Hari Om and good afternoon graduates, families and friends.
I am a Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering and
Computer Science here at Duke and the faculty advisor to HSA
since its inception in 1998. I thank HSA for giving me this
opportunity to say a few words to the graduates on this occasion of
their Deekshaant (or graduation) ceremony. I am also very happy
to have Madhu Sharma, Duke Hindu Chaplain by my side here
today.

Let me begin by first congratulating the graduates and their parents
and let me also wish the graduates the very best that life has to offer.

We started this Baccalaureate service in 1999. Based on the advice of
a friend, Dr. Siddharth Chaterjee (then Prof., CS, UNC-Chapel Hill;
now at IBM; his son Arnab is a Duke undergraduate), I located this
reading that we use for the service today. Let us first thank Shri
Vamsee Krishan Pamula and Shri Vijay Srinivasan (both PhDs, ECE,
Duke University) for the beautiful chanting of these verses (actual
verses in Sanskrit and their English Transliteration are given on the
last page of this document).

The chosen reading is from the Vedas, known as Shruti, revealed
or primary scriptures of Hinduism. The word Veda literally means
knowledge; it contains both sacred and secular teachings. There are
four books of the Vedas: Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. Yajurveda
is further divided into two branches: Krishna and Shukla. This
reading is from Krishna Yajurveda. In particular, it is from the
The first verse sets the stage:

_Vedamanoochya acharyah antevasinam anusasti_

In ancient times, the teacher (Vaishampayan) had just completed teaching the Vedas over twelve years and was making concluding remarks to his pupils. [Beginning of this twelve year period is marked by the upanayan (or the sacred thread) ceremony.] The teacher gave his parting advice, a convocation address, in 25 parts. Besides the individual parts, the sequence is also important. I will attempt to explain a few of his main points and thereby give some parting advice to you as you get ready to plunge into either a job or go to graduate school [or just take some time off to find yourself!]. My explanation is inspired by Swami Shri Chinamyanadji’s commentary on this Upanishad.

_Satyam vada,_ Speak the truth, but a caution may be added not to speak unpleasant truth.

_(satyam bruyat priyam bruyat na bruyat satyam-apriyam.
priyam cha nanratm bruyat esha dharma sanatanah)_

One should speak the truth, that is pleasing, not the truth that is upsetting. One must not speak an untruth that is only meant to please. This is the eternal way of life. A lot of nuances can be added here; for example, for a parent or a teacher it is ok to gently or lovingly point out the types of errors the student makes in order to help them get better.

_Dharmam chara_

Practice righteousness -- act according to your Dharma. Now Dharma is a complex word with many meanings. Here I like to interpret it as duty. So the teacher says, do your duty. We have a
normal tendency to emphasize our rights. This verse tells us that along with these rights come many duties and responsibilities. To drive a car is your right but your duty is to obey the traffic laws. Owning a vehicle, you may think, is your right but arranging to pay for the cost of the vehicle, insurance, maintenance and gas is your duty.

You have a duty to yourself, to your family, to your forefathers, to the Scriptures, to the society/nation/humanity at large and to the environment. All these are pointed out in the text.

_Svadhyayan ma pramadaha._
Your first duty is to the scriptures. You should read, understand and assimilate their teachings into your daily life. Srimad Bhagavad-Gita is the most beloved scripture of the Hindus; and I am glad to say that the HSA has been using it for their Sunday discussion Eknath Easwaran’s Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living. Let us congratulate HSA for continuing this study at the average rate of one Adhyaya (chapter) per year. Scriptures emphasize our duty to society (_loksangraha_) and our duty to the environment besides the duty to ourselves, our parents and our forefathers.

_Acharyay priyam dhanam ahrutya._
Your next duty is to earn and pay off your debt to your teachers. In the olden days, you paid your fees at the end of your studies. In the present context it means paying back any loans that you may have taken on for the privilege of this education. This may also mean paying your debt to HSA and to Hindu Life at Duke to help sustain them.

_Prajatantum ma vyavachchetseehi._
Do not cut off the family line. It is your duty to propagate the family lineage. This is a duty to your forefathers.

_Satyan na pramaditavyam. Dharman na pramaditavyam._
May you lead a righteous life (right thoughts, right speech and right actions).

*Kushalan na pramaditavyam.*
May you always remember your duty to yourself. Take care of your own health – physical, mental and financial. Protect yourself. This includes, exercise (including Yoga), eating right and meditation/prayers.

