

AU alumnus Peter Jenkins addresses graduates

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Best-selling travel writer and photographer Peter Jenkins today urged the graduates of Alfred University to follow in his figurative footsteps, "taking a different route from everyone else" to find success. Jenkins, a 1973 alumnus of Alfred University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in sculpture and ceramics, told the more than 1,000 graduates, their families and friends gathered at McLane Center for this morning's ceremony "Life is filled with impossible situations, with things you cannot do or things you should not do, or things you don't have the capacity to do. But you do have the capacity to do them." Jenkins grew up in Greenwich, CT, a wealthy suburb of New York City, but his family was not affluent. "I was the oldest of six children. We lived in a federal housing project, and I remember times when we had no food, or no telephone." He graduated from high school with mediocre grades and a mediocre score on his College Board exams. Jenkins thought college was not possible for him, but his guidance counselor told him about Alfred University. In defiance of his father, who forbade him to go visit Alfred, Jenkins took the train from New York City to Hornell. "I felt compelled in my heart to go to Alfred," Jenkins recalled. Even though he technically did not qualify for admission, the director of Admissions at the time agreed to take a chance and Jenkins enrolled. "The greatest times of your life happen in this little valley," Jenkins told the graduates. Originally a liberal arts major, Jenkins took a required art courses, and "that was the most exciting thing I'd ever done." He transferred to the art school and earned a BFA degree. Given his background, Jenkins said, "If I could be a student, I could do anything" and AU's newest alumni can, too. "Continue to be challenged," Jenkins told the graduates. "Life is a continuous, endless challenge. You don't need to take a back seat to anyone." "I wrote a best-selling book, and I was an art student," Jenkins said, as graduates laughed. "I mean, give me a break!" Writing not just one best-seller, but a string of them, was not what Jenkins intended to do when 30 years ago he set out from Alfred to walk across America. "I knew I wanted to take some time off before going to grad school," said Jenkins, who planned on eventually getting his Master of Fine Arts degree. In the meantime, he decided to take five months to see the country. His first journey actually took him five years to complete, and resulted in two best-sellers, "A Walk Across America" and "The Way West," followed by a string of best-sellers including his most-recent, "Looking for Alaska," published in 2001. The University bestowed an honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, on Jenkins during this morning's ceremony. Also addressing graduates were the Outstanding Seniors, who were nominated by faculty and staff and selected by members of the Alumni Association and University staff. Nathanael Lawton, a materials science major from Little Genesee, NY, was the outstanding senior male, reminded his fellow seniors that when they left for Alfred University nearly four years ago, they got all kinds of advice. The people who were right, he said, were those who advised the new freshmen to "have a little fun" with their studies. "It was easy to get caught up in how much work we had to do," Lawton recalled, but college is about making friends, meeting people, being confronted with new ideas and new situations. "We are all striving for success, and being here gives us a good chance," he said. Although Lawton professed to have had "a little bit of fun" while at Alfred University, he was also honored at the top graduate of the School of Ceramic Engineering and Materials Science with a four-year grade point average of 3.96 on a 4.0 scale. Lawton is a son of the Rev. Gordon and Linda Lawton of Little Genesee and is a graduate of Bolivar-Richburg Central School. The Outstanding Senior female, Emily Rose Tucker, a performing arts major from Lansing, NY, recalled that when she graduated from high school, she received a gold pocket watch as a gift. After being at Alfred University for two years, she realized the watch operated, as she does, on "Tucker Time." A key component of "Tucker Time" is the concept of "worthwhile delay," said Tucker, who said she's learned "If you can't be on time, make them laugh" with your excuse, such as "I hit every red light in Alfred," with the joke being, of course, that there is only one red light in the village of Alfred. Another concept of Tucker Time is creative extension, which some may confuse with procrastination, but which Tucker prefers to define as "collecting opportunities without leaving adequate time to enjoy them." Tucker is a daughter of Terry and Karen Tucker of Lansing, and is a graduate of Lansing Central School. Other top graduates recognized included: Liane May Klingensmith, who received a Bachelor of Arts degree in chemistry from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. She has a 3.96 GPA. Klingensmith is a daughter of Donald and Virginia Klingensmith of Adams, NY, and is a graduate of South Jefferson High School. Yoshinaga Kawamura, who received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the School of Art and Design, graduates with a 3.78 GPA. He is a son of Mr. and Mrs. Tahikou Kawamura of Oberaki, Japan. Daniel Stuart Dickmann, who received two degrees - a B.S. in mechanical engineering from the College of Engineering and Professional Studies and a B.S. in materials science and engineering from the School of Ceramic

Engineering and Materials Science - earned a 3.92 GPA to be the top graduate in the College of Engineering and Professional Studies. He is a son of Donald and Phyllis Dickmann of Petoskey, MI, and is a graduate of Petoskey High School. Lisa Rosa, earned a 4.0 as an accounting major in the College of Business. She is a daughter of Carl and Marjorie Rosa of Avoca, PA, and is a graduate of Wyoming Seminary College Prep. Alfred University conferred nine Ph.D. degrees in ceramic engineering and glass science; three Doctor of Psychology degrees in school psychology; 132 master's degrees and certificates of advanced study; and 471 baccalaureate degrees. Some of the students who were listed in the program for today's ceremonies, however, actually earned their degrees in August or December 2002.