



**President Mark W. Huddleston  
Commencement Address  
May 21, 2011**

Good morning, Class of 2011! And a warm welcome to all of your families, friends, and mentors, and also to our dedicated and distinguished faculty and staff who helped make this day possible. Today, we are proud to celebrate the 141st Commencement of the University of New Hampshire!

You will hear soon from our honored guests, and from representatives of our faculty, board of trustees, alumni, and student body. They all are here to recognize you and to celebrate your achievements.

Before we begin, though, I would like to pause and give special thanks to the parents, families, and loved ones who worked so very hard to support the Class of 2011. I know that it was not always easy, especially during the very troubled economy of these past few years. Today we celebrate you, too, your investment and your wisdom, and the rewarding lifetime your sacrifices afford these scholars. I would ask all of the families and friends who helped make this journey possible to please stand so that the soon-to-be-graduates can also stand, turn around and give you a collective, well deserved loud cheer for all that you've done.

Let's hope that your voices celebrating the value of a UNH education carry clear across the nation and around the world, penetrating even the dome of our state capitol in Concord, New Hampshire.

I find it inspiring, even a little overwhelming to look out on this field today and into your faces—faces that express joy, anxiety, wistfulness, excitement in various measure—and think about not just what UNH has meant to you, but what you have meant to UNH. I know that this special place has transformed you. I have heard many of you use that word, "transformed." But you should know that in your time here you have transformed UNH. You will be part of its history forever.

UNH presidents have an informal tradition of taking a walk around campus early in the morning of Commencement Day, even on rainy days like this one. Mostly it is to thank the grounds crew and police and sound engineers and events staff and others who make commencement possible. But for me the walk is also a time to reflect.

And as I came by this field when the sun was trying to rise today, it struck me both how much change this spot has witnessed over the years—and how much has essentially stayed the same.

If we had gathered here during UNH's first few commencements, we would have missed the ceremony entirely, because at the time UNH was still located in Hanover, New Hampshire. 141 years ago, the ground where you are sitting was still Ben Thompson's cow pasture, and so it would remain until the 1890s. Still, it would have been fun, and inspiring, to stand with Ben in his pasture and listen to him talk about his vision for what would become this great University. And, talk about change, these days, we celebrate Ben's birthday on Facebook.

If we had come here for the 75<sup>th</sup> commencement, much of the campus would be recognizable, at least superficially. The train station would have been there, looking much as it does today. But there wouldn't be many civilians among us. Instead, our view would be filled with young men, mostly, but young women, too, preparing to serve our nation in the waning days of the Second World War, lining up with their duffel bags to depart from that train station. Today, more than a few of you in the class of 2011 are either returning veterans or are soon to enter the ranks of the Army or Air Force as commissioned officers. We salute your service, as generations before us saluted the service of your parents and grandparents.

If we stood here shortly after our 100<sup>th</sup> commencement, say in the fall of 1972, we might meet an incoming student for the class of 1976, who, if he was anything like my friends in the early 1970s, probably had shoulder length hair and bellbottom jeans. That incoming freshman in 1972, David Cote, would eventually become the chairman and chief executive officer of Honeywell, Inc., a company that employs nearly 130,000 people in more than 100 countries. And soon, he will address you, our future leaders, as our keynote speaker.

Well, here we are now at our 141<sup>st</sup> commencement.

Look at this field today.

Look at yourselves.

Just four years ago, most of you were just out of high school. And most of you had no earthly idea what you wanted to do with your life. Your only concrete goal might have been to come to UNH, and to move into that hallowed UNH landmark called Stoke Hall. Good choice, by the way.

Then, before you knew it, things started to change. They may have seemed like small, incremental changes at first. But at UNH, small changes happen quickly, and constantly—and they add up.

Consider a few of the remarkable transformations you have undergone:

- Some 75 percent of you changed majors since you came here. And believe it or not, that experience alone may serve you well, as an average person will change jobs every four years, and will likely change careers several times.
- Last year, more 1,000 UNH students, including many of you, participated in internships in private businesses, public schools, hospitals, local governments, and with community organizations.
- More than 700 UNH students travel abroad each year to study, work, and experience the cultures, societies, and economies that are increasingly intertwined on a global scale.
- More than 30 percent of you volunteered throughout your time here, from joining the Relay for Life to working at the Cornucopia Food Pantry to serving with the Alternative Spring Break Challenge program. In all, UNH students volunteered more than 100,000 hours last year.
- Lots and lots of you have done cutting edge research. This year, the UNH Undergraduate Research Conference included a record 1,100 students. Over the past four years, the Class of 2011 has been instrumental in making the URC the largest undergraduate program of its kind in the country.
- Speaking of the URC, who would have ever thought you'd be presenting research on complex projects such as the Interstellar Boundary Explorer satellite? Physics major Joshua French did just that, and he shared his research with us at the URC. Joshua, are you out there? And he is just one example of 2,500 classmates who have transformed their lives at UNH.

Through your hard work, dedication, scholarship, and achievement, you are now the graduating Class of 2011.

You are equipped with the best education the world has to offer. You are innovators, engaged citizens, problem solvers, and entrepreneurial thinkers. You cultivate the best in yourselves, and those around you in ways that make us all proud.

It makes me especially proud, I have to say. Because you are in a sense my classmates. We arrived here at UNH at the same time, four years ago, and together we have touched and been touched by this wonderful institution.

So, as a fellow member of the class of 2011, I say thank you—congratulations—and warm wishes to each and every one of you.