

2019 Commencement Address

Saint Leo University

By Timothy Robinson

Delivered at the Florida State Fairgrounds on Saturday, April 27, 2019

Distinguished faculty and honored guests, I am humbled to represent the class of 2019. I would like to thank the president of Saint Leo University, Dr. Senese, our deans, professors and administrative staff who have all contributed to our academic success. To the families in the audience, I would like to say thank you for your patience and support. Thank you all for being here to share this special day with us.

My name is Tim Robinson. I am a father, a husband and an active-duty service member. I am here today to celebrate earning my Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice after beginning it 15 years ago. Before coming to Saint Leo University, I was an average student. However, that all changed thanks to the inspiration of our amazing faculty, staff and my classmates. I cannot believe I am standing here before you and was given the opportunity to speak on behalf of this graduating class. I am humbled and thank you all very much for this opportunity.

I came to our school as a transfer student. I began my education at St. John's University in Queens, New York. When I realized that although I am proud to serve our nation, my true calling is to serve a more local community, and I knew I needed to complete my criminal justice degree. I knew it would be impossible as a service member and family man to sit in a classroom, so I was curious to see if there was

an online program that would not just have me click through a couple of courses and then just mail me a piece of paper that said I graduated college. I wanted an education program that would challenge me and give me the tools I need to solve real-world problems. I was not sure I could find this in an online program considering it would be very difficult to socialize and learn from my peers in an online classroom. But then I talked to an enrollment counselor from Saint Leo University and found out that our University offers a superb education, student life that includes student organizations, as well as a career services department dedicated to helping students and alumni, and this was all online as well!

I also learned that this school is one of the best for active-duty, veterans and military spouses to attend. This was important to me because although I was getting ready to transfer to shore duty, I still had some time left with the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit capable of deploying at a moment's notice. I was only in school a week or two when I experienced this. One morning, I was a little early at work and I was still getting used to all of our school's systems, so I was checking out Lions SHARE and saw another student who also happened to be a criminal justice student, but in the graduate program, was posting pictures of the devastation he was witnessing as a first responder in Texas after Hurricane Harvey. I was a firefighter when Hurricane Sandy destroyed my hometown in Long Beach, New York, including the house I grew up in, so I wanted to go help and I knew there was a good chance my command would be going. When I was told we were going, I was going to track that guy down and tell him I'm another student from Saint Leo, and I'm here to help. At the same time, I was disappointed because the ship they were sending us on was not ready to have us on board and we would not likely have Internet, so I thought for sure I would have to drop my classes. However, my advisor, Steve, told me to contact my professors and see what they say, so I did and they assured me of their support. I put my textbooks in my pack and off I went and was able to keep up with the readings and the assignments while I was out, so all I had to do was submit them when I had Internet again. As it turned out, we never made it to

Texas because we were sent to the Caribbean where we would go help in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico after Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

When I made it back, not only was I able to submit my assignments and receive full credit, but I also had the opportunity to get involved with the online student organizations, like the Student Communications Club where I learned to develop my writing skills and made some great friends. I met that student from Texas, Mike Fulton, in the Student Peer Mentoring Club where his story inspired me. We had the opportunity to get to know each other in the Online Criminal Justice Association, and I finally caught up with him today as he is also here with us, receiving his Master's degree. If it were not for people like Mike, or the many friends, faculty and staff that I have met along the way, I might not be graduating today, but I definitely would not be enrolled in the graduate program I am in right now.

My fellow graduates, we all have our own story, but one thing we have in common is that we all worked diligently to balance career, family and school to finally stand before this great audience, donned in this sharp academic regalia. Today is our day to rejoice in this accomplishment. However, my fellow graduates, our work is not yet done. There are more challenges that await us, but we will conquer them because we are Saint Leo University Lions.

Lions are known to be social animals who enjoy fellowship with each other in groups called a "pride."

Ladies and Gentlemen, our pride has grown from students who attended a small Catholic college in Pasco County to a worldwide campus of Lions either on a computer or in classrooms in learning centers and military installations around the globe. Our school is one of the pioneers of distance learning and online education, and thanks to this innovation, we have people in our class today from multiple generations who were able to achieve this great accomplishment. For the first time during our

academic career, we come together as graduates from campus, the Center for Online Learning and various Education Centers, as one generation of college graduates but more importantly, as one pride. Many of us never met the person sitting to the right or the left of us. Aside from a common major, we know there is something else we have in common – the fact we are both Lions, which tells us a great deal about one another because we know that we are people who never accept the status quo; rather, we fight for what is just. Like our school's Patron Saint, Pope Saint Leo the Great, who defended his people against barbarians including the ruthless Atilla the Hun, we too seek to inspire charity in a world filled with hate and suffering. To execute this mission, our Benedictine Fathers have armed us not with weapons of war, but weapons of intellect, consisting of Excellence, Community, Respect, Personal Development, Responsible Stewardship and Integrity. Armed with these core values, we are prepared for any task, accomplish any goal, and defeat all challenges. As we prepare to depart each other's company today, remember that we are one pride, worldwide. Some of us will go on to further studies, and for others, their student career is over. But one thing we all have in common is that today marks our new life as Lions, and we have joined a pride where we will enjoy fellowship for the rest of our lives.

My fellow graduates, thank you for letting me represent you today. I just have one last fact to share about Lions with you: that is that scientists say their roar can be heard from five miles away. Saint Leo University Class of 2019, the time has come to let the world know that we have arrived. I am proud to be part of this fellowship with you, and Congratulations to you all!