

## **Convocation Address, College of Design, December 15, 2007**

Good morning Dean Engelbrecht, distinguished faculty and guests, and the most important people, our honored graduates of the College of Design.

It is an honor and a pleasure for me to spend a few moments with you before you head off to the rest of your lives. Although I am a wildlife ecologist by trade, I do have a connection to design. You might say I married into the profession. Renee, my wife, is an architect. She also is a take-no-prisoners advocate of two important principles, which I think bear repeating here today:

- Bad design has no excuse.
- Good design need not cost more.

These have become design mantras for me over the years and have served me well in setting high standards for many types of endeavors.

Today, before you leave us here at ISU, I want to make sure that you know a little about Extension and the opportunities that it offers you in your future undertakings, as well as how it relates to design.

Let me begin by giving you a very brief history of design at Iowa State and the land-grant university in general. Iowa State has, since its very beginning, focused on the ideals that higher education should be accessible to all and that the university should teach liberal and practical subjects. These ideals are integral to the land-grant university. And design, surely, is a liberal and practical subject. Although the College of Design is only 29 years old, most of its programs have existed since the beginning of Iowa State and others since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, architecture began in the Division of Engineering, landscape architecture and planning began in the Division of Agriculture, and art and design began in the Division of Home Economics. Design at Iowa State has been an evolution from single subjects to several courses to specialized majors to programs to departments — and finally, to the College of Design that we celebrate with your graduation here today.

Your work as students in the College of Design has prepared you for life as design professionals. Through the college's outreach programs and programs with ISU Extension, many of you have gained real-world experiences that you could not have obtained by merely sitting in a classroom.

Iowa State's College of Design brings bright, willing, and able students eager to stretch their design wings, so to speak — to offer their ideas, practice their design skills, and interact with the residents of Iowa communities to make design come alive in a real place for real people with real needs. This isn't a textbook example or an experiment in a locked-up laboratory. It's real-life experience that has helped you connect with Iowa and see the possibilities for your own future.

And Extension is the connector, the tie that binds together the expertise from the university with the needs of Iowans. It is a tie, a connection to Iowa State, that you can maintain long after you have left the university.

Programs such as Community Visioning, PLaCE, Town/Craft, and Design West are fine examples of the integration of design education with on-going ISU Extension programming. These joint efforts go beyond traditional ISU Extension roles to fulfill the broader goals of university engagement. Communities benefit, students benefit, and the instruction within the college and university is enriched. I would like to take a moment to familiarize you with some of them:

### *Community Visioning*<sup>1</sup>

The Community Visioning Program integrates technical landscape planning and design techniques with sustainable community action to assist community leaders and volunteers in making sound and meaningful decisions about the local landscape. The program empowers local leaders through a planning process that results in an enhancement plan reflecting the values and identity of the community.

### *PLaCE*<sup>2</sup>

The PLaCE (Partnering Landscape and Community Enhancement) program aims to enhance and promote the quality and character of Iowa's landscapes and communities. The College of Design will engage with communities in collaborative efforts to understand, envision, and promote a fundamental enhancement of their physical environment.

### *Town/Craft*<sup>3</sup>

The center for Town/Craft is an alliance of Hometown Perry, Iowa, the College of Design at Iowa State University, and ISU Extension Community and Economic Development for the purpose of identifying and developing new "ideas and strategies that strengthen small communities."

Town/Craft combines the resources into a comprehensive vehicle for envisioning a sustainable future for Iowa towns and surrounding landscapes. The center expects to include the knowledge, wisdom, and creative energy of the arts, sciences, liberal studies, politics, economics, entrepreneurship, and, most important, the real and virtual citizenry of our Iowa towns as it pursues its mission.

### *Design West*<sup>4</sup>

The ISU Design West studio is a new satellite program of the College of Design. It expands regional educational opportunities in the design disciplines of architecture, landscape architecture, urban and regional planning, graphic design and interior design. The program is a partnership of the College of Design, Iowa State University Extension, and Sioux City, supported in part by an Iowa Great

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<sup>1</sup> From <http://www.communityvisioning.org/overview.html>

<sup>2</sup> From <http://www.design.iastate.edu/place.php>

<sup>3</sup> From <http://www.design.iastate.edu/TownCraft/>

<sup>4</sup> From <http://www.iastate.edu/~nscentral/news/2007/sep/designwest.shtml>

Places grant. And to quote your esteemed Dean, Mark Engelbrecht, "The studio is intended as a destination for people to learn, explore, and interact on the topics of urban design, community development, and quality of life in Sioux City and the surrounding area."

