

**WGS Undergraduate Commencement Address '07**  
**Professor Harleen Singh**

Good Afternoon! It is my honor to be the commencement speaker for the Women's and Gender Studies majors and minors today. I have known that I had to write something for this moment for a few weeks now, but every time I began to type I was stymied by the enormity of this task. What can I possibly say to a room full of majors and minors in Women's and Gender studies, faculty from the Program, the Board, and all the families and friends gathered here to celebrate this day? Every time I opened the newspaper the pages were littered with news of all that seemed out of control, of all that is wrong with our world. And I thought, yes, this is it. I will tell them why it is necessary for a program, such as ours, to exist. I will urge them to go out and change the world. I will remind them of what I hope they have learnt in our courses of justice, freedom, and equality. And then it occurred to me—they know this. These are intelligent human beings who have already comprehended that there is much that is lacking in the world, and by choosing to be majors and minors in our program they have set themselves on a course where they will fight these inequities. And they have heard all about this in your courses—don't make them sit through that again!

And then, to procrastinate, I began to look through old photographs. And those of you, who have taken 5a with me, will remember a photograph on WebCT of a young Indian girl. I took that photograph in 1998 on a hiking trip in the Himalayan Mountains of India and it reminds me of something I hope I will never forget. While walking in a beautiful sun-filled valley I had come across a group of buffalo herders who migrated to the mountains in the summer. They had fixed up a home near some fruit trees and by the side of a huge boulder. They were not privileged in any sense of the word. And when I came to their home, this little girl came running out to offer me an apple. I took it, I sat there and ate it, and then, cognizant of my privilege, I offered her some money for the apple. She looked me straight in the eye and said—you don't have to be rich to be able to give.

And I began to wonder if, in our commitment to fix the wrongs of our world, we had lost sight of all that is right with the world.

I had taught my students about systems of privilege, about history, about gender, about economic and social inequalities, but did I speak to them of happiness, of generosity, of love? I know I taught them to be critical thinkers, good writers, and concerned human beings—but have I taught them to be happy? To trust in laughter even when its history is a minefield of racist and sexist epithets?

And then it dawned on me—this is a day of commencement, a day of beginnings, of hope. And so I offer to you, a manifesto of sorts—neither exhaustive by any means, nor objective, but a list of things I hope you will remember to enjoy. A list of what, I believe, is right with our world.

1. You are graduating
2. Despite the temperatures today, this room is filled with warmth
3. The endless possibility of joy can be glimpsed in the smile of a child
4. Chocolate
5. Every culture, every religion, every country—has music
6. Women's and Gender Studies will celebrate its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this fall
7. Everyone who derided the fashion choices of the 80's...now wears 80's inspired clothes
8. One book, one person, can still have a lasting effect on our lives
9. There is as yet no law against tickling someone or being tickled
10. I don't have to follow the expected logic of lists and end at 10
11. A walk in a field, in a valley, on a mountain—teaches you more than you ever expected to learn
12. You are graduating