

Three Anecdotes and A Couple of Quotes

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1 Introduction

Ambassador Young, Dean Bahl, Members of the Faculty, Members of the Staff, Fellow Students, Distinguished Guests...Good Evening.

My time at Georgia State University in general and at the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies in particular has been and continues to be a great one. Since I only have a few minutes, I do not anticipate discussing the greatness of GSU in a justifiable manner during this talk. However, I do hope to address some of my experiences at GSU that are representative of what push this institution towards greater achievements each and every day.

With this in mind I have decided to name this speech "*Three Anecdotes and A Couple of Quotes.*" In itself, this title may seem strange; however, after careful scrutiny it is the title that best suits this talk. For, I intend to illustrate the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies by means of exactly *three anecdotes and two quotes.* Although some of these are intended to be entertaining, I have selected each of them since they are representative of what we stand for.

2 Anecdote 1

The **first anecdote** is not as much of an anecdote as it is a summary of what I have accomplished during the academic year 2006–2007. My intention here is not to advertise my personal accomplishments. Rather, this summary is intended to illustrate two key arguments.

First, that no student can obtain great academic achievements *without* a continuing support from faculty and staff. Secondly, that *any* student can achieve what I have achieved – and then some – with sufficient faculty and staff support in combination with sufficient drive.

For me, this academic year has been a particularly fruitful one. I have managed to:

1. Serve as a teaching assistant for two Ph.D. level classes
2. Present at a major professional conference, namely the First World Meeting of the Public Choice Societies
3. Present at a seminar at the International Food Policy Research Institute in D.C.
4. Present at two brown bag seminars, one at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta's Research Department and another at the Department of Economics here at Georgia State University

5. Receive two academic awards for excellence in research. First, an honorable mention from the Public Choice Society for one of the three best papers submitted for the Knut-Wicksell Prize and secondly, the Joseph K. Heyman Scholarship from the Atlanta Economics Club
6. Receive an academic award for excellence in teaching, namely the Theodore C. Boyden Excellence in Teaching Award from the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies
7. Obtain a Georgia State University dissertation grant for support of my research on corruption and yardstick competition and two travel grants – one from the GSU Economics Department and one from the Public Choice Society
8. Finally, secure the position of post-doctoral fellow in experimental economics with the Market, Trade and Institutions Division at the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, D.C. to begin fall of this year.

So, the accomplishments are quite a few. However, what must an outside observer conclude from this list of "accomplishments?" *One must conclude that I have a set of truly great supporters!* It is understood that it takes a certain drive on the part of any student to strive for bigger and better things. However, over and above such drive, a student needs additional support from faculty and staff in order to reach new heights. And the fact is: That I have had truly outstanding supporters throughout my time here at GSU. So, what I want you to take away from this anecdote is that *behind every great student stands an even greater group of supporters* – consisting of faculty, staff, alumni and of course, family and friends.

3 Anecdote 2

The **second anecdote** is representative of something that I consider to be very important within ANY organization – a sense of humor. The setting is Ragan Petrie's office in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies building. I was running some economics experiments. For those of us who are unfamiliar with this concept, economics experiments are research sessions in which mainly students make economic decisions and they are rewarded in cash for their participation.

Consequently, I had some cash on me. It was the end of the day and – being the meticulous person that I am – I was trying to balance my cash drawer to the nearest penny. Since I was dealing with a substantial amount of cash, Ragan suggested we close the office door almost fully while I sorted things out. As I was in the middle of my fervent counting, none other than Dave Sjoquist – one of our senior professors – walked into the room to deliver a letter addressed for Ragan which had accidentally been delivered to him.

At first, it did not occur to him that there were many stacks of dollar bills on the desk. He delivered the letter, closed the door and left the room. After about fifteen seconds, he came back into the room, stared at the cash, looked at the two of us and said: *"I wonder what grade you're getting for this course."* Of course, we all burst out in laughter for the comment came at an unexpected yet opportune time.

To me this story is memorable because it is exactly the type of experience that characterizes the atmosphere at the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies.

First, the anecdote illustrates a sense of humor on the part of faculty – this is not an uncommon experience at GSU. From comical sayings such as "*Don't do research with people who don't do research...*" to "*Where's the beef...*" our faculty abound of humor and wit and, it seems that they always have something entertaining *yet sensible* to say.

Secondly, the anecdote illustrates a great relationship between students and faculty. I have attended several academic institutions throughout my career and many are the schools that have not managed to successfully bridge the divide between students and professors. AYSPS has been VERY successful at that and this is a great asset to our organization.

Finally, the anecdote contains some personal irony. For, the cash I was counting out was for my research experiments on corruption. So, one can imagine that to be "accused" of "corrupt" behavior at that point in time was quite ironic to me.

4 Anecdote 3

The **third anecdote** is representative of the greatness of our staff. A while back, for some reason, only half of my graduate stipend was deposited into my bank account. Apparently, HR had recently changed systems and my usual payment was not linked to the appropriate accounts. As we all know, students generally live on a very tight budget. So, I was – to say the least – quite worried about this occurrence. *How was I to pay rent, food etc.?*

So, I ran to the usual staff members in the economics department – Caroline Griffin – and in the Dean's office – Avani Raval – and I asked them what to do. After some phone calls had been made, Avani explained the problem. He then proceeded to inform me that he would write me a personal check to serve as a buffer until I received my full payment from GSU. Avani wrote me the check no questions asked and told me to pay him back whenever. I was very pleasantly surprised by this gesture and I cannot express how much I appreciated that. For, he had absolutely no obligation for doing that.

This anecdote illustrates a couple of main things. First, the importance of staff for a student's academic achievements and survival. Secondly, the attitude of AYSPS staff. Our staff is friendly, capable and open to inquiry and suggestion and they form a great complement to our organization.

5 A Couple of Quotes

Ladies and Gentlemen: You may have noted that none of the chosen anecdotes specifically allude to the greatness of our students. This is where my "couple of quotes" fit in. Since I am speaking on behalf of students in the economics department I solicited opinions from students in my year of the Ph.D. program. The following two quotes capture the student experience and profile.

Mike Tasto said the following: *"One of the best things about getting a Ph.D. at Georgia State is having access to some of the profession's best researchers and experiencing the devotion they have to teaching us their knowledge and wisdom."*

Nara Monkam said the following: *"My greatest experience at AYSPS and at GSU in general would have been the opportunity to study, work and grow in such a cosmopolitan and eclectic environment. It may be not as thrilling as a trip around the world, but it is excitingly close."*

I do not believe I could have summarized our student body and the student experience better. Indeed, our student body is diverse and vibrant and we are constantly seeking to achieve new heights. And I can truly say that my fellow students have added to my student experience at GSU in ways that I never could have imagined.

6 Closing Remarks

In closing I would like to leave you with two main thoughts.

First, throughout my time here at Georgia State University I have always been fortunate enough to receive advice and support from truly great individuals. And, I would like to take this time to publicly thank each and every one of you who have assisted me in any way. For fear of forgetting names, unlike the Academy Awards, I will refrain from naming names; however, *you ALL know who you are! And, I thank you sincerely!*

Finally, I would like to leave you with the following words. Whatever you do in life, do it with passion, motivation and dedication. For, without these three ingredients, you may become good, but you will never be great!

Ladies and Gentlemen: I thank you once again for your attention.