

Good evening! I'm Nancy Ruscheinski, Notre Dame Class of 1984. It is quite an honor – and frankly a bit surreal – to be speaking to all of you tonight. After all...it seems like just yesterday that I WAS one of you, a liberal arts major squeezing every joyful minute out of my four years at Notre Dame.

Unlike you, though, I don't think I spent much time seriously pondering my future.

I honestly can't recall ever worrying about whether or not I'd find a job, as I raced between Walsh and O'Shaughnessy Hall, cramming for art history tests, interning at the South Bend Tribune...and occasionally hitting a bar or two.

Now granted, that's partly because it was a different time, and a better job market. Back then, jobs were pretty much a foregone conclusion after graduation.

But it's also because I had been told emphatically by my father – Howard Scribner, Class of 1953...that getting a liberal arts degree was **essential** – a **sure thing** – and the **best guarantee** of a well-rounded education and a successful future. He told my sister Sue – class of 79 – and my brother Mark – class of 78 – the same thing. The College of Arts & Letters at Notre Dame was the right place for us.

Now let me be clear – my dad was a business major here! And while he enjoyed an immensely successful banking career at

Chase, he wanted us to have the luxury of a more expansive education. He wanted us to read great books, study language, history, religion and philosophy.

Looking back, I think it was much more about the knowledge that we'd gain, and the kind of people we'd become...then it was about where we would ultimately secure gainful employment.

But his logic was apparently that if you had knowledge and character, and you pursued a wide range of interests, the right career would eventually find you.

So I was able to relish being a relatively unburdened American Studies major.

(By the way...I would have relished it even more if I got to take some of the classes you guys are taking this fall: "The Meaning of Things?" "American Chicks?" Cool!)

As an American Studies major, I developed writing and communication skills – and a real *passion* for writing and communicating -- as I suspect many of you are doing. I became more creative, imaginative, resourceful, and intellectually curious. I became a pretty good researcher, too, and I started to pay more attention to news and politics. And although I had no way of knowing it when I first chose that major -- all of this would prove immensely valuable when I embarked on a career in public relations.

It should be noted here that I'm not sure I'd ever even heard of public relations until I took a class from Professor Robert Schmuhl. At that time, I was beginning to daydream about a future in journalism or advertising – we were all going to be famous investigative reporters and brilliant copywriters in those days. One day, Professor Schmuhl gave us a lesson about the variety of marketing and communications careers we could pursue. He talked about the power of public relations, about managing corporate reputations, and communicating on behalf of well-known brands.

I remember he also challenged some assumptions we had about the starting salaries for different marketing and communications professions. I'm not ashamed to tell you that when I saw that PR salaries were towards the top of the list – as high as \$12,000 a year – well, I was hooked.

So twenty-eight years later...how have I fared with that liberal arts education and PR aspiration? Pretty well, as it turns out.

I'm a senior executive at Edelman, the world's largest and best public relations firm. I've enjoyed 25 years of pitching, winning and growing business, building high-impact consumer marketing campaigns, leading and inspiring teams, cultivating strong client relationships, managing large and profitable operations, and creating innovative practices and industry-leading methodologies.

I've had the opportunity to provide strategic counsel and to generate creative consumer engagement ideas for blue chip organizations like Kraft, Walmart, United Airlines, Burger King, SC Johnson, Humana, Samsung, Quaker, KFC, Butterball...even Notre Dame.

I've gotten to travel the world extensively, presenting to clients in Jakarta, Delhi, and Shanghai this year alone. I ran our headquarters office in Chicago for seven years, and served as US president and chief operating officer for three.

Within Edelman, I've even been able to launch a startup or two: I was the entrepreneur or "intrapreneur" who started Edelman's digital practice way back in 1995. Today that's a \$90 million agency-within-an-agency, with more than 700 digital and social media specialists around the world. Over the past year I got to wear yet another hat, as the firm's first Chief Innovation Officer. Last week, I started a new role as Vice Chair of Client Engagement.

My journey at Edelman has involved plenty of change and adaptability along the way. I've had to be master a wide range of subjects and quickly consume and synthesize vast amounts of information. But the type of education I received HERE –that liberal arts sensibility – prepared me beautifully for that, and offered an ideal training ground for me. It will prepare you well, too...because YOUR ability to synthesize information, to reinvent

yourself and adapt to changes in the world - and the job market - will be your greatest asset when you leave here.

If my career story is instructive for you, terrific. Maybe there are some would-be public relations professionals in the audience...I hope every one of you comes over to talk to me and my colleague Travis at the Edelman table later this evening.

But I also want to tell you a BIGGER story tonight about the power of a liberal arts education. Did you know that the founder of Pinterest – Ben Silbermann – has a liberal arts degree? So does Jamie Dimon, CEO Of JP Morgan Chase. Hillary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice were liberal arts majors; so was Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel. And the chief digital officer for NBC News. And the head coach of the New England Patriots. All of them - liberal arts majors.

Closer to home, there are plenty of Notre Dame alumni with thriving, diverse careers and liberal arts degrees: Jim Nelson, the editor in chief of GQ Magazine. Fashion designer Thom Brown. General Electric's chief financial officer, and ESPN sports anchor Hannah Storm. All of them, liberal arts grads. Oh, and so is philosophy major Reverend John Jenkins – and he seems to be doing pretty well for himself these days.

I share all of these examples with you because the most wonderful thing about graduating from Notre Dame's College of Arts & Letters is the breathtaking variety of career choices and

paths in front of you. Don't let that paralyze you! Because if the companies assembled here tonight are any indication...you're exactly the kind of talent they're looking for.

That's partly because of the skills you've developed – maybe without even realizing it – because they are precisely the skills needed today. Critical thinking. Persuasive writing (and you **can** be persuasive even in 140 characters or less). Excellent verbal communication. Using research to develop insights. Using insights to generate ideas. Visual thinking and storytelling. Creative approaches to problem-solving.

(As my sister put it, 'nothing against business, but the world's most pressing problems won't be solved by finance or accounting majors.')

But a liberal arts education isn't just about the skills you've acquired. Frankly, you learn most of the skills you need on the job anyway. It's about the knowledge you've gained.

Skills aren't power; knowledge is power. Knowledge of people, history and culture, philosophies and systems, and knowledge about the interconnectedness of the world today.

It's also about passion. I can't prove it, but I know liberal arts graduates are more passionate. And your future employers love that you're passionate about something. Trust me when I tell you that they don't see medieval studies or gender studies or

avante garde poetry as impractical coursework. Twenty-first century employers know that passionate interests -- which, by the way, are often expressed in social media channels -- lead to passionate employees...who also happen to be savvy about social media. And passionate, socially savvy employees are very good for business.

So although you are undoubtedly entering one of the toughest job markets in history, your liberal arts degree from Notre Dame WILL be a powerful calling card. You'll be bringing more relevant skills, more passion, more knowledge and ability to the table than you can even imagine.

As for me, I'll be heading home to turn this speech into a "teachable moment" for my fifteen-year-old twins. With any luck, they'll be heading to Notre Dame in three years...and they'll head straight to the College of Arts & Letters.

THANK YOU.