

June 15, 2003

Professor Arturo Gomez-Pompa
Department of Botany and Plant Sciences

Dear Arturo:

Thank you so much for serving as keynote speaker at UCR's 2003 commencement program to address our graduate students as they receive their master's and Ph.D. degrees.

For those students who have come to know you during their careers at UCR, this will be a special treat that you are present at their graduation. For those who may not have known you, they will be inspired by your knowledge and your presence.

Thank you for sharing your time and helping to create a memorable experience at Commencement 2003.

Sincerely,



France A. Cordova
Chancellor

'Responsibilities in an uncertain world'

by

Arturo Gómez-Pompa

Chancellor Córdova, Fellow faculty members. Distinguished guests. To all the family and friends, without whom today would not be possible. And to you graduates, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. It is a great honor.

Of all the academic ceremonies you may have attended, this is probably the one you will always remember. This is a very important step in your lives. It is the end of a journey full of good memories, as well of worries -- exams and final papers -- and anxieties that we all know so well.

I am here supposedly to give you a brief and profound message of wisdom about your possible future in 7 minutes. Unfortunately

I am not sure what wisdom really is; and my ability to see the future is non-existent.

But anyway, I will try to do it.

I accepted this task to have an opportunity to congratulate you and especially your family, not only for your graduation, but, for giving you the opportunity to attend one of the finest institutions of higher learning in the world and to congratulate you for using this opportunity and privilege -- and hard work -- to get your degree.

Some of you may choose to continue your education and obtain a higher degree or a post-doc position. Others may choose to work for a government agency or the private sector. Some of you will return to your countries of origin and give back your skills and knowledge.

In all cases you will be representing UCR. Each of you will be for life, a UCR alumnus. Your successes will bring honor to your Alma Mater. What you have learned in this institution will help

you to succeed in your work and hopefully in your life. Your understanding and respect for diverse points of view and your acceptance of others with different ethnic backgrounds, ideologies, nationalities, religions, or sexual orientation is also something UCR has been proud to show you by its own example. We are sure you will honor this fundamental quality of our times wherever you are and also be aware that this understanding will be a great asset in your future.

During your time here at UCR you have witnessed the incredible growth and renovation of our campus and the creation of new centers of excellence. You also have witnessed incredible advances in science and technology in your disciplines that show great potential benefit for human kind.

Today we live longer and healthier than any previous generation. Agriculture production is making progress in many fronts, from industrial agriculture in modern large farms to sustainable farming. We are exploring our planets and also looking into the genome of humans, plants, animals and microorganisms at an

incredible speed. The search is on for new genes and chemicals in the as yet untapped biodiversity of the world that can help find better treatments for our illnesses and improve our agriculture production with more and better products. Unfortunately, these great advances are not enjoyed by all.

The advances are not reaching the great majority of people of the world where 3 billion people live with less than 2 dollars a day, where hunger is rampant and infant mortality reaches alarming levels. The war against poverty is a pending priority of our times.

This profound inequality of our world as reflected in the abysmal economic gap between the poor and the rich has many collateral costs: deforestation, biodiversity loss, air-water-soil pollution, terrorism. These are symptoms of a major global problem.

We most remember that misery exists not only in third world countries but also in industrial countries. In this world of poverty, the opportunities for education are scarce and aspirations for a

better future seem nonexistent. People suffer and resent their fate. We can't ignore this reality of our times.

We are living in an uncertain world, full of opportunities and challenges, that needs the knowledge, the values and the experiences that people like you will bring to it.

This privileged knowledge has also responsibilities. One fundamental responsibility is the search for the truth. You have been taught that all ideas could be challenged and subjected to scrutiny and examination. I hope you have learned not to get hooked with the latest fashionable technology, but to look for important ideas and problems, how to assess them, and propose hypotheses to try to solve them. You have learned the value of an inquisitive mind and the importance of respecting opinions that differ from yours. But also you have the responsibility to use your inquisitive mind to question accepted truths and doubtful values, and search for better explanations and better values.

It is clear that your generation is inheriting a very difficult world that my generation has created. We have acted as if the world resources are inexhaustible, as if energy will continue to be abundant and cheap forever, as if the environment can absorb all kinds of pollutants without a cost; and democracy and free markets will take care of the poverty of our world. Well, it seems that this is not the case.

We are passing the bill to your generation with the hope that you can do much better and be able to change the dangerous path in which we are moving.

I am sure that you may be wondering, how can I change the world? Of course, not one single person, even the most powerful can change that.

Let me quote a paragraph from one of my favorite authors, the poet and farmer Wendell Berry (1990): "Nobody can do anything to heal the planet. The suggestion that anybody could do so, is preposterous. The heroes of abstraction keep galloping in on

their white horses to save the planet—and they keep falling off in front of the grand stand.”

There are no world-wide solutions: solutions may come from the individual actions of all of us in our home, our work, our community, our country, our world. This is the only way. The power of our collective actions, decisions and preferences can help change the world for the better. I am sure you will make the right choices for the betterment of our world wherever you may be.

God bless this Class of 2003, today and throughout the rest of your lives. Make wisdom, honesty and optimism guide you into the future. Thank you very much.

Berry, W. 1990. Word and Flesh. *Whole Earth Review*. Spring, p. 68.

June 15, 2003



Keynote Speaker



Arturo Gómez-Pompa

University Professor and Distinguished Professor of Botany

Arturo Gómez-Pompa, University Professor and Distinguished Professor of Botany, has been a faculty member since 1986. In 1999, he became the first UCR faculty member to receive the prestigious faculty appointment of University Professor. Born and raised in Mexico City, Dr. Gómez-Pompa has spent more than 40 years studying and teaching biology, tropical botany, conservation, ecology, ethnobiology and land use practices of native peoples and the tropics.

Among Dr. Gómez-Pompa's many awards are a Guggenheim Award, the Chevron Conservation Award, the Tyler Prize, the Alfonso Herrera Medal of Mexico, and the "Golden Arch" Netherlands Medal. He is the editor of the book "Lowland Maya Area: Three Millenia at the Human-Wildland Interface" to be published in the summer 2003.

He recently received two honors: the Honorary Researcher Award from the Institute of Ecology (INECOL) in Veracruz, the largest institute in Mexico devoted to the study of ecology, and the Gold Medal Merit Award from the University of Veracruz, Mexico, one of the most prestigious state universities in the country.

Student Commencement Speaker



Jeannette Linda Mabee

MA, Education

Jeannette Mabee is receiving her Master's Degree in Institutional Leadership & Policy Studies and an Administrative Credential as well. In 2001, she received a Bachelor's Degree in Liberal Studies from UCR. She remained at UCR to receive her Multiple Subject Teaching Credential in 2002. While at UCR, Jeannette was active as a reporter for the UCR Highlander newspaper. She also participated in many functions and events for the UCR Sweeney Art Gallery. Jeannette has continued to remain active with many after school mentoring programs, including Avid and Prime-time.

Currently, Jeannette is in her first year teaching at Arizona Middle School in Riverside. She plans to continue teaching while pursuing her education and hopes to enter the Graduate School of Education