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Second Thoughts

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Former Secretary of Education

Messages to graduates

BAGUIO City—What messages can commencement speakers deliver to the graduates during this period of global economic crisis and, in the Philippines', protracted political malaise?

Clearly, the occasion calls for some congratulatory greetings. The graduates have worked hard to earn their degrees, and their families, at great cost, have supported their studies. Graduation speakers do not want to come across as kill-joy, Old Testament prophets predicting doom and gloom. At a time of economic and political uncertainty, neither do they want to appear as Pollyannas peddling uncritical optimism.

Four distinguished guests addressed the graduates of the University of the Cordilleras in Baguio last week and, in their individual ways, walked the tightrope be-

tween dampening the enthusiasm of the graduates and deluding them with false hopes.

Professor Lydia Arao Palaypay, former Dean of the Institute of Nursing and subsequently vice president for academic affairs at the Far Eastern university, pioneered the development of the four-year B.S. Nursing program and later helped evolve the ladderized curriculum of the two-year Associate in Health Science degree. She spoke to the nursing graduates about the contributions of the profession in improving the health and life expectancy of the population, but also warned them about the shrinking market for nurses.

Like Professor Palaypay, Dr. Fely Marilyn E. Lorenzo, founding Director of the U.P. Institute of Health Sciences and Development Studies, stressed the pride the nursing graduates

should take in their calling. She challenged them to do their part to defend the integrity of their profession by emulating the example of Cyndi Erfe, Dennis Bautista and Earl Sumite. The three were nursing graduates from Baguio schools who alerted authorities about the cheating in the 2006 nursing licensure exam and participated in pursuing the case in court.

Karina Constantino-David's audience included public administration graduates, the group most attuned to her experience as former Chair of the Civil Service Commission. Engineering and architecture graduates were among those who listened to Felino A. Palafox, Jr., founder and chief architect/urban planner of the internationally-acclaimed architectural firm Palafox and Associates that he founded in 1989. Unlike Professor Palaypay and Dr. Lorenzo, neither enjoyed the advantage of addressing graduates of only one discipline.

For David, the Class of 2009 represented a "crisis generation." Though they were among the lucky few among their age group privileged to complete a college course, they faced the serious threat of joining the ranks of the educated unemployed. The government's employment

generation programs were not relevant to the graduates. These jobs basically called for manual labor on barangay road construction or forest and mangrove regreening projects, for which the graduates were over-qualified.

The crisis generation belonged to a bigger youth group of 18-30-year-olds, which Palafox referred to as the Millennial Generation. Fresh from a meeting of architects and urban planners in San Francisco, Palafox noted that about two-thirds of the conference papers dealt either with environmental concerns or the larger problem of climate change. Without sustained action to address these issues, their dire consequences would impact, in 20-30 years, on the Millennial Generation. Consider the Philippines losing a third of its islands to rising seas.

David exposed violations of Civil Service Regulations by the Office of the President, without results. Palafox gave up a million-dollar contract and alerted the highest government officials to the planned destruction of 360 trees in Subic. He gave the names of people complicit in the plot at a Senate hearing. His reward was a libel case and death threats. And the Senate investigations of

Senator Gordon appear stalled.

But their scepticism about the current political leadership has not deterred David or Palafox from pursuing their advocacy for good government. They echoed the same message that Palaypay and Lorenzo had sounded. The graduates had to become involved in nation-building. They had no direct control over many forces that would affect their lives. Like whistle-blowers Erfe, Bautista and Sumite, they were not simply powerless pawns. They could make a difference by the choices they make and the actions they take.

These were hard messages to give the graduates. Their degrees, which open opportunities to them, came at a price. They had the responsibility to those who helped them through school and to those who did not have the benefit of their education to do their part in redeeming the nation.

From different disciplines and perspectives, the commencement speakers offered the graduates only the comforting reassurance that they were not doomed to be either victims or oppressors. They could be part of the solution.

The column, "Second Thoughts" appears at the Manila Bulletin every Monday.



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Contact persons :

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