

**MSW Graduation Celebration  
Greetings from  
Dr. Gregory Sadlek  
Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences  
Cleveland State University  
May 8, 2009**

I am pleased to bring you greetings on behalf of Cleveland State University's College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. I greet you not only as the Dean of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences but also as an honorary member of Phi Alpha Honor Society, Delta Zeta chapter, a membership of which I am very proud. This ceremony marks an important milestone in the lives of you graduates.

Your diploma represents hundreds of hours of study and field practice. I have been told, for example, that, during their program at CSU, MSW students contribute about 900 hours of service work in one of about 250 to 275 cooperating agencies. This is an amazing statistic. It suggests that Social Work students at both the University of Akron and Cleveland State University have not only mastered their professions but have also already made significant contributions to their respective communities.

Just attaining a Master's Degree is a remarkable achievement. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, only about 9.9% of the U.S. population achieves this level of academic accomplishment. So this puts you in an elite group. You have much to be proud of.

But you are also in an elite group because of what you chose to study, Social Work. There are many reasons this is so, but let me describe just two.

First, Social Workers seem to have high potential for a satisfying, self-fulfilled life. This year I was pleased to teach an Honors Seminar focusing on "the good life," i.e., on what kind of life is the most desirable. As you may suspect, although many people and institutions try to tell us what is best for us, there is no right answer for everyone; each person must find the particular "good life" suitable for him or herself. Popular culture, for example, tries to persuade us that a life of maximum pleasure and maximum accumulation of goods is the happiest life. But what psychologists find is that humans are marvelously adaptive and that with each new pleasure or each new acquisition, we set a new "baseline" for what is normal. So that the more we get, the more we desire. Psychologists call this the "hedonic treadmill," comparing the life of a dedicated pleasure-seeker to the life of a hamster on its wheel. He can run as fast as he wants, but he never really gets further along the road to fulfillment.

Psychologists and philosophers have found exceptions to the "hedonic treadmill" rule, however. If one, for example, gets caught up in activities demanding the exercise of high-level skills, those activities seem not to fall victim to the "hedonic treadmill"—one can spend a lifetime at those activities and can continue to gain maximum pleasure from

them. Also, activities that involve forms of personal relations seem to be exempt. But Social Work combines both of these kinds of activities—highly skilled involvement and close work with people—and, thus, Social Workers seem to have at least a higher potential for achieving some form of the “good life.”

Second, there is the argument from idealism. The poet Kahlil Gibran wrote that “Work is love made visible.” This is nowhere so true as in Social Work. Your love and caring are seen in your labors with citizens struggling with mental health issues, domestic violence, foster care, or chemical dependency. They are visible when you work at hospices and community centers. No matter where you perform it, your work is always aimed at the common good. The very nature of your training directs you to service of others, and most particularly to the most vulnerable and least fortunate sectors of our society. This is a wholly noble and commendable choice of career goals, and, again, puts you in an elite category.

And I want to be among the first to wish you a full measure of success in all you do during your careers. You will benefit personally; we will all benefit collectively from that success. Congratulations!