

National Honor Society Induction, Spring 2006
Keynote Speech by Kate Deater

I'd like to start by saying that I was both shocked and honored to be asked to speak this evening. I've been on the NHS selection committee for quite a few years and have attended many of the induction ceremonies. I thought about speaking to this group, and felt at ease because I already know all of you! Then I remembered that last year's speaker was Mrs. Maxwell... When I pictured myself trying to follow in the footsteps of the "Lady of Latin," I felt downright intimidated!

Well... that aside...

I want to start by congratulating each of you and your parents for both taking and supporting the many steps it has taken to come this far.

Your fellow inductees have already spoken about the 4 areas that are at the heart of the National Honor Society. I want to take those four components: scholarship, leadership, community service and character into reality. Weaving these four things into the reality of your life is an important part of the keeping your focus as you take each step forward. The purpose in your steps will be built on small decisions that you make everyday...and the perspective you gain with each step will help you evolve into an intelligent, competent, creative, and compassionate world citizen.

Whew... that sounds like a tall order... so let me break it down a bit.

When I think about scholarship, I've come to see that it is much more than GPA points or positions in rank or on the honor roll. It is in the lifelong pursuit of learning that you will find the most reward.

If this was 1988 or 89... and this was my junior or senior year... I wouldn't even be in the seats among you. I was what you'd call a 'late bloomer' in academic matters. I sailed through my public school education with little challenge, and little effort. With those came little interest. If you went back to my high school and told my old teachers what I was doing now... they wouldn't even believe you!!

When I got to college, I found some things... actually challenging... After I got over the irritation of having to do some actual work... things started to fall into place. I found a new side of me that really enjoyed learning.

Just this past week, I talked with a student that graduated in 2004 and is now in college. When she talked about her current semester, she specifically mentioned a course that she found difficult. She said... I took Physiology this term... and "Deater... it was the hardest class I've ever taken in my life! But... I learned SO much in there...it was cool." I also think about a guy that attended my high school, and eventually the same college as I did... he would always be excited on the day of a test... saying... it's not a TEST... it's an opportunity to show how much I've learned, and let my professor know what a great job he's doing! You'll be comforted to know that I never quite bought into that logic!! But I know that some of you depend on us, and our evaluation of you, as a way to measure your success in learning. You're like Lisa Simpson... you look at us with wide eyes and say... GRADE ME!!... when really, you already know how you've done and what you've learned. And when you stop using grades as a motivator to learn material, you'll find that the whole world around you is full of learning opportunities.

Leadership is not about being elected or appointed to an office. It's not a position you'll ever hold in a corporation or institution. It's an attitude that you develop over time. When I think of the great

world leaders, or even great local and school leaders... they have a few things in common. They have a vision and are very skilled at communicating that vision to other people. They build trust easily with others because they are clear about what they stand for... and what they won't stand for! They are willing to take risks to make things better, and they appreciate the investments of time and energy among the people they work with. They play "King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table," not "King of the Mountain!" They make difficult decisions with compassion and admit their mistakes.

Service... as a concept can be confusing. First, you must separate it from the 30 required hours for graduation. Service is not a single thing... a single event... It is not the collection of money in homeroom for a fundraiser... that's a service PROJECT. Service is not a social event or fieldtrip with your friends that you attend because it will be 'fun.' And CONTRARY to popular belief... it's not something that you do because it will look good on a college or scholarship application. Service is a sincere gift of yourself to others. Paul McCartney said, "you get what you give." True service happens all the time, and anywhere - and has no visible or tangible benefit to yourself.

Character. What a loaded word! You have all been indoctrinated with the Character Counts initiative, the 6 pillars of character (Respect, Trustworthiness, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship)... and when you hear words like impeccable, good and strong attached to character, it's easy to see that it's an important thing to work on...

But what does it all mean in your life? It's large things, and small things, that you decide to do. It's not your yearbook picture, your resume, or the myspace profile you create for others to see... it's what you are when nobody else is around to be impressed. Do you pick up a piece of trash because it was dropped? Do you cut and paste from a bunch of websites for that research paper that's due? Do you feel entitled to your mistakes... or try to strike a bargain... saying, well – I did that right, so it's okay to do this wrong... nobody's perfect – and things will really come out even in the end. Do you make "deals" with yourself to make yourself feel better when you slip? It's the integrity of those private decisions that will define your character. Your ultimate success and happiness will depend on making good ones.

So... for those of you that may have zoned-out... here are my thoughts in a nutshell...

Take advantage of as many learning opportunities as you can – in whatever form they present themselves to you. Give sincerely. Admit your mistakes, make good private decisions, and Always be true to yourself.

There's a line in a song by John Mellancamp that says... "you have to stand for something or you'll fall for anything." I know that this group can stand tall!