

CORNELL UNIVERSITY 139<sup>TH</sup> COMMENCEMENT  
School of Hotel Administration  
Diploma Ceremony  
May 27, 2007

Student Address: Ryan Pernice '07

Thank you, Dean Johnson. On behalf of the graduating class of 2007, welcome to our diploma ceremony. It means a great deal to have you here. Before I begin my remarks, I'd like to acknowledge two groups of people who we owe thanks for our being here today.

First, to the faculty and staff of our School: Over four years, you've helped us grow from wide-eyed freshmen, brimming with naiveté, and slight, though endearing, hubris, to become ladies and gentlemen of maturity and poise. In large part, whatever acumen we have gained – in either the business of profit or life – we owe to you. Thank you for every minute you spent counseling, teaching, and leading us to this day.

Second, to our families, many of whom have traveled across oceans to be with us today. I truly hope that this achievement represents not only the fulfillment of our longtime goal but also, on some level, yours as well. On a special note to our mothers and fathers: From your sons and daughters who aspire to great things and can only so dream because of your love and support, thank you for being here to celebrate what we've worked so tirelessly to achieve. Oftentimes, it was the desire to make you proud that kept us going. I know my own parents always tell me that they are proud of me no matter what, but I do hope this helps a bit.

A few weeks ago, Dean Johnson asked if I, as the 2007 Drown Prize Award Winner, would be the first ever student speaker at the School of Hotel Administration's diploma ceremony. Needless to say, I was absolutely honored. Now that I'm actually on the stage, the full reality of this duty and this day overall is a bit daunting.

But as I stand here, it is comforting to look before me and see my classmates, many of whom I've grown tremendously close to in the past four years. I find it ironic that we'll exit Cornell much as we entered. In that first Dean's Distinguished Lecture, we all gathered in the Statler auditorium together, much as we are now gathered in Barton Hall, patiently listening to someone else speak though all the while going just a bit crazy inside asking ourselves, "What comes next?" Then, our biggest concern was the looming ambiguity of what it meant to be a Cornell student. Of course, we were something greater than your average Cornellian; we were Hotelies, although we didn't yet know what that entailed either. For a brief moment at the beginning of our Cornell lives, we lacked an identity.

Today, we face a similar sense of uncertainty. Until about a week ago, we were sure of ourselves as college students, and that was a role we played well. Now, I find myself pondering the same questions I asked myself in that first Lecture four long years ago: After graduation, what comes next? What new role must I play? What new identity must I create? But in the time I spent in the Hotel School, between that first lecture and today, I gained something priceless: an identity as a Hotelie from the Class of 2007. And this time, as I consider my future, however uncertain, I don't feel so anxious.

As individuals, we spent four years defining ourselves at Cornell. What's amazing to me is that, despite a shared set of courses in the Hotel School, our class possesses such an incredible diversity of interests, talents, and ambitions. Look around and you will see financiers sitting next to foodies, salesmen next to sommeliers. Yet while the experiences we've had at Cornell are certainly different, today we celebrate that one part of our identities – perhaps the biggest part – that is the same for everyone in our class. Despite all the varied paths we carved for ourselves through our four years at Cornell, today we all cross this stage as “Hotelies.”

So what defines a Hotelie? Well, try to walk through Mac's Café between classes, or ride the elevator in Statler Hall without being drawn into a conversation, and you'll see for yourself. We study for exams the best way we know how, in big groups, with a glass of Pinot Noir and a cheese spread. We can point out the difference between a Macintosh and a Washington apple, pontificate over the pros and cons of unionization, craft the most gorgeous PowerPoint you've ever seen, and cap the day with a dinner of risotto and lamb cooked by our Prom King. (Oh, that's another thing: we're the only college I know of at Cornell, or anywhere else, to have a prom. So thank you, Meryl Davis and Liz Martyn.) More than any other student group at Cornell, Hotelies are defined by their ability to succeed in any situation, because every situation involves people, and no one makes a friend more readily than a Hotelie.

In the end, I don't know exactly what comes next for each of you. And this big transition...yeah it's new and scary and kind of a big deal. In 2003, we entered Cornell as individuals, very much without an identity. In 2007, the School of Hotel Administration's greatest graduation gift to us is not any concrete skill or theory we gained in the classroom. Rather, it is the special identity as Hotel School alumni that we'll have for the rest of our lives; something we carry with us everywhere to make the going easier and connect us to each other. If you need financing for a new business, our classmates are on the cutting edge of venture capital. If you want to propose to your girlfriend at a special table at a hot new restaurant, we are in kitchens and dining rooms the world over. And if you ever need business intelligence technology systems, well, I hope you know who to call.

In my last opportunity to address my classmates as a whole, I'd like to issue a challenge. The identity I mentioned earlier, our “Hotelie-ness,” is not something that works well for an individual. As we enter the real world, I realize that my knowing you made Cornell valuable to me, more than any concept in a textbook ever could. And in the coming years, I challenge all of us to remain close, and never forget that our ability to open doors for one another is the greatest power of our Cornell degree.

So after four years at Cornell University that have been sometimes difficult, oftentimes enriching, and always entertaining, congratulations my class of 2007, today we graduate! And with a spirit of limitless possibility and boundless, even reckless, optimism that is the truest hallmark of a Hotelie, we can enter the world and know that everything is ours for the taking. I wish you all the best in whatever comes next.