

Prepared Remarks for the 2007 AUA Baccalaureate Service

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 2007 Baccalaureate Service of the American University of Armenia. Bestowing laurels, crowns or garlands, upon people of accomplishment is an ancient tradition. We honor that ancient tradition today, as we honor the accomplishments of our graduates.

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While we continue to learn throughout our lives, the time spent studying at university is unique. It is different from later learning, more concentrated, more imaginative, more challenging, more open, and free, and as you look back on it, also more fun, than the kinds of learning and study we may be called on to do later in life. It is also less responsible, since a university is a place to experiment and explore. More importantly, it is a place that we learn that we and others can overcome mistakes and misconceptions through hard work, patience and ingenuity.

Although you will soon leave behind this sheltered environment, you should be sure to take with you the self-confidence that you can meet and overcome obstacles fairly and honestly through intelligent analysis and dedicated work. At the university we learn not to be discouraged, because we understand better why things are the way they are and know better how to address the inevitable problems we all face on our life's journey. On that journey, we must be vigilant for ourselves and others to assure that our world is safe, fair and just, a healthy place for ourselves and future generations. That it not always easy; it often poses risk and demands effort and courage. Vigilance is the price of freedom and shaping our own destiny. It is also a virtue that is especially suited to Armenians, whose patron saint is St. Gregory. Gregory is a Greek name that means "vigilant".

The word baccalaureate comes from the words bacca 'berries' and 'laurel', the plant whose branches were formed into crowns and bestowed on heroes and champions.

Traditionally, that is why laurels are given to graduates, to signal their achievement. With honor comes responsibility, never to forget it is a privilege to receive knowledge and skills at university and that that knowledge and skills are to be used for the common good. We all have many talents, opportunities and resources to do good. Few of us use them as fully or as well as we could. We become distracted or diverted or discouraged. Yet we are reminded of Gandhi's wise saying, that the difference between what we do and what we could do would solve most of the problems of our world. So today we bestow laurels on you in the presence of each other and your family and friends, so that you will remember that each of you are meant to be a hero of your lives and your community. Heroes sometimes fail, but they never fail to try. That may be the most important lesson you learn at university. Take it with you and use it well.