

COMMENCEMENT 2012



Here are some highlights of the 158th Commencement of Syracuse University and the 115th Commencement of the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, held on May 13 in the Carrier Dome:

DEGREES CONFERRED

SU, 5,056; SUNY ESF, 637.

CLASS MARSHALS

Patrick J. Alvarez, College of Visual and Performing Arts, and Stephen A. Barton, College of Arts and Sciences

STUDENT SPEAKER

Stephen A. Barton, University Scholar

HONORARY DOCTORAL RECIPIENTS

Joel Louis Lebowitz G'55, G'56, George William Hill Professor of Mathematics and Physics and director of the Center for Mathematical Sciences Research at Rutgers University, and human rights activist (Doctor of Science); **Patricia Anne Moore**, gerontologist and designer (Doctor of Fine Arts); **Carl J.**

Schramm, entrepreneur and former president of the Kauffman Foundation (Doctor of Humane Letters); **Aaron Sorkin '83**, award-winning screenwriter, producer, and playwright (Doctor of Fine Arts).

COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER

Aaron Sorkin '83

QUOTING SORKIN

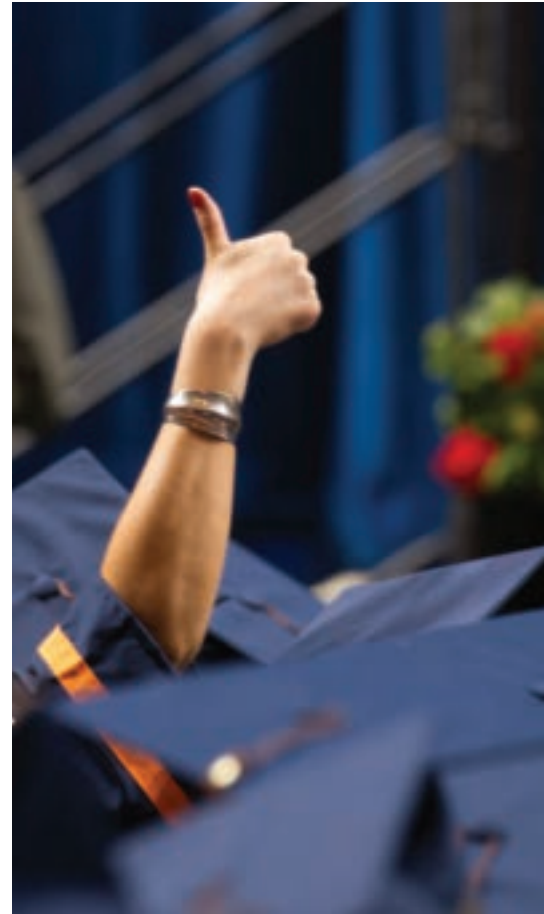
Today is May 13th and today you graduate and the rules are about to change, and one of them is this: Decisions are made by those who show up. Don't ever forget that you're a citizen of this world.

Don't ever forget that you're a citizen of this world, and there are things you can do to lift the human spirit, things that are easy, things that are free,

things that you can do every day. Civility, respect, kindness, character. You're too good for *schadenfreude*, you're too good for gossip and snark, you're too good for intolerance—and since you're walking into the middle of a presidential election, it's worth mentioning that you're too good to think people who disagree with you are your enemy. Unless they went to Georgetown, in which case, they can go to hell.

Don't ever forget that a small group of thoughtful people can change the world. It's the only thing that ever has.

Rehearsal's over. You're going out there now, you're going to do this thing. How you live matters. You're going to fall down, but the world doesn't care how many times you fall down, as long as it's one fewer than the number of times you get back up.



» TO VIEW MORE COMMENCEMENT photos and a video of Aaron Sorkin's address, go to sumagazine.syr.edu and click on the links.





DANNY ZUKER '86 FUNNY MAN

DANNY ZUKER WAS DAYS AWAY from delivering the keynote at the 2012 Newhouse School Convocation, and he was worried about...not being funny. "They're expecting funny," he says. "It will be quite a disappointment if I'm dry."

Sometimes it's hard to tell if Zuker, the Emmy Award-winning writer and co-executive producer for ABC's *Modern Family*, is joking, but it's safe to assume he is. Turns out being funny comes naturally to Zuker—and always has. Here are excerpts of his phone conversation with *SU Magazine* contributing writer Wendy Loughlin G'95, Newhouse's communications director.

When did you decide you wanted to do comedy?

My grandfather was a bartender at a hotel in the Catskills, and he knew all the performers. When I was about 5, he introduced one of them as a comedian, and I asked what that meant. He told me it's someone who tells jokes. A light bulb went on, the heavens opened up, angels started singing. I thought, "Wait, you can get *paid* to do that?" To me that was the ultimate job.

Were you always funny?

I started doing stand-up comedy when I was 16. I would sneak into Manhattan and talk my way into clubs—I have always looked older than I actually am, which is a drag now that I'm 48—and I'd do this really terrible stand-up. I kept doing it all through college and got up to the level of mediocre.

What was your first "big break"?

I can trace my entire career back to a college internship. I was working on the show *PM Magazine* with executive producer Steve Schwartz [now a Hollywood producer]. After graduation, I moved to the city and worked odd jobs, including making videos about developmentally disabled kids—not exactly the best job for a comedy writer. Schwartz was putting together a talk show for Howard Stern, and he hired me as a PA [production assistant]. That was my first job in show business.

Tell me about your first writing gig.

My first time as a paid writer was on *The Arsenio Hall Show*. I was basically a glorified PA, but I submitted jokes every day for three weeks and was writing a large portion of the monologue. Finally, Arsenio called me in and said, "I either have to fire you



or hire you [as a writer]." So he hired me. And now I make a living writing jokes, which a lot of people say you can't do. I think it's all about the luck of throwing yourself out there and finding a way.

You were working on another project when you saw the pilot for *Modern Family* and you wanted in. What drew you to the show?

I'm a father of three, I live in the suburbs, I'm not terribly unlike Phil Dunphy. I could relate to it. And the cast: It's like lightning in a bottle. Good writing has never saved bad acting, but good acting has often saved middle-of-the-road writing.

You're very active on Twitter [@DannyZuker], and hilarious. How did that come about?

At first I didn't get it. I went a year or more without tweeting anything, except "How does this work?" Then I heard about people amassing followers by telling jokes, and I could see the utility. Twitter is like a whole new form of stand-up, and it forces you to write, and you get feedback, and you can do it all day. I got a rush out of it. And it's a democratizing tool. You can put jokes out there and if you're funny, and funny every day, eventually people will notice and you'll get picked up.

In 140 characters or less, what's your best piece of advice for students who want to go into the entertainment industry?

Send someone else your spec script.

Postscript: Zuker was decidedly not "dry" at the Newhouse Convocation ceremony. Watch the video at www.youtube.com/NewhouseSU.