeed in this world, but also to improve it.
 3. I would like to think it is the voice of the learner speaking in the George Bernard Shaw words "You *see* things and you say '*Why?*' But I *dream* things that never were, and I say, '*Why not?*'"

V. Our Future

- A. As I join the ranks of those graduating today, I too am proud to call myself a Marietta alumnus. By coming here, I have learned a lot about what it means to have a Marietta education. I take great hope in the future of Ohio and America because of what I have seen and learned here.
- B. Those entrusted with the education of our fellow citizens – and those enriched by it – face profound questions. As Ohio enters its Third Frontier striving to compete and win in an ever-flattening world, we must seriously re-examine what it takes to educate a whole person.
- C. Education is about more than enabling us to get a good job and higher income. It is about preparing each of us to become a member of our communities – a member of a free and democratic society.

D. So I close with one final thought – from President Woodrow Wilson, who stated:

1. “You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish *yourself* if you forget the errand.”
 - a) Marietta College has helped you prepare for that errand. As you go forth today, celebrating your achievements and recalling the love you have for your family, your fellow students and the faculty and staff of this wonderful place, I know you will never forget it.
2. Congratulations to you all and Godspeed.