



Commencement II: President Obama and Arizona State

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President Obama gave the commencement address last week at Arizona State University. It was preceded by controversy because ASU had decided not to give him an honorary degree. Why? "It's normally awarded to someone who has been in their field for some time," according to an ASU spokeswoman. "Considering that the president is at the beginning of his presidency, his body of work is just beginning." Those folks are not easily impressed. ASU President Michael Crow then announced that the best way to honor Obama was by naming their scholarship program for economically disadvantaged students the President Barack Obama Scholars Program. Why? "President Barack Obama represents outstanding academic achievement, thoughtfulness, a long record of service to others, inspired leadership and a commitment to building strong communities across this country. He has set new standards for what is possible in America, and encouraged people around the world to pursue their dreams." The faculty members serving on ASU's Honorary Degrees Committee presumably made the bone-headed decision that President Obama still needed to prove himself, which forced President Crow to scramble and save ASU from a public relations disaster. Too late. John Stewart of *The Daily Show* does his usual number on hypocrisy [here](#).

The most impressive part of this story is how President Obama responded in the first part of [his commencement address](#). He turned it into an opportunity to send a message to the graduates, and presumably to the faculty and administrators at ASU. First, he jokes that Michelle agrees with them that he hasn't done enough and that she has a list waiting for him at the White House. Then he "embraces" and "affirms" the serious point that he hasn't done enough in his life, and that titles (even his) say little about the impact of one's life. There is always more to do. President Obama turns a bad decision by ASU into an opportunity to talk about the importance of a lifelong commitment to service. Pretty impressive.