Honored guests, members of the faculty, and fellow graduates,
I feel honored and extremely glad to be speaking to you at this time. Four years ago, when I graduated from Hiawatha High School, there was no way anyone could have convinced me that in 1985 I would be giving the valedictory address at the University of Dallas. For those of you who thought otherwise, Hiawatha Kansas is not exactly the cultural and intellectual hub of the midwest. Western thought has evolved there to the extent of four wheel drive pickups and tractor cabs with radios. When classes began in the fall of 1981, I heard of men like Homer, Plato, and Aristotle literally for the first time. For this and for the rest of my education, I am indebted to the University of Dallas.

The self-professed goal here at UD is to trace the foundations of Western thought. Believe it or not, that was one of the main reasons for my decision to attend classes here. The other one was Rome. Often it is easy to lose sight of these two in the day to day life on campus. Many times I have been disillusioned about what I was doing here, and in this state, I forget the beauty and majesty of Rome. Discouragement can be common here, but still, cynicism accomplishes precious little of value. Never again will we be in such an advantageous situation for learning as Rome offered. To be 19, with a hundred other students, and in Europe is without a doubt the best experience of my life thus far. The art and culture which surrounds one in Rome, not to mention the sheer presence of history is something I will always remember. This realization struck me fully when the Pope said mass at Santa Maria Maggiore on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.
Standing outside the Counter Reformation restoration of that 5th
sixth-century basilica with Father Carroll in the dark
December air as the Pope departed, gave me an impression of
the permeance of Rome. The student in Rome is in a unique
position. He is able to straddle virtually the entire
breadth of the Western tradition. By having the art and
architecture of twenty centuries at his fingertips, he is
much more open to the thought and conceptions behind that
art. The continuity and the immediacy of history I felt
then seem to be the overall aim of education here. In every
department at the University of Dallas, the goal is a synthesis
of tradition. Whether or not it succeeds ultimately rests
with the student himself. I am an English major and pre-med,
and I have never been conscious of a disparity between the
sciences and the humanities. I can safely say that if there
were time enough, I would like to major in almost every
department here. Now more than ever I am aware of how little
I really know. I know but the smallest brush-stroke of the
entire canvas UD has presented. I just finished a senior
project which was 15 pages long. Naturally like
perhaps all of you, I felt relieved and satisfied once it
was over. But when you think about it, it was actually
quite trivial. Shakespeare, Chaucer, Dante, Michelangelo,
Yeats, and name after name keep occurring to me in mockery of
what I think I have accomplished. What is 15 pages of third
rate prose? And this above all seems to me to be the crucial
message of graduation: a bachelor's degree from the University
of Dallas is but a beginning, the smallest of beginnings.
William Butler Yeats once said that when he was young a
sentence flashed in its entirety across his mind. The sentence
was: "Borrow your thoughts into unity."
precisely what awaits each of us, namely, a continuation of what we have begun here, and the ultimate realization of our potential in our chosen disciplines. I realize that all of this sounds high flown and romantic, especially when most of us are simply worried about finding a job in order to scrape together next month's rent and some beer money, not necessarily in that order. But after all, how can one forget or dismiss those isolated moments which undoubtedly have occurred to each one of us when we actually felt inspired by what we were studying. When at last, we really understood why we had chosen our respective majors. In this frame of mind, it is apparent that a liberal arts education has left us mainly with the desire to educate ourselves. This is one of two things with which I am proud to leave, the other is the memory of those I have come to know here. In Rome began a sense of community of which I have become increasingly aware each semester. After my sophomore year, I almost transferred to Kansas University. Of course now I am glad that I did not. I remained here largely because of those of you I had met here, for I was aware that I would be leaving a very unique group of people. I feel that the undergraduates here are singular in their desire to learn. Anyone can drink beer, some better than others, but few people think and quote Shakespeare while they are doing it. This happens here on campus. Each of us has friends here who will be hard to leave. I know that I do and I will remember you, and I hope that you will remember me. Always recall that if any of you happen to be travelling through North East Kansas and wondering if anyone there has heard of Plato, I have in Hiawatha.
By studying here, I believe that I can understand my home town better. Ultimately, the liberal arts education of the University of Dallas does not mean a mere awareness of the past as determining the present. This is undisputedly a large part of the program here, but nevertheless, ideally a degree here points forward not backward. It is a pledge to progress in our world. On this note, the new science building and chapel are especially significant. They represent a commitment by the University to the future. Their presence lends added weight and proportion to our campus. The science building reinforced the idea that truly all of human experience is pursued here. In like manner, the chapel indicates perhaps the most fundamental concern of the University, namely, the spiritual growth of the students. Finally, they are mute symbols of what we as undergraduates really are. Just as they represent a belief in the value of the University’s role in the future, so we are more complete images of UD’s testament to the future. We are the heirs to the Western tradition. As such we occupy a crossroads position. Either the four years we have spent here have been an expensive mistake or they represent the best investment of our lives. I happen to believe in the latter opinion. If this century is not to be totally incomprehensible to us, we must understand its evolution. This is why Rome is so important. In Rome the generation of ideas from the classical world to the Christian world through the Renaissance and up to our modern world is so apparent. It is a vivid dramatization of what we in Irving can only approach through the printed word. There is no photograph or description that can even remotely approach the grandeur of the Sistine Chapel. When we become aware of our
heritage in the present, then we are able to perform what must be done in it. Only by seeing what is to be rejected and what is to be preserved and nurtured in our past can true progress occur. Liberal arts is a stepping forward into the future from a firm footing in the past. From the posture of continued learning, a bachelor's degree signals a belief in a world which is not haphazard and accidental. I have learned in a small way to follow the thread which connects Irving to Rome and Rome to Hiawatha.

Thank you

(torrents of applause)