

**UMSL Commencement Address – D’Andre Braddix, EdD
December 17, 2016 (Ceremony II)**

Thank you, Dean Yasbin, for that overly generous introduction, and for the invitation to give today’s commencement address.

UMSL Graduates – congratulations on this amazing achievement! With only 1/3 of Americans having earned a bachelor’s degree, and only about 12% holding a master’s or doctoral degree, today you become part of a pretty elite group. In essence, you’ve achieved the social media equivalent of reaching 100,000 followers on Instagram. All in all...job well done!

And to the parents in the audience this afternoon, you too deserve recognition for instilling the value of a college education in your graduate. Please note that it is tradition to give your new graduate a small token to celebrate this huge accomplishment. But whatever you do, just make sure it’s not a key to the new locks on your house. Because when the university follows up with our graduates, we prefer to hear that they’ve made it further than the basement of their childhood home.

While I would like to stand here today and say that the UMSL student experience is not inherently any different than other universities...I know this isn’t the case. Over the years, I have seen firsthand the many challenges our students have to overcome to finish their degree, like military deployment, family commitments, work obligations, mental and physical health concerns, homelessness, etc. When many would have thrown in the towel, our students keep pressing forward. It’s for this reason that I can say with complete confidence that the ingenuity and commitment of an UMSL student cannot be matched.

Graduates – as you sit here this afternoon, I encourage you to remain mindful of all the obstacles you jumped, roadblocks you circumvented, and pitfalls you avoided in your path towards an UMSL degree. And like Julius Cesar, you too should proclaim **“Veni, Vidi, Vici” – “I came, I saw, I conquered.”**

When your degree is conferred upon you in a few moments, you will officially be granted the full rights, honors and privileges related to your degree. And while I hope you relish in this profound accomplishment – along with the bragging rights that come with it – I would be remiss if I did not implore you to also think about some of the inherent values that are associated with your UMSL degree.

Your degree is more than an official declaration that you have mastered the requisite knowledge and skills in a particular field of study; it is also a proclamation that you are willing to show civility and respect when presented with dissenting opinions about politics, social issues, current events, literature, art, etc. It affirms your commitment to being a critical thinker and a critical consumer of information by first questioning the source and then exploring alternate view points before forming an opinion. It is an acknowledgement that you understand that the world is comprised of many diverse people with varied life experiences, and though you may not always understand the differences which exist, you will show empathy and a willingness to learn. It conveys that you recognize the importance of being civically engaged, whether it is by volunteering at a local organization, engaging in social activism, promoting social justice or just simply casting your vote in a local or national election. And most importantly, your degree is a pronouncement that you will do whatever you can to leave this world a little better than you found it. Though you may not be able to do everything, you can always do something.

While it may not happen today or tomorrow, trust me when I say that someday soon you'll reflect on the fundamental values that your UMSL education has established and nurtured over time. And I am sure that I speak for everyone on this stage – and for your faculty who are sitting with you today – when I say that we hope that you remember these values and use them both as a moral compass and as a model for others.

Congratulations again on this amazing achievement!