

Commencement 2007: Graduates Join a Global Movement

As a medical officer with the World Health Organization in the 1970s, this year's commencement speaker, **Larry Brilliant, M.D., M.P.H.**, managed the smallpox program in India, leading a team of more than 100,000 workers, who in two years successfully searched out the last cases of variola major, essentially eradicating the disease in the subcontinent. Brilliant founded the Seva Foundation and, in 2006, became the first executive director of Google.org, the philanthropic arm of the renowned search engine company.

Excerpts from Commencement Address by Larry Brilliant May 12, 2007 - Zellerbach Hall

I had a very typical life for someone from the '60s. Four decades ago, I went to medical school. I spent my freshman year marching for civil rights, my sophomore year at teach-ins against the war in Vietnam, my junior year building free clinics, and my senior year driving around the Soviet Union studying international health systems. Then I came to San Francisco for my internship, became a hippie doctor, joined a commune, got on a bus from San Francisco to the East, changed buses in London, spent a couple years on the road to Kathmandu, lived in a monastery for two years, and then exchanged my ashram robes for a three-piece suit and became a WHO medical officer. Typical story for my generation. ...

I have probably seen over 5,000 cases of smallpox. Some of these children died in my arms or were already dead when their mothers handed them to me in a desperate hope that a UN doctor could cure them. Once, in the city of Tatanagar, India, I was in charge of an epidemic of smallpox so severe that thousands died in the streets or the railway station from the disease and the river stopped running, blocked by dead bodies from this terrible scourge. But we did finally eradicate smallpox, a disease that killed over 500 million people in the last century, more than all the wars combined. ...

And after we had eradicated smallpox, the alumni, the smallpox warriors as we were called, were so



inspired, so excited that we spread out and spread the virus of optimism to dozens of other institutions and programs: to CDC, NIH, other UN agencies, many large foundations, and many schools of public health; some of our veterans went on to lead programs to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and polio to name a few. ...

Here is the good news for you, Class of 2007. The largest movement for good in human history is taking place today and you are an important part of it.

Your timing is perfect.

You are part of a global conspiracy of the good.

You will save the earth from global warming.

You will bring people of all colors, all races, all nations, and all religions back together.

You will find ways to lessen the economic divide that separates the rich from the poor and of course, most of all, you will find ways to lift the burden of suffering from the sick—to chart new pathways to a healthier America and a healthier world.

You will find innovative ways to finance health care.

You will use the Internet and new communication technologies to revolutionize health education and communication.



1 Commencement speaker Larry Brilliant

2 Bachelors of arts in public health (left to right) Melissa Amacher, Brittany Barto, Sachini Bandara, Alisa Arce, Janet Ajao, Sarah Adler-McDonald, and Kathleen Abanilla

3 Sarah Ismail, bachelor of arts in public health

4 Epidemiology doctoral graduates (left to right) Sheryl Magzamen, Melinda Aldrich, Purnima Madhivanan, and Samuel Malamba



2007 Awards

Alumna of the Year

Susan Desmond-Hellmann, M.D., M.P.H. '88, President, product development, Genentech, Inc.

Henrik L. Blum Award for Distinguished Social Action

Carina Vance, M.P.H. '07

Distinguished Teaching and Mentorship Award

Richard Jackson, M.D., M.P.H. '79

Zak Sabry Mentorship Award

Stephen Shortell, Ph.D., M.P.H.

Outstanding Graduate Student Instructor Awards

Manish A. Desai, Ph.D. '07

Rachael M. Jones, M.P.H. '03

Sepideh Modrek

Michelle C. Odden, M.S. '06

Alicia L. Salvatore, M.P.H.

Katherine B. Saxton, M.P.H. '06

Vincent M. Yau

Margaret Beattie Award

Karen Clyde, Ph.D. '07

Warren Winkelstein Award

James Scott, Ph.D. '07


Gary Stewart Memorial Award

Olivia Lustro, B.A. '07

Rachel Sax

“The largest movement for good in human history is taking place today and you are an important part of it.”

And you will find ways to conquer diseases that fall disproportionately on the poor—polio, malaria, HIV AIDS, TB.

You are part of an immense global movement, and you inherit a magnificent tradition. You step into the shoes of those who conquered hookworm and smallpox, who will conquer polio and guinea worm, who have contributed to a doubling of life expectancy in many countries in less than a century and who will extend that blessing to the rest of the world. 

The full text of Larry Brilliant's commencement speech is available at sph.berkeley.edu/gallery/06-07/07_commence_speech.html.

5 2007 Class Gift Committee cochairs Yasmeen Drummond (left), a graduating public health major, and Rohini Dhand (right), an M.P.H. graduate, present a check to Dean Stephen Shortell.

6 Public Health Alumni Association president Leslie Louie presents the Alumna of the Year Award, which this year went to Genentech president of product development Susan Desmond-Hellmann.

7 Masters of public health in epidemiology (left to right) Rajesh Sathy, Alexandre Kunombo, Tan Ngoc Truong, Tenesayi Kufa, and Sumathi Krishnan

8 Rene Gonzalez, bachelor of arts in public health

