Sacred Heart University

From the Selected Works of Andrew Miller

August 29, 2016

School of Communication and Media Arts Marks Inaugural Graduation Ceremony

Andrew Miller

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Sacred Heart University's School of Communication and Media Arts (SCMA) awarded approximately 70 diplomas at its inaugural graduation ceremony recently. Approximately 70 students gathered in the Frank and Marisa Martire Business & Communications Center, facing faculty, staff, family and friends. University administrators and faculty addressed them before bestowing diplomas.

“This is our first graduation ceremony,” said Andrew Miller, director of SCMA’s graduate programs. “We’re excited to have you all here.”

Rupendra Paliwal, provost and vice president for academic affairs, also greeted the crowd. “Congratulations, graduates,” Paliwal said. “The real learning begins now.” He explained that when students begin working, they really will start to experience life and grow.

Robin Cautin, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, told the group it always will be the first graduating class, and she always will be proud of them.

James Castonguay, director of SCMA, provided the crowd with a brief history of the school. He explained that media studies became a major in 1999, and it grew from there. “I would have never predicted in 2016 I’d be attending the first School of Communication and Media Arts graduation,” Castonguay said. “We recognize the program is only as good as our students.” He congratulated and thanked the graduates for placing their trust in SHU, and he asked them to keep in touch with him as they embark on their careers.

Following Castonguay’s speech, Justin Liberman, co-program director of SCMA’s film and television master’s program, took the podium to introduce the event’s featured guest speaker, Frank Whaley. Whaley is an actor, writer and director whose 30-year career has landed him roles in dozens of films and TV shows, including Pulp Fiction, Ironweed, Ray Donovan and Madoff.

Whaley inspired and amused the crowd with his advice and personal tales. “I am most proud and truly happy and humbled to be sharing this moment with all of you,” he said.
He told the graduates he gave an enormous amount of thought about what he would say at the "monumental occasion." He related that, as he pondered over his speech, he thought, "What would Frank Whaley have benefited from hearing at this point in his life?"

“I wondered what advice or words of wisdom ‘2016 Frank’ might impart to ‘little 1985 Frank,’” he said. “Firstly, I would strongly suggest to ‘little 1985 Frank’ that he rethink the spikiness and color of his hair, reconsider the number and size of his earrings…roll down the sleeves of your lady blazer…and do away altogether with shoulder pads; you look like Nancy Reagan.”

After more jokes about tattoos, music and girlfriends, Whaley turned serious. “It’s fine to think you know everything, as long as you can acknowledge it is remotely possible that you do not know everything,” he advised.

Whaley told the graduates to make their own molds, and small regrets are okay. He urged them to be on time and don’t be afraid to be pushy. “Time is precious; don’t waste it,” he said. “It goes by really, really, really fast.”

Whaley also encouraged them to exercise their creative muscles every day by drawing, writing and taking photos. “Be confident. Even when you’re scared to death, be confident. Remember, you got this; you know this,” Whaley said.

After Whaley’s address, graduates received their diplomas. Amanda Sialiano, who earned her master’s degree in communication, concluded the ceremony with a final speech. She told her peers to cherish every moment and to push the limits whenever possible. Leadership and confidence will lead to great things, she said. “The moment we all worked so hard for is finally here.”

At the ceremony’s conclusion, graduates took photos with family, friends and faculty and enjoyed refreshments.

The ceremony “was really great,” said Viviane Batista, who also earned a master’s degree in communication. “I’m really proud of myself.”