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"From Dollars to Grades in the Chase for Learning" by Malcolm Moos, Spring Commencement: June 2, 1968

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FROM DOLLARS TO GRADES IN THE CHASE FOR LEARNING

Commencement Address by
Dr. Malcolm C. Moos,
president of the University of Minnesota,
on Sunday, June 2, 1968,
at the University of North Dakota,
Grand Forks, North Dakota

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Malcolm Charles Moos

Citation

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Educator, author, political scientist, consultant to Presidents, you have assumed the highest office at the University of Minnesota at a time when that great institution begins her second century. You bring to that high office a new concept of service compatible with scholarship, a new sense of commitment to the common good. You envision a communiversity beyond whose walls emanate a greater vision for more effective human community. Confident that yours will be a brilliant achievement in the enrichment of knowledge for the welfare of humanity, the University of North Dakota is proud to confer upon you the Degree of Doctor of Laws.

THE commencement address as an ornamental capstone to a collegiate career is expected to compact the wisdom of the ages within the compass of twenty minutes. It invariably fails on the first of these aims and always does on the second, much to the grief of parents, students, and faculties. Since by training I am a political scientist—a term that today seems to have lost half of its title and all of its dignity—I hope you will forgive me if I begin by recalling an experience that well illustrates the shards and tatters of most efforts at a commencement address.

Once when I was just a boy my Father took me to a political rally on a day when I wanted to go fishing with my Uncle Bill. The speaker talked for an hour and a half on the differences between a Democrat and a Republican and just as he wound up the dreadful harangue, the elderly white-haired gentleman on my left leaned forward and tapped a friend in the next row. "I forgot my darn hearing aid," he shouted. "What did he talk about?" "I don't know," yelled back his friend. "He didn't say."

Today it is just thirty-two years since I was graduated from college. If we look ahead at the thirty-two storm-swept years that lie ahead of you, when the year two thousand will be reached and you will hopefully be in the prime of your careers, what will the future bring? What should it bring? And, more importantly, are we beginning to do what ought to be done to deserve the future we would like to see—a future with dazzling advances in the biomedical field, a stable social system, cities of distinctive architecture free from urban blight, and a world at peace with the sorrows of war permanently consigned to the scrolls of history?

Time, as the celebrated philosopher-theologian Augustine reminds us, is a three-fold present: the present as we experience it, the past as present memory, and the future as present expectation. Of one matter we can be fairly certain as we contemplate the brink of doubt and confusion that surrounds us: Nothing seems to set ourselves and our contemporaries further apart from earlier epochs and societies than the significance we ascribe to the future. More and more our thinking seeks out a forward-referring loop. We must concentrate on long-range forecasting and the need to plan wisely today in order to keep critical options open for the society of tomorrow.

In education we are faced with the problem of educational giantism and the need to dismantle assembly line educational systems. Fourteen per cent of our youth went to college when I was graduated; today 45 per cent are

enrolled and every indicator suggests that the entire nation is becoming one large classroom. But it is not entirely numbers, not funding, not the vast complexities of administering our institutions of higher learning that lie at the heart of our concern, but rather a matter that is central to the domain of the mind and the spirit. The twin dangers I submit are that, first, we still tend to enthrone the man who knows the price of everything but the value of nothing; that we still produce the "instructed" man, not the educated man. We grind people through our mills; we "instruct" but do not educate in the broadest sense.

Second, we all criticize Horatio Alger for spending his life chasing dollars, and we like to believe that we have evolved past the crass materialism of the buccaneering days that worshiped the dollar. But we have come to embrace a new cult and a deadly one at that: An educational system that exalts the chasing of grades. It is a system not designed to measure the intellectual growth potential of men and women, but a means of providing a kind of cosmetic record for the "instructed" man. Do not misunderstand. Like Lord Balfour, "I am more or less indifferent when being praised, not altogether unhappy when being abused, but I must confess downright uneasy when being explained." My criticism is not of the student for chasing grades; the criticism must be directed at the system where the rewards and incentives make the chasing of grades a national educational steeplechase.

