Grady’s Prepared You to Meet the Future!

Thank you very much. Dean Reid, Dr. King, Dr. Alexander, Dr. Middleton, and Dr. Kreshel, and most importantly, graduates, friends and families of Grady's best.

It is hard for a person from coastal Carolina to talk and have people understand without the aid of PowerPoint slides. So be patient.

I want to talk a minute or two about something you already know. But don't go to sleep as you might in class. You're living in an age of change.

When I was your age the prevailing thought was that the American economy was as strong as General Motors. Today, GM is fighting to avoid following Delta into bankruptcy. Every business is trying to reinvent itself to survive. Change is scary.

Marketing, advertising, PR, all communications and media are all being reinvented. The business model is changing or needs to be changed.

The mass audience is a thing of the past. As Business Week stated, "The proliferation of digital and wireless communication channels is spreading the mass audience ever thinner across narrowcast cable -TV and radio channels, thousands of specialized magazines and millions of computer terminals, video-game consoles, PDA's, and cell phone screens."

According to Saatchi & Saatchi, as television becomes more game-like, mobile phones more television-like, and in-store screens more movie-like, there is a need to put this sight sound and motion technology in human terms.
What's the big story of the next decade? Many more screens. Broadband, wireless and the Internet are making it happen.

Roper research tells us that 50 percent of the country feels it's difficult to keep up with the amount and pace of change happening in America. We're all time challenged. And for marketers, media executives and consumers there is too much information and too little time to digest it.

Grads, think of the media changes taking place since you began high school? What about since you have been in college? I won't ask how many of you have cells or ipods? How many of you have your own blog, podcast, or videocast? How can news or pr people use either or both?

IBM began formally offering blogging tools to its employees six months ago. Today IBM has 15,000 internal registrants and 2,200 external blogs to talk about IBM. Why shouldn't IBM's own experts open blog discussions with consumers? This is change.

What impact will satellite radio have on radio stations? What's going to happen to newspapers with declining circulations? What will unbundling of cable channels have on cable networks? Will digital magazines be profitable? There are many unanswered questions.

Continuing Change.
Many advertising agencies have dropped the word advertising because they are now integrated communication firms. Little is the same as it was a few years ago.

Okay, let's look at change another way.

ABC cut a deal with Apple Computer to download Desperate Housewives onto Apple's new video iPods for $1.99 per episode. Are you willing to buy?

Another example: Fox Television is producing original mini-episodes of 24 to be watched on mobile phones. Will you watch?

Today consumers don't have to read newspapers, listen to radio or watch TV to get the news. My 30-something daughter relies on 11 alive.com for local news and the Weather channel for weather (or weather.com) and in a crisis CNN.com and usually reads the Sunday paper. Where do you get your news? Where do your peers get their news?

Go to Google and check out U.S. news. They claim some 3,800,000,000 of so called news items. Many of these are press releases directly from a company. We can get information differently today.

Are you signing up with your cellphone provider to get ESPN, CNN, or the Weather Channel or even the Discovery Channel, Learning Channel and a host of other sources? What's the impact of this?
Kevin Roberts, CEO, Saatchi & Saatchi recently told newspaper executives: "The newspaper model of the 20th century was production-driven. The newspaper model of the 21st century must be inspiration-driven. Consumers still like paper, but they sure don't depend on it.

Newspapers know everything about their business, but seem to know little or even care little about news consumers.

Today consumers define news on their terms.

He goes on to suggest *Newspapers need to define their screen presence, and not just by putting everything up on the web. The screen is where the action is.* The screen is where consumers are headed. Design the newspaper around and through the screen. Is he right? Something to think about.

Will consumers want to buy stories instead of subscriptions? Another interesting question. Do we know the answer?

Do people really want to watch movies on their cellphones or Blackberrys? Does anyone really know? Just because technology allows us to do something, do consumers want it? It's a thing called consumer acceptance.

Dick Roth, head of Roth Associates, said, "It is interesting. Everyone's trying to address the multitude of media choices." At the moment there are so many unanswered questions about how to best use new media forms.

The communication industry is too focused on what the device can do or what rivals are doing. Do they know what consumers want? They have forgotten consumers have control.

As AG Lafley, CEO of Procter & Gamble, has said, "*your products run for election everyday.*" This applies to everyone in business or media.

So it doesn't matter what your major, you are entering a scary changing world. Where no one really knows what is around the corner. And who is going to survive and in what form.

You're so lucky. You are heading into this unknown. You'll always be challenged. And you can rise to the challenge. You've been trained well to think, to analyze and be strategic. You are prepared to be successful in this brave new world of communication. Companies need people like you who can solve problems.

Your future fields are in need of creativity. Apple's Steve Jobs defines creativity as simply connecting things.
A few years ago Maxine Clark sat close to where you're sitting at her graduation. She went on to lead a department store's advertising and later to become CEO of a discount shoe firm-important business. Maybe it wouldn't be considered especially creative. However, she connected the dots when her niece wanted a teddy bear. As a result, she became CEO and Founder of Build-a-Bear Workshop. I'd say you've arrived when you have a float in the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade as Build a Bear did a few weeks ago. So be creative. You can connect the dots.

Yes, all of these new technology communication companies need people like you. Your opportunities are expanding. And you know that the consumer is the key to your success.

Finally, in this fast paced crazy world, remember to find time for "balance" in your life. And always remember what is important. One of the great benefits of technology is the individual now has more control. People are seeking to exert control over all areas of their lives from social morality to health and emotional well being to work. Something you'll deal with.

And remember your responsibility to give back to society. And Grady! Keep in touch with the Grady alumni, development and placement people on a frequent basis.

If you still don't know what you want to do in life, don't fret. I was an apprentice pharmacist. It will come.

It is time to recognize those in our audience who are so happy to see this day come—parents and family. Grads give them a hand of appreciation for their support.

In a few minutes the rest of us can applaud today's grads as they leave Grady and get on with their lives.

The best to all of you!