Good Evening Dean Bosworth, faculty, staff, distinguished guests,

Welcome to all alumni who join us, particularly Mrs. Oakley – I speak on behalf of the students when I say that we are honored to be part of the same institution, indeed the same community, where you studied fifty years ago. The collective accomplishments and experiences of other alumni whom we meet, and your own, serve as a reminder of why we chose Fletcher, all that we should aim to absorb while we are here, and what we should shoot for when we graduate.

Welcome to all incoming students. We are glad you are here. You are probably in the right place if your ideal vacation destination is a failed state or if your previous job title sounded something like “special expert for global synergy and creative initiatives”.

Welcome to all my returning classmates who spent their summers in cities and villages across the globe, in Mongolia, Afghanistan, Turkey, Ethiopia, Morocco, Nicaragua, and so many other places. I often thought that I should have forgone a summer job entirely and just traveled to visit all of you. Instead, I was about four hours south of here, in a city with a baseball team that will remain nameless, working with the United Nations’ High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis.

I am honored to have a few minutes this evening to speak on behalf of the students, particularly on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Fletcher School. It is a powerful exercise to imagine those who have been in the halls of Fletcher over the past 75 years.

It is not news to any of you that we live in a complex world. We were reminded of this as millions were gathered around televisions watching the opening Olympic ceremony in Beijing, while at the same time a fresh war was being declared between two, so-called, democracies. Those who know me, know my enduring optimism. One friend even jokes that I live in MackinnonLand, where oil is still affordable, where the UN is a glorious, well-functioning, effective organization and all the children are above average. But, as we take in the teetering global economy, the increase in those displaced due to conflict, the breakdown and ineffectiveness of so many international agreements, and the threat of climate change – it becomes harder to remain optimistic.

This morning’s headlines show what we are up against: “Pakistan Leader Escapes Gunfire”, “Commodity Hedge Fund Collapses”, “North Korea Said to Restore Nuclear Site”, “Two Journalists Are Attacked in Russia”, and “Floods strand 2.5 million”.

In preparing for tonight, I took a look back at headlines from 75 years ago. On September 3, 1933, this is what was on peoples’ minds:

Dean Sheehan was kind enough to find the original bulletin announcing the founding of the Fletcher School in 1933. Set in the context of the headlines I just mentioned, it tells the story of Austin Barclay Fletcher who bequeathed one million dollars to start a school of law. The Office of Development and Alumni Relations has asked me to repeat this point: Mr. Fletcher donated one million dollars to start a school of law. But, due to the “close proximity of other well developed law schools” and the assessment that, I quote, “one of the most pressing needs to be that of intelligent, trained leadership in international affairs,” the first graduate school of international affairs, the Fletcher School, was created. I would like to note the annual matriculation fee was five dollars.

The headlines of today and those of 1933 show that just as “intelligent, trained leadership in international affairs” was so critical when Fletcher was established, the need is just as compelling now.

What brought us all to Fletcher over the years is a common belief that the world is better off with functional, inter-connected global systems and relationships. Those who are part of the Fletcher community do not fit neatly into boxes. We are not simply concerned with finance, or security, or politics within our own borders, but instead we often find ourselves drawn to, inspired by, and defined by the gray areas. Where others see fuzzy lines and uncertainty, we can see opportunity.

During our time at Fletcher, one of the greatest skills we learn is that of inquiry—basically, we learn how to ask the right questions. Now, it might seem silly to be spending $100,000 dollars learning how to ask questions (those of you with children know that two year olds already have this skill down), but asking the right questions will actually turn out to be one of the most useful things that we can offer to our future communities and to our future employers – that is right, I said employers. Counter to the Office of Career Services email that we all received last week about “uncertainties by traditional employers”, we will find jobs and put our stellar questioning to use.

It seems to me that we see opportunities in gray areas because we know how to ask questions to develop answers to complex, fuzzy problems. A Fletcher mind could recognize, through asking the right questions, that there are daunting global challenges, but, a Fletcherite would also comprehend the profound opportunities that lie ahead in these same challenges.

While I am far from an economist, I know from Professor Lynch’s course that high food prices could actually serve as a market incentive and lower the barriers to entry for small-scale developing country farmers who were previously priced out of the market.
And, while I am not an environmental engineer or a labor specialist, a Fletcherite sees that the need for alternative sources of energy provide the foundation for millions of new jobs around green technology.

While some people may view a graduate degree as simply an expensive piece paper, you would be hard pressed to find any such person here at Fletcher. Rather, most would consider their time here to be some of the most meaningful and formative years of their life. Fletcher is not a two-year hiatus from our otherwise adventurous lives. Instead, our time here is a part of a journey where we bring so much of what we knew and experienced before and which shapes what we will do with all of the knowledge and expertise that we gain in the future. Fletcher provides the space to sift through all of our lessons, experiences, travels, and knowledge; add, mix and mold these with the lessons, experiences, travels and knowledge of our fellow students and our distinguished faculty; and fine-tune the framework to organize and understand future lessons, experiences, travels, and knowledge.

As Convocation marks the beginning of this school year, I will offer these thoughts as we embark on our year together.

To the faculty and staff –
Thank you. Your hard work, dedication, commitment to excellence, and thoughtfulness make Fletcher unique.

To the alumni –
You are the face of Fletcher to the world. I am certain that I am not alone in the recognition that alums were a large part of my decision to come to Fletcher. Where ever we go, you seem to be there. And, where ever you are, you seem to not only be doing well, but also doing good.

And, to my fellow classmates –
Henry David Thoreau once said that the greatest compliment that he was given was being asked for his advice, and his response actually being attended to. I say this to urge all of you to be genuine in seeking to learn from one another and keep an open mind. Our collective experiences are tremendous, and, therefore, our learning opportunities are enormous.

Have a great year and thank you.