

DU grads urged to make the world a better place

By Abbey Roy

May 17, 2010

GRANVILLE -- On Sunday afternoon with a backdrop of blue sky and sunshine, a procession of black-robed Denison University graduates-to-be filed down the cement staircase toward the Fine Arts Quad.

They were greeted by a horde of paparazzi in the form of family and friends, then ushered through two lines of applauding faculty; seated, charged with making a difference and sent off to change the world.

By the numbers, the Denison University Class of 2010 comprised 519 graduates -- six bachelor of fine arts, 88 bachelor of science and 425 bachelor of arts students.

Thousands of their supporters gathered on the lawn to watch them cross the stage, diploma in hand.

The address at the 169th annual commencement was given by Deborah Bial, founder and president of the Posse Foundation, which identifies promising high school students in disadvantaged urban areas and trains them for college education, partnering with colleges— including Denison—to provide scholarships for the students.

Several Posse Foundation students from Chicago and Boston were among the crowd of graduates at Denison, which has worked with the foundation for a decade.

Bial channeled lyrics by the Beatles and Lady Gaga to illustrate the universal desire to find true love, then urged the graduates to use the same desire to commit to making the world a better place.

"Our hearts should be open not just to falling in love, but to the world," she said.



Deborah Bial gestures as she makes her commencement address on Sunday afternoon at Denison University in Granville after receiving her honorary doctorate. Bial is the founder and president of The Posse Foundation, a nonprofit foundation that helps high school students from urban areas in seven U.S. cities gain access to colleges and universities. (Matthew Berry, The Advocate)

She gave the graduates two "musts": Fall in love, and make the world better.

"Boy, do we need you," she concluded.

Bial's words resonated with 2010 graduate Kristine Amen, a creative writing major who plans to work at a summer camp before heading to Brooklyn to see what the next stage in her life holds.

Amen opted to go barefoot for Sunday's ceremony in the tradition of the residents of Denison's environmentally conscious "Homestead" -- and because "I didn't have any stylish shoes," she said good-naturedly.

She said one of the most valuable lessons she learned at Denison was to live for her own desires and dreams, not others' plans, and she was just one of 519 ready to see what the world has in store.

In the words of Bial, "You have a lot to be proud of, and a lot to look forward to."