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Jack Brown's Remarks from the 2007 Honors Convocation



Jack Brown, of the mathematics and statistics department was honored at the 2007 Honors Convocation. Below are his remarks from the ceremony.

I went to high school in Texas in a small town with a population around 5,000. When I went off to the University of Texas, I had never even been outside of the state of Texas. It is a cliché to say that one's university education "has a big impact on one's life." In my case it was more like my university education **created** my life. My time in graduate school had a big impact on my life, of course, but it was those first four years in college that really made the biggest difference. By the time I graduated with my B.A. in mathematics, I had participated in a state department sponsored student exchange program in Chile and I had a job at one of the national laboratories.

I'm sure you know that when I was a graduate student I spent almost every summer doing applied work at Sandia Labs. But when I was nearing graduation with my Ph. D., I was definitely planning on pursuing a career as a university professor. I didn't actually even apply for any jobs; my supervising professor made some phone calls. Those were the "good old days" when it wasn't so difficult to get teaching appointments, and I got offers from Georgia and Auburn to weigh against my standing offer from Sandia.

I flew out to Atlanta and visited Georgia first. I called Jane from Atlanta, where I spent the weekend, and told her we were going to Georgia. Then on Monday, I visited Auburn. Ben Fitzpatrick took me to his senior-level analysis class. I watched what was happening in there, with the students going to the board presenting their solutions to assigned problems and I said to myself, "These people are just like me!" There was no question in my mind that Auburn was where I wanted to spend my career. When I got off the plane returning me to Austin, I told Jane that we were going to Auburn. For years, her (large) family thought we went to Georgia.

In that letter you sent to me on February 5, you said that I "placed the needs and education of [my] students above [myself]." That wasn't entirely true. The time I spent working with students one-on-one or in small groups and seeing with my own eyes the growth they were experiencing and the abilities to think for themselves they were developing was done for my benefit as well as theirs. Having the privilege of being a part of that process was the primary reason I entered the profession.