

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Christine Clark Jun 20, 2013

Comedian Lewis Black Advises Graduates That Sense of Humor Will Serve as ‘Life Preserver’

Thurgood Marshall College commencement one of 8 ceremonies held on campus over weekend



Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

Always keep your sense of humor. Hold on to your idealistic beliefs. Pursue your dreams. Take care of each other. And never look at your cell phone during a job interview. Those were some of the words of wisdom comedian Lewis Black shared Saturday with 1,200 graduating Thurgood Marshall College students as part of UC San Diego’s 2013 commencement series.

Black is a two-time Grammy and an Emmy Award-winning comic who has been a guest commentator on “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart” since 1996. He is best known for his rant-type performances in which he vexingly reports on perceived absurdities in politics, religion and pop culture.

In his first commencement address, the famed stand-up comic and social critic gave a witty speech, reminding students that a sense of humor will be their “life preserver in what could definitely be a veil of tears.”



“Relish it. Cultivate it,” he said. “It will keep you sane in the midst of the madness you will encounter nearly every day of your life. It is vital to your existence.”

Black’s talk was preceded by a welcome from UC San Diego Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla, who participated in all of the UC San Diego’s graduation ceremonies. More than 6,000 students graduated from UC San Diego’s six colleges over the weekend. Hundreds more received graduate and professional degrees. Other graduation speakers included alumnus Robert Buckley, an actor who has appeared on the CW’s “One Tree Hill” and NBC’s “Lipstick Jungle.” Buckley kicked off graduation weekend Friday night with hundreds of students during the All Campus Graduation Celebration.

Khosla encouraged the new graduates gathered at Marshall’s commencement ceremony to use their education to help others.

“However you find your passion, make sure it’s something that makes you happy and also contributes to society,” Khosla said. “Whatever you end up doing, know that you’ll always be a part of our UC San Diego family. And know that you’ve made a lasting impact at UC San Diego and at Marshall College.”

Black echoed similar sentiments, encouraging students to follow their dreams.

“Pursue whatever it is that you want to do with your life,” Black said. “It is the only secret to happiness that I know except for maybe true love, that and maybe having the amazing health insurance plan that our congressmen have.”

Black touched on many subjects in his 13-minute speech, ranging from misconceptions of one’s ability to multitask, to his positive thoughts on paying taxes and his concerns about the state of social security.

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“Before I forget, I just want to say, I am really sorry you might not get the social security checks you might have spent when you get old,” Black joked. “Our parents passed it on to our generation, but no one ever said to us that we were supposed to pass it on to the next generation. So we spent it.”

An M.F.A. graduate from Yale University, Black’s first foray into show business was as a playwright. Having written more than 40 plays, his work has been performed throughout the country. His work in theater led him to performing comedy and writing. He is the author of three *New York Times* bestsellers.

As an actor, he has appeared in more than a dozen films, including “Man of the Year,” and in television shows, such as “The Big Bang Theory.”

“Pursuing your dream, I believe that is the path you should follow; that is why you have the dream to be on the road that you should be on,” he said. “If you follow that road, you might not end up at your dream, but you will end up doing something that gives you immense satisfaction.”



He encouraged students not to base their happiness on money and said he was as happy earning a meager living as a playwright as he is now working as a successful comic.

He also spoke about the importance of holding on to ideals.

“Just because you get old, it doesn’t mean you have to let go of your youthful inquisitiveness. Just because you get old, it doesn’t mean you have to let go of the beliefs you have now. You have them for a reason. It’s generally called idealism, and

there is nothing wrong with being idealistic.”

Black, who is 64, concluded his speech by telling students to be better than his generation and help make the world a better place.

“You are already years ahead of us socially,” Black said. “You have all the information that mankind has gathered right in your pocket in your phone. Now use that information to find the facts to make a better world than the one we have today ... You matter. You are important. Get the job done and remember to take care of each other.”

Black regularly performs comedy across the country and also supports U.S. military personnel. He has performed in three tours with the USO, visiting several military bases in the Middle East and Europe.

Other speakers at UC San Diego’s commencement celebrations Saturday included San Diego City Council member Sherri Lightner, who delivered the keynote address during the Office of Graduate Studies graduation ceremony where 500 students received Ph.D.s and 1,125 students received their

master's degrees.

Sixth College alumnus Sev Ohanian spoke to 929 Sixth College graduating students and about 2,000 guests at 1 p.m. Saturday. Ohanian is a filmmaker who served as producer and cinematographer on the 2008 film “My Big Fat Armenian Family” and the 2013 film “Fruitville Station,” which won the Grand Jury Prize and Audience Award at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival.



For John Muir College’s commencement on Saturday, graduating Muir senior Elizabeth Elena Garcia, gave a talk, entitled “Learning to be Who We Are and Love What We Do,” to 1,200 new Muir alumni.

Sunday’s graduation ceremonies started off with Earl Warren College’s event at 8 a.m., which was followed by the School for International Relations and Pacific Studies (IR/PS) ceremony at 10:30 a.m. IR/PS’s keynote speaker was Bowman Cutter, a senior fellow and director of the Next American Economy Project at the Roosevelt Institute.

Rounding out the weekend was Revelle College’s ceremony at 1 p.m. followed by Eleanor Roosevelt College’s graduation at 5 p.m. Both events took place on RIMAC field and featured graduating students from each college as keynote speakers.

Other special graduation celebrations included the Rainbow Graduation for LGBT students and celebrations for the Black Student Union, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MECHA), the Native American Student Alliance and Kaibigang Pilipino student organizations. Khosla attended the majority of the events, where he thanked all of the graduates for making UC San Diego a better place and urged them to apply their education to change our world.

For more information on UC San Diego’s 2013 commencement series, [click here](#).



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