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Tisch School of the Arts
Salute Speech
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The Theater at Madison Square Garden

To all of the family and friends who have traveled from all over the country and all over the world to be here in Madison Square Garden Theater this morning, to the Tisch faculty and staff, to David Payne Carter Awardees Gerald Casel and Shawn Van Every, Dean Scheeder, our guests -- Executive Vice President, Michael Alfano -- and our honored speaker, Amy Heckerling, Tisch alumna and parent of a newly minted Tisch alumna - to all of you -- I have the great privilege this morning of presenting the 1,290 alumni of the Tisch School of the Arts, class of 2008.

Look at you. You are so magnificent. Each and every one of you is here by virtue of your talent and audacity. Each and everyone of you is also here by virtue of the support and love you have received over the years from the family and friends gathered today, class of 2008, please salute your family and friends.

Alumni of the Tisch School of the Arts - that is powerful. You are now members of a community for life. The Tisch School is now part of your DNA. You can never get rid of us.

The salute ceremony this morning is an opportunity for us -- members of your “community for life” -- to salute and celebrate your accomplishments. You have given us a lot to celebrate.

When you first came to us, we told you that your time here could be a “daring adventure.”

- We invited you to collaborate and as members of the undergraduate group, SCAN -- Students for the Collaborative Arts at NYU - you’ve taken us at our word. You discovered the book, lyrics and music of graduates of the Graduate Musical Theater Writing Program and, as an extra-curricular activity, you cast, directed and acted in “Wood,” your very own off off off Broadway musical.
- Then you entered the show into the New York Musical Theater Festival along with 400 other submissions from around the world, and “Wood” was one of 12 musicals to win a spot in this fall’s festival.
- When you came to Tisch, we told you that we expected you to be leaders in your field and you completed your Ph.D. in Performance Studies and now will assume a tenure track position at Princeton; or at the University of California, Irvine; or a Mellon post-doc at UCLA, or a Princeton Society of Fellows post doc.

- We promised to prepare you for the real world. Now that you have graduated from the Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program in Cinema Studies, supported by an \$8M grant, you will join a team that is tackling the real world problem of salvaging the digital archives of Public Television.
- You will be the costume designer for Trinity Rep Theater in the fall and the lighting designer for an upcoming production at New York Theater Workshop.
- We invited you to challenge the status quo. Three of you from ITP challenged the stereotype that says that artists are not business people. The three of you won the Stern School of Business' entrepreneurship competition. Your design, "social bomb," a cell phone game tied to face book won the top prize of \$50k to help launch your own business.
- You heard us, when we urged you to think globally. You took your camera to a hospital in Battambang, Cambodia where you spent last August photographing in a hospital for victims of land mines.
- You traveled to Japan to film the legendary Mets manager, Bobby Valentine and his efforts to revive baseball in that country. Last month your film, *The Zen of Bobby V*, debuted at the Tribeca Film Festival. This

- You have won top national and international awards: a Beinecke Fellowship, 3 Fulbrights Fellowships for international studies and two Reynolds Fellowships for Social Entrepreneurship.
- You took your film crew to Barrow, Alaska and in sub zero weather, you and fellow students shot a breathtakingly beautiful short that won first prize in the shorts division at the Sundance Film Festival.
- You started the University's first film journal, Film Review, one of the most popular publications on campus.
- We counseled you to take internships and you have taken them at Miramax, ABC daytime television, Yahoo, with famed casting director, Bernie Telsey, Williamstown Theater company, W Magazine, in a lab at the NYU Medical School, Pixar Animation, David Dorfman Dance, - to name a few. Many of you have parlayed these internships into career launching jobs.

You have abundantly demonstrated the world's hunger for your ambition and imagination. The world is waiting for you.

What a world it is. I cannot think of a better time for you - graduates and undergraduates alike -- to be leaving school. You are entering a world volcanic with change. Take for example, the internet. When I came to the Tisch School of the Arts over fifteen years ago, no one at the school - except for ITP -- was using the internet. By 2001 the number of internet users world wide - was 1 billion; by 2007 that number had doubled to 2 billion and by 2011, there will be 3 billion internet users. Fifteen years ago the idea that you would be carrying a cell phone with you day in and day out as if it were a portable life support system was highly unlikely; the idea that you could watch a film from your cell phone was unthinkable.

