

**UMSL Commencement
August 10, 2013**

JoAnn Shaw, vice president and chief human resources officer, BJC Healthcare

Good afternoon. It's an honor to stand before you today graduates, distinguished members of this University, guests. Graduates – you've endured, you've persevered and here you are today at the end of one journey, one of many of your life's journeys. You deserve to be proud. You have written a new definition of success – it's your skills and education, your behaviors and your attitude.

Today is about YOU – a day to recognize YOUR accomplishments - a day to celebrate your success. You're among the 30 percent of the US population who have earned a bachelor's degree. And those today who've earned a master's degree, you're among the 8 percent. Wow.

Today also is a day of reflection. A day to think about your path, what brought you here, the challenges you faced. How you endured and persevered to succeed.

And today is about your future - what you do will do with what you've achieved. How you'll pay it forward. Today is about your story and how you choose to write it.

So what's next? Before I answer the question, I want to share an interesting statistic with you.

Did you know that by tomorrow, you will have forgotten 30 percent of what I am saying to you today? And within a month, you will have forgotten 98 percent of what I'm saying, which means that I have to make the 2 percent that you WILL remember really, really good! Well, here goes!

I think about the motto of this great institution – Salus Populi – The Welfare of the People.

The Welfare of the People - that resonates with me on so many levels. Each of you here today has achieved something many in our country, in our world, don't.

They don't have the opportunity. They face insurmountable challenges. Each of you faced challenges while earning your degree. But you persevered and you succeeded. You've earned your degree but your journey doesn't stop. Your story is still being written.

My challenge to you today is this – pay it forward. I'm so inspired by Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani girl who was shot in the head and neck last October in an assassination attempt by Taliban gunmen. I'm sure most of you have heard her story. On July 12, 2013 at the age of 16, she delivered these profound words to the United Nations. "One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world. Education is the only solution. Education first."

Malala lives in an area of Pakistan in which militants issued an edict ordering that no school should educate girls. She is writing her story, a story that started long before that October day last year. Her life is about paying it forward – making a difference in the lives of others.

What will you do to make a difference in the lives of others? As a member of this graduating class whether you're continuing your formal education or starting a career, whether you're a faculty member, a guest at this graduation – a member of the human race – what are you doing now to make a difference? How will you use your education – not only in your chosen field, but to set an example and help bring about positive change in others? How will you re-invent yourself?

Graduates - your journey hasn't ended. In many ways, it's just begun.

You now have much work to do. Despite the age of technology, our instant access to information, the message that's been drilled into us is that we can be whatever we want to be. I fully believe this.

However, there are many, many, who are left behind in our communities. It's a challenge and each of us must share in the hard work of addressing these issues.

I want to share a story with you of someone who I admire, a person who faced adversity.

Insert Sidney story.

Sidney's journey, his story, was not easy but he persevered. Someone inspired him, made a difference in his life, and in turn, he paid it forward. He succeeded. Education is not an easy journey. Some of you are first generation college graduates. Some are parents. Some work full or part time. Each of you embarked on a journey that was individual to you but brought you to this day. Now it's your turn.

Paying it forward is so very, very important. Without it we never make progress. It is personal. It's life changing. You are never the same after you make the decision to make a difference. You realize that what matters in life – it is about what YOU WILL DO, armed with your great education from UMSL that will help you to guide others who may be struggling, who will look to your story for inspiration.

I'd like to close with these profound words of Malala, that young Pakistani girl who is making a difference in the lives of so many.

“If we want to achieve our goals, let us empower ourselves with a weapon of knowledge.”

I challenge you to use your weapon of knowledge to pay it forward. Make a difference. Continue to write your story.

Congratulations, Graduates of the Class of 2013.