

## FACULTY ADDRESS AT HONORS CONVOCATION, APRIL 27, 2011

### GREG WINTERHALTER:

Happily we gather here today to honor the students for their academic achievements as well as their community activities. As a member of the college's faculty, I have had the pleasure to witness the successes of students as they progress along the path to excellence and truth that a college education affords.

One who is willing to make the commitment to persist in his or her studies, seriously practices the academic disciplines of a liberal arts-based education, and fully commits to an academic or professional major leading to an associate's or bachelor's degree from this college will undoubtedly succeed and live a life that is rewarding.

During their years of attendance, students are supported by a faculty, staff and administration committed to each student's vision of becoming an advanced learner who earns a college degree and is prepared for a productive future in which they will contribute to making a better world and a more humanistic society.

The students at Southern Vermont College do just that, achieving numerous successes in their chosen fields and, in their own right, walk into a future where they can make a considerable difference in the quality of life. Along the path, they have been mentored by a caring, committed faculty, like the much-loved Professor Bob Consalvo who we sadly lost this year.

Additionally, program advisors, coaches, counselors, support staff, and many other members of the college community have made it their mission to support the students' quest for a better life through education.

I came to Southern Vermont College more than thirty years ago, first as an exhibiting artist in the college art gallery and a few years later as a faculty member teaching courses in studio art and the humanities. During that time, I have learned a lot about the dimensions of the academic achievements of students whose experiences here have often been transformational and inspiring, in spite of the normal difficulties one encounters in seeking a higher education degree.

Each story of accomplishment is unique, but all of the stories affirm the values and achievements that really make a difference in a better life. They are each remarkable. For that reason alone, I am a grateful participant in this process, and this has been the capstone of my education in life. I have learned far more about myself and others than I ever imagined was possible. Every student who graduates with a degree from Southern Vermont College has achieved on a high level and some, like those we honor here today, are truly exceptional in what they have accomplished in this place of vision and learning.

From my own perspective, as a teacher of art, the progress of a student that leads to a college diploma is like the four phases of making a painting. In the first phase, the artist faces a blank white canvas and must make an assessment of the existing conditions relating to the subject at hand. Checking the facts, recognizing the differences. He or she must investigate the visual properties of a subject and be curious about what is seen, felt, sensed and thought about. The first phase is complete when all of the aspects of a subject are recognized, accounted for, and arranged in a logical order. The initial process results in a framework of visual composition. Line, shape, form and the general relationships of color and value appear on the surface of the canvas fully. The idea is now there, but only in a rough form.

In the second phase, the artist must go deeper, utilize the theories of visual art, and develop insight and practice drawing and painting and revising the forms in relation to each other, learning to understand their interrelatedness. In this phase, the painter learns to build up form, make the evidence more real, and discover their inner workings. Here, the student painter learns to develop the substance of concrete and imaginative reality and take ownership of it. All of the major elements become real and concrete.

Phase number three brings the student-artist into the inner workings and curiously imaginative qualities of the subject; the subtleties are discovered as he or she becomes lost in the dynamic interactions of subject and expression bringing one's personal life experience into play with the visual aesthetics of the world outside. In this phase, there is a synthesis of objective investigation and personal creativity. Discoveries not previously imagined are made here.

In the final phase of the painting, the artist reaches the pinnacle of creative learning in which he or she has now become a serious player, a skilled practitioner and a consummate achiever. The final product, the finished painting, while just another one of the many steps of a life of making art, has transmogrified the artist to a place of knowledge, achievement, and confidence and he or she is ready to move on and upward.

As a teacher, I have seen this great event happen thousands of times, and it will forever inspire me to use that inspiration to better my life as an artist and teacher. The phases of working for a higher education degree are like the steps in creating a painting. Students, whose majors are in fields other than art, echo their educational path when they make a painting. That is something remarkable to see.

Thank you.