Now, it's safe to say, virtually every institution, for-profit and not-for-profit alike, representing every discipline in this school is unsettled by the constant churn and seismic pace of change. In today's world of cell phones and social networks, those Hollywood studios and television networks you are working for are scrambling to keep up. Everyone knows they need a bold plan of action; but, no one can afford to take risks. So, they play it safe. They cling to old maps - the familiar, the celebrity, tradition, the way things are done. They cling to the old maps even as the old world around them shifts and slides into something totally unrecognizable.

You, on the other hand, you are entering new to this changing world. Clearly many of you have already discovered that in a new world, old maps don't work. In a new world, what you need most is the GPS of your imagination. You have no capital to preserve so you can afford to be playful. "You have no reverence for the ways things are done" so you can experiment. You can take your one man show to LaMama or P.S. 122 or your choreography to the Tank and give it a try. When everyone is bemoaning the high cost of L.A. and New York, four of you from Recorded Music, like Louis and Clark scouting new territory, will move to Asheville, North Carolina to invent the future of the music industry.

There is no map. You are like pioneers, hitching up the horses to the conestoga wagons and with your talent and raw ambition, you are making a way as you make your way. Maybe you don't have much capital but you have great wealth. You have the tools of your craft, and your finely honed critical thinking skills. You have the ability to revel in being unsettled. And you have the potency of your new "community for life."

In the old days, neither the Tisch School nor NYU recognized the potency of this community. We knew we had great alumni like our honored speaker, Amy Heckerling. When she began her career as a film director, you could count the number of women film directors on one hand and still not use up all of your fingers. Nonetheless, she forged a successful career in film and television and raised a family. She did all of that without the benefit of an alumni network.

Lucky for you, your community for life has changed and changed dramatically in that regard.

There are many ways to connect with the alumni community these days. If you are moving out west, there is a west coast group and, if you are staying in New York City, there is the more recently formed, east coast group. Speaking of the internet, there is also the Tisch Alumni List Serve, that helps you contact other Tisch alums in your home town or make contacts in a new city. In addition to those groups, individual departments have begun drawing on the potency of alumni connections. For example, Tapping into the 900 graduate acting alumni who graduated in the past 40 years, faculty in grad acting, have created an incubator for the creation of new work. One of those pieces – a three person “Tempest” opens at Classic Stage Company in July. ITP has long tapped alumni to stay on to do seminal research, becoming in the process one of the country’s leading greenhouses for new ideas in interactive media. A dramatic Writing alumna founded “Behind the Scenes” to stage readings of new work by alumni playwrights. And the Richard Vague and Chris Columbus awards have been a catalyst for teams of young alumni filmmakers to come together to do what they were trained to do best and that is make films. For the third year in a row Graduate Musical Theatre Writing will mount a production of work of its alumni, performed by Undergraduate Drama alums and lit by a lighting designer from the Department of Design for Stage and Film. In the past few years, Tisch alumni

have turned membership in the “community for life” into a laboratory for new work, new ways of making and distributing art, a crucible for new ideas.

And not a minute too soon: we need all the new ideas you can generate. For all of the rapid change we live in a world that seems stuck in the past. We are in a war we can't seem to end for reasons we have forgotten. We live on a planet we keep wearing down. Dwelling in our individual differences, we get lost in a wilderness of misunderstanding and miscommunication. We have an opportunity to elect new leadership for our country yet we engage in what the historian Tony Judt describes as a “politics of insecurity.”

You, on the other hand, you are so new and so joyful. You understand how to make something from nothing. You know how to be intensely individual inside of an intensely collaborative collective. You know how to build out of your differences a space for human commonness. You are alive and you've got the power.

So, seize your freedom

Be bold; fearless, heretical.

Speak the unspeakable and

When forgetting becomes convenient

Make us remember

When the unconscionable becomes

Commonplace,

Be our conscience.

In the face of the impossible,

Imagine possibilities.

You are truly magnificent!

I salute you this morning. I salute you and your gifts and I leave you with a gift of my own, a poem I offer up every year to the graduates. The poet is Christopher Logue, who wrote it on the 50th anniversary of the death of the French poet, Guillaume Apollinaire, and it goes like this.

Come to the edge

It's too high

Come to the edge

We might fall

Come to the edge

And they came

And he pushed them

And they flew.

Good luck.