

May 28, 2010

## 2010-05-28: Law graduates urged to serve and question

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### Recommended Citation

St. Martin, Greg, "2010-05-28: Law graduates urged to serve and question" (2010). *News@Northeastern*. Paper 607.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20001850>

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## Law graduates urged to serve and question



Nearly 200 graduates received degrees at the School of Law commencement. Photo by Mary Knox Merrill.

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Legal advisor to the U.S. Department of State Harold Hongju Koh urged the graduates at Northeastern University's **School of Law** commencement to serve the public good in their future careers — using both their global experiences at Northeastern and the vast emerging technologies their generation has available at its fingertips.

"You live in a global century. [You must] use the tools you've mastered to become global citizens," said Koh, citing opportunities such as furthering international law and lifting others out of poverty and disease.

Koh, who spoke to nearly 200 graduates and their families and friends during the Friday afternoon ceremony at Matthews Arena, was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws degree.

A leading expert on public and private international law, national security and human rights, Koh joined Yale Law School's faculty in 1985 and later served as dean from 2004 to 2009. He has served two other U.S. presidents — from 1983 to 1985 in the Office of Legal Counsel in the U.S. Department of Justice under President Ronald Reagan, and from 1998 to 2001 as assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor under President Bill Clinton.

Speaking after the degrees were conferred, Northeastern University President Joseph E. Aoun urged the class of 2010 to continue asking questions as they follow their individual paths — not only about the law, but also about their own lives and beliefs, because that is the "sign of intellectual courage."

"If your ideas are built on rigid ideology instead of thoughtful nuance, you will miss out on the interesting contours of life. Instead of navigating the world with a nimble mind, you run the risk of becoming intellectually brittle—of being one-dimensional. This can only limit you and your aspirations," President Aoun said.

"So be courageous and humble. Challenge the way things are. Be guided by justice, motivated by a sense of purpose. And be relentless," he continued. "This is how you will reach deeper levels of understanding about your profession and the higher purpose it serves. It is how truth and justice will best be served. But more importantly, it will allow you to live a life of personal fulfillment as well as professional accomplishment."

Those themes of seeking the greater good in their careers and knowledge in their lives resonated throughout the ceremony. School of Law Dean Emily Spieler lauded the graduates for their hard work — in particular their efforts to preserve human rights — through experiential learning opportunities that took them to 28 states and 13 countries. "You are poised to be great lawyers and great leaders," she said.

In the faculty address, Professor of Law James Hackney Jr. said Northeastern's proud tradition of training law students to act in the public interest, as well as to promote entrepreneurship, will allow the class of 2010 "to thrive in a time of uncertainty."

With beaming family members looking on, the student speakers fondly recalled their time at Northeastern. Phil Hancock pointed to the "unparalleled" passion his graduating class exhibited in its work, while Noah Kaufman recalled being struck by how strongly Northeastern's students and faculty value "collaboration, community and collegiality."

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