Hey, who’s excited to be here? It was only about a week ago that I was told I’d be speaking today, so in the engineering tradition I sat down at midnight last night, threw back a couple energy drinks, and came up with what you’re about to hear. It’s certainly an honor to be standing in front of such a wonderful and talented group. We’ve come a long way since freshman year, pushing through countless exams and countless problem sets and only a few hours of sleep, and I think we all have a number of people to thank for getting us to where we are today. I want to thank my parents for backing my decision to venture 3000 miles from my hometown of Peachtree City, Georgia, to pursue a new life on the West Coast, and for supporting me the entire way. And on behalf of all the graduates, I want to thank each and every family here today for sharing this event with us. I want to thank Julia Payson, the best girlfriend a guy could ask for. I want to thank Dean Yates, Milind Tambe, and Gene Bickers for playing particularly influential roles in the academic side of my undergraduate years, and many thanks to all Viterbi faculty and administration who have made our experience here what it was. I want to thank my friends and my roommates, who do things like putting live chickens in my closet in the middle of midterms. Also a thank-you to our good friends down at RTH café for providing an endless supply of coffee and a limited supply of food. And finally, of course, let’s not forget the committed and hardworking employees of Salvatori Computer Science Hall, for without you, we would have no place to work at 4:30 in the morning.

You know, it’s only appropriate at a time like this to reflect on what we’ve learned over the past four years. And while I can safely say I’ve forgotten most of what I learned in class, I have learned how to spot an engineer from ten miles away. So in the spirit of fellow Georgian and personal role model Jeff Foxworthy and his “You Might be a Redneck” series, I’ve pulled together a few observations of our graduating class that will help us identify whether, after four years, we are in fact true engineers.

- If you spend more money on coffee than you do on rent, you might be an engineer.
- If you’ve spent more time this semester with your TI-84+ than you have with your girlfriend, you might be an engineer.
- If more than one library has closed on you in one night, you might be an engineer.
• If you measure the time you spend on school projects in Pandora hours, you might be an engineer.
• If you lose track of the time you spend on said projects because Pandora doesn’t count high enough, you might be an engineer.
• If you’ve ever killed a fish or a houseplant due to negligence during finals week, you might be an engineer.
• If your biggest challenge isn’t finishing your final project but finding a computer that doesn’t crash when you open it, you might be an engineer. And finally,
• If your $6000 US government-sponsored electric satellite thruster is in perfect working condition but your washing machine is not (and your name is Scott Macklin), you might be an engineer.

In writing this, though, I got the sense that there was something… not quite right… about these observations, if you will, for the class of 2011. And that is – they don’t embody the spirit of Viterbi engineers. For us, I see something more like the following:

• If one afternoon you’re studying by the fountain in the quad and that night you’re swimming in it with your whole graduating class, you might be a Viterbi engineer.
• If your study breaks involve trips to Hollywood, to Vegas, to Coachella, to Big Bear, and to the best beaches in the country, you might be a Viterbi engineer.
• If some of your most memorable college experiences come from a fine event called the Viterbi Ball, you might be a Viterbi engineer.
• If your daily routine takes you from class, straight to the best bars in Madrid or Rome or Paris, straight to breakfast, and straight back to class, you might be a Viterbi engineer.

And of course:

• If you’re graduating with a degree in Aerospace or Mechanical Engineering and still don’t know what an op-amp is, you might be a Viterbi engineer. Just kidding, AME Department.

More than anything, my time here has shown me that Viterbi is a unique and amazing place. Just look around. We’ve got people headed to the best engineering graduate programs in the country, the best business school in the country, the best propulsion school in the country. We’ve got people working for NASA, heading toward management at Boeing, and transforming the entire aerospace industry at a company called SpaceX… maybe you’ve heard of it. We’ve got people
starting businesses in games, and in the solar industry. We’ve got people at the best construction firms in the world, and we’ve got people taking over Intel. I’m proud to say we’ve got at least one person competing for management positions at Anheuser-Busch… and of course we have those of whom I’m most jealous – the ones extending their time here at USC, at a school as diverse, engaging, and thriving as any other in the country. And those are just the students I know about.

One of the great things about this university is the fact that while it allows us to pursue some of the best degrees out there, it also exposes us to diverse people, diverse disciplines, and one of the most diverse cities in the world. As Viterbi engineers we’ve had all kinds of experiences both within and beyond engineering. And as we take “the next step,” that unique background will only bring us more personal and professional fulfillment in today’s society, where integration of knowledge across all fields is more important than ever in innovating the world of tomorrow. At the same time, using what we’ve learned here to explore fully our passions and curiosities and interests gives us a better idea of where we want to go in life and brings happiness as we align our interests with our life’s work. And for our generation, doing what we love and loving what we do is more important than it has ever been before. And that’s the truth – I read it on Facebook somewhere.

So Viterbi, keep doing what you’re doing, enjoy life, stay curious and young at heart, and take advantage of what this great country has to offer. I’m excited to see where we all end up, and I hope to stay connected with each and every one of you. Congratulations Viterbi Class of 2011, I love all of you, and fight on.