

**Niagara University New Student Convocation Address**  
**August 25, 2006**

Who will change the world?

As an academic who researches international relations, I look at the world and I see that it needs changing. I could point to the ongoing wars and conflicts, income inequality around the world, environmental problems, the nuclear proliferation, the terrorist threats, genocide, even to the fact that there were 267 pirate attacks last year (!). No matter what field you have come to study, you will find plenty of problems that need solving.

But the point of my comments today is not to highlight the problems of the world. The goal is to identify who can solve these problems.

Who will change the world?

I believe that the most likely individuals to solve the world's problems will have four attributes:

- (1) resources,
- (2) information,
- (3) an ability to communicate that information, and
- (4) the knowledge to transform that information into power.

So who will change the world? Who has these four things?

- ❖ If you have money in your wallet or spare change in a dish, you are among the world's wealthiest
- ❖ Less than 5% of the world's population has some college-level education
- ❖ Less than 5% of the world's population owns a computer

In other words, as of Monday, when you start your classes, you will have three of the tools necessary to solve the world's problems. You are already among the elite of the world in terms of resources, information, and the ability to communicate.

How do you develop the knowledge to transform that information into power?

That is where the next four years comes into play. If I can impress one thing upon you today, it is the fact that for the next four years, your job is to think. Google the word "University," and you will find that it is supposed to be:

- ❖ an arena for discussion and debate
- ❖ a place of learning and exploring
- ❖ a marketplace of ideas

It should be a place for developing the skill of thinking. Not memorization, not regurgitation of facts, not saying what we want to hear. Your job, your responsibility, is to practice thinking deep thoughts. It is to imagine what could be.

So who will change the world?

It will be the person who takes that job – of thinking – seriously.

Earlier this week I took a group of five students to the United Nations. We attended committee sessions; we met with training specialists, economists, lawyers, reporters, delegates... But the prize from that trip was this [hold up business card].

We met the person who is assessing the peacekeepers that are being deployed in Lebanon. He has trained counter-terrorism experts all over the world, he has developed conflict resolution strategies, he is one of the top people in peacebuilding efforts in the world! And do you know what he did in that meeting? While we were discussing a number of global problems, he turned to each student, individually, and he asked them, “What do you think the solution is?” And he listened to their ideas. At the end of the meeting, he handed me this card, and he said, “If your students have good ideas, let me know. I want to hear about them.”

I tell you this, not because every student should aspire to go to the United Nations or to work on Peacekeeping missions, but because each of you should plan to realize your highest vision within your own field of study. If you can imagine it, it is possible to accomplish it during your time at Niagara University.

So who will change the world? That is up to you.

*David A. Reilly, Ph.D.*  
*Director of International Studies &*  
*Assistant Professor of Political Science*  
*Niagara University*