Admission to professional schools, to graduate schools to the leading institutions of

higher learning, are all so tightly tied to grades that the student has no choice but to conform. Essentially the student is tyrannized by the system and lives out his collegiate life in an academic environment of fear that hangs over him like a deadly mist. It is a system that neither taxes the elasticity of the mind nor promotes a code of educational ethics that ought to enoble the entire system of higher learning. That it lingers on from generation to generation without serious challenge does great disservice both to our Republic of learning—our universities and colleges—and our learning Republic.

WHEN a friend of mine was introduced to Brancusi, the noted sculptor, and told him he was a writer, Brancusi said quickly: "I've never cared for the medium. You can't see it from every side." In short, this is the nub of the problem as we seek to educate a truly socially literate people and find solutions to our own problems at home, as well as those nagging sorrows throughout the world that has brought America to a new brink of terors. If anything is certain in this uncertain world it is that both at home and abroad we will have to walk increasingly in a corridor of confrontations. They may be campus confrontations as, young people have begun to question authority in the person of dads, university presidents, bishops, and popes; encounters in mayors' offices, or protracted negotiations that seek to build stone by stone settlements to military conflict. In such a climate it is well

to recall that historically, this nation has manifested a tolerance toward violent expressions of opposition that has both amazed and confused many foreign observers. At times conduct has gone right to the edge of sedition.

As we tilt over immensely complex and combustible issues, it becomes ever more important that we fall back upon the steadying traditions of our society — the time-honored, tested, true traditions of the open society — the right to speak unmuzzled. It is this principle that President Starcher has upheld and for which this university stands the taller. Criticism may abound from the stout defense of free expression, but fortunate is the community to have such a defender. Some of you may recall the brilliant French writer and flyer, Saint Exupery, who, in 1944, flew from Southern France on a war mission never to return. Later, at the dedication of a monument to him, an American admirer said to Saint Exupery's widow: "In all of France you can never find enough stones to build monuments to your dead heroes." "Well," she sighed, "there will always be plenty to throw at them while they're still alive."

As you take leave today and as we contemplate where we may meet again on the home diamond, an ageing Moos would remind you that in one respect your careers will stand in marked contrast to those which have gone before you: as we move from an earning to a learning society, education will be a continuous part of your life. In a sense, your education will be somewhat comparable to a driver's license or passport that has to be

renewed periodically. It will be a better world because your generation has the talents to help us ascend the upper, difficult slopes of the summits. The climb will be a long one, but you have the gifts to stay the course: a strong sense of our history and respect for it, a strong vision of your mission and, most important, a measured optimism for the destiny of this Republic. And, most notably of all, it may well be—and I believe it must be—your generation that will build the structures for permanent peace. When I was just leaving college, the distinguished editor of the *Chicago Daily News* and author of *Young Captain Sam Grant* told me of a dialogue he once had with his eight-year-old daughter as they were driving through Southern Illinois. As they passed a national guard encampment the young girl asked her Dad who all the men were. He explained they were soldiers. "What for?" she asked. "They're being trained to fight wars," he answered. "What are wars?" she persisted. Her father then explained that when two societies are unable to solve their disputes they go to war. Not to be put off, she waited a spell, then finally said quietly, "Daddy, what happens if neither side shows up?"

Graduates of the class of 1968, I salute you and wish you well for the exciting journey that lies ahead. You should be about your work.

DR. MALCOLM M. MOOS

Inaugurated May 9th as the 10th president of the University of Minnesota, Dr. Moos received the Ph.D. degree in political science from the University of California in 1942, and from then until 1961 was a political science professor at John Hopkins University.

In the political field, Dr. Moos has served as the Chairman of the Maryland Republican State Central Committee, and speechwriter for both President Eisenhower and Pennsylvania Gov. William Scranton.

In 1964, Dr. Moos joined the Ford Foundation, and two years later was named director of the Office of Government and Law of the foundation.

As an author and co-author, the university president has written "Dwight D. Eisenhower," a children's book; "Hats in the Ring," with Stephen Hess, and "The Campus and the State," with Francis Rourke.