*Bhootyai na pramaditavyam.*
May you not neglect propitious activities or worthy activities for the benefit of the society at large. One who wants to do something will find a way; one who doesn’t will find an excuse. Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it away from themselves. In short develop a social consciousness. Teacher basically says that you should shift from being primarily a consumer to being primarily a contributor. Example here is the work that was done by HSA to help Bhutanese refugee kids by meeting them once a week to teach them English. Another example is the increasing popularity of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) as a discipline.

*Svadhyaya pravachanabhyam na pramaditavyam.*
May you not neglect the study and propagation of Scriptures. Learning, both sacred and secular texts and assimilating their contents, is a lifelong pursuit; it does not end with graduation.

*Devpitrkaryabhyam na pramaditavyam*
The word *Deva* has many meanings – in the current context I take it to mean the forces of nature and hence the environment. So the teacher says, may you not neglect your duty to the environment; recall here the three Rs of the environmental movement: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. Simple ideas like less printing, printing on both sides and recycling should be encouraged. Do not also neglect
your duty to your forefathers by maintaining your culture, religion and traditions. HSA is a very good example here.

*Matrudevo bhava.*
Treat your mother with great respect.

*Pitrudevo bhava.*
Treat your father with great respect.

*Acharya devo bhava.*
Treat your teachers with great respect.

*Atithi devo bhava.*
Treat your guests with great respect.

As you gain more freedom, you also have responsibilities [toward the family, society, country and the world]. You will be responsible for the consequences of your actions. So the teacher says: Those actions which are free from blemish should be undertaken and not others. Only noble and virtuous actions should be followed and not those that are immoral and vicious. This is an example of your duty to yourself, to your family and to society.

Now that you have fulfilled your primary duties, next comes charity.

Sraddhaya deyam, asraddhayaa adeyam, sriya deyam, hriya deyam, bhiya deyam, samvida deyam.
Always volunteer; don’t get so wrapped up in your other duties that you don’t find any time to volunteer. Give to worthy causes. Give with sympathy and respect to the recipient, not with disrespect. Give plenty (give till it hurts). Give with modesty and
humidity (anonymous donors much admired!). Give with full understanding and knowledge of the recipient (organization).

In conclusion, even though these verses were composed more than 5,000 years ago, they relate to our lives today. Hari Om Tat Sat and God bless you all.

At this point the assembly blesses the graduates with the following stanza:

ॐ श्रायुष्कामः यशास्कामः
पुजुकामस्तथैव च। श्रारोग्यं धनकामश्च
सर्वे कामा मवन्तु ते ।

“May your desire for a long, healthy life with fame, wealth and progeny be fulfilled.”

I now invite Madhu Sharma, our Hindu Chaplain, to address the graduates on the topic, “Defining True Success.”

Below we give the original Sanskrit verses (with transliteration) of Shikshavalli of the Taittiriya Upanishad from Krishna Yajurveda:
श्रं नो मित्रः श्रं वर्गः
श्रं नो भवत्वयमाः
श्रं न इन्द्रो ब्रह्मस्पतिः
श्रं नो विष्णुरुक्तः
नमो ब्रह्मः
नमस्ते वायो
त्वामेव प्रत्येकं ब्रह्मासि
त्वामेव प्रत्येकं ब्रह्म वदिष्ट्यामि
अरुं वदिष्ट्यामि
सत्यं वदिष्ट्यामि
तन्मामवतु
तदक्षायमवतु
अवतु माम्
अवतु वक्तारम्
ॐ शान्ति: शान्ति: शान्ति:

वेदमनुष्यायायेन सावित्रमनुष्यात्

नत्यां वद । धर्मं च चर । स्वाभायान्मा प्रसदः ।

आचार्यो ग्रंथं धनादृढ़त्यं प्रजातन्त्रं यम् व्यवस्थितस्वः ।

नत्यां प्रमदित्वम् । धर्मां प्रमदित्वम् ।

कृशलात्रं प्रमदित्वम् । भूत्यं न प्रमदित्वम् ।

स्वाभायः प्रवचनाभ्यां न प्रमदित्वम्

द्वपितुकार्य्यो न प्रमदित्वम् । मातृदेवो भव ।

पितृदेवो भव । आचार्यदेवो भव । अतिथिदेवो भव ।