

UAF commencement 2011

Sitara Chauhan – Student speaker

Board of Regents, Chancellor Rogers, President Gamble, Faculty members, Honored guests, students and families.

Four years ago I stood in line at the US consulate In Mumbai, India, praying to get approved for a student visa. After looking through my application, the American clerk looked up and asked me with a stern expression, “Why UAF?” You do know the climate is a little cooler in Fairbanks right?” Over the last four years I have been asked the same question more times than I can remember. One crucial thing has changed though- and that is that I now have a better answer than the one I mumbled back then.

If I could meet the visa clerk again I would tell him that I chose UAF because I was ready for an adventure. Many of us cannot imagine a different college experience. What would college have been like without procrastinating before a midterm at pub trivia? Or taking a study break to go strip down to your underwear at - 40? Can you imagine college without packing in here at the Carlson Center to cheer on our Nanook hockey team at Gov Cup? Or perhaps playing mud volleyball on case day, I mean spring

fest! The answer is simple- For most of us UAF has been home for the last 4 or 5 years.

Many small experiences in our college careers have shaped us and brought us all here together today. One such experience for me was having to use Doritos as traction when my car was stuck on an icy path at 40 below.

On a more serious note another momentous experience for me was listening to a lecture by Mr. Vick Fischer my sophomore year. As one of the signers of the Alaska state constitution Mr. Fischer spoke about how a clause for community service is included in the constitution. He spoke about how lending a helping hand is what allows our Alaskan community to not just survive but truly thrive up here in the last frontier. The Alaskan spirit of community service is one of the most valuable lessons I have learnt at UAF and I hope to share it with my community back home.

And It gives me great pleasure in knowing I am not alone in this. Today among us we have 62 other international students, who have had the unique opportunity to learn how to plug in cars and survive Alaskan winters. These students truly give UAF a global

perspective and are taking back a part of that Alaskan spirit of community service all across the world.

Wherever life may take us after this whether it is a graduate school, an internship or one of those mysterious things called “a real job” we will all become part of a new network or a new community. Today we become part of only 6.7% of the world’s population that has a college degree. We are all leaving UAF with not just a degree certificate but also with unique skills that can help make a difference in someone else’s life.

I implore you step out of your comfort zone, dive in and use the skills that you have acquired at UAF, especially the spirit of community service that Mr. Fischer spoke about, to not only build a career but to also create a positive change in your new communities. From my experiences at UAF I have noticed that giving back to society, especially to one in which you are an outsider, helps to not only blend in and become an integral part of that society; it also helps to garner respect from them. I wish you all the best for your future. Congratulations class of 2011!!!

Thank you.