These programs are perfect examples of ISU Extension being in-sync with Iowa's values of healthy people, healthy environments, and healthy economies. We build and support relationships with organizations, agencies, businesses, communities, and individual Iowans of all ages. We recruit our state's young people to Iowa schools and careers. We work to renew Iowa communities — improving quality of life, providing opportunities for lifelong learning, and helping communities develop as good places to live, work, and raise a family. And we bring resources to the table — the research from Iowa State, our ISU Extension staff, and our connections throughout the state. These are the keys to Extension's continued relevance today and in the future

I encourage you, as new design professionals, to promote and advocate for these types of programs in your communities. Do what you can to strengthen the connection of Iowa State's College of Design, Extension, and the people of Iowa.

The relationship between the design professions and ISU Extension extends more than 80 years at Iowa State University. However, this vital relationship between the college and ISU Extension remains unique to the state of Iowa and the nation's land grant system. It represents a true center of excellence within Iowa State University, is the envy of many of our peers, and contributes greatly to our status as one of the best Extension systems in the country.

We at Iowa State will do our part to grow this relationship. In your new role as Iowa State alumni you can grow this relationship as well. Continue to work with the College of Design through ISU Extension to the benefit of your communities. Stay in touch through Extension—your county ISU Extension office remains a front door to the university at any time. Run for an elected position on your county ISU Extension council. Volunteer to help your community through Extension, no matter what city—or even what state—you call home as you pursue life after graduation. But most importantly, take the knowledge that you have gained here and continue to use it throughout your life to make the world a better place, a more beautiful place for all of us in which to live and enjoy.

And finally I cannot be the wildlife ecologist that I am and leave here today without reminding you about conservation and the environment. With Global warming, increasing human populations, and decreasing energy supplies, you as graduates of the College of Design can and will have an impact. As architects and landscape architects; as artists, planners, and designers; you will have the ability to impact our natural environment in positive or negative ways. One needs only to look as far as how we have designed and built our suburbs and subdivisions to understand their impact on energy waste and contribution to global warming. I always have believed that it is important that non-natural resource majors, especially engineers, be required to take a course in General Ecology. I would also suggest that of students in the College of Design. I have a colleague at Utah State

University on the landscape architecture faculty, who took a sabbatical and went to NDSU to earn a Master's Degree in wildlife biology so that he could better understand the wildlife habitat he was impacting with his designs. So I will leave you with this short essay to remind that you all have this responsibility.

It is called *Goose Music*:

I stand each summer, in a prairie that produces its nostalgic fullness of native grasses and forbs, of big bluestem grass and Silphium sunflowers, both taller than a man, in the undisturbed tiny strip of land between a highway and a railroad track. I have hardened myself to the sounds of roaring automobiles and thundering trucks; I accept the inglorious fact that unless I wish to drive a good long way (itself destructive to my search for some aesthetic pleasure from the natural world) to find a prairie that does not have the intruding sounds of its mechanical conquerors—if there be any such prairie with solitude at all—I had better accept the noise. At least for prairie I will act as though a remnant of its natural beauty were better than no taste at all. But I cannot so easily accept the blank and uncomprehending faces in the speeding automobiles that pass so close to me, faces without interest or imagination, faces oblivious to everything about them, unable to recognize or appreciate the remnants of the magnificent flora that once covered a third of the continent and gave it soils that were four feet thick, unable to see them even as “weeds,” faces (I swear it's true) unable even to see me there by the roadside. What must such a life be like? And where do you suppose are they all going so fast, when pieces of the primal beauty of the vast American prairie lie here to be seen and touched and smelled in the roadside ditch?

Watching the fullness of prairie bloomings or watching the spring migration of birds, each of these is like developing a love affair, it gets better and better, each gets more intriguing, each is infinite in its possibilities for intimacy, affection, and pleasure. The natural world has an unlimited capacity to add to the breadth of the human experience. You have an obligation to learn how to approach your primal lover.

There is an immense amount of energy and materials of this earth locked up in the multitudinously fascinating bird forms of organization. Hundreds of millions of these astounding organisms twice yearly hurtle themselves across the face of the globe. Millions of geese ya-honk and cackle their ancient ways north and south, bringing spring to the tundra and the tundra to the human soul. I ask myself, sometimes, if the shifting masses of their fragile bodies might not make a detectable tilt in the axis of the earth; I suppose not, but there is no doubt that they can, and should make a detectable shift in the capacities of the human mind. Would you be so careless as to miss it? Would you be so stupid as to destroy it?

Again, my congratulations on the success of your graduation and my sincere best wishes for your continued success in life.