

Good morning, graduates, esteemed faculty, family, and friends.

Today, we gather here in celebration of all you've accomplished—of late-night study sessions, the thrill of discovery, and, of course, the friendships and memories you've made along the way. Today is a milestone that marks the beginning of a new chapter. As you sit here, dressed in caps and gowns, brimming with a blend of excitement and uncertainty, I want to remind you of something important: this is just the beginning.

You're in an exciting, somewhat daunting phase of life right now, and I can relate. I sat where you are, with a similar mix of eagerness and uncertainty. My journey had its own unique challenges—I started a family at a young age while I was still navigating college myself. Balancing studies, work, and the responsibilities of being a young parent was often overwhelming. There were days when I doubted if I could make it, but I was incredibly lucky to have the support of my family. They helped me find my footing, and, together, we made it through.

Today, I'm incredibly proud to share that the child I was raising during my time here is now an alum of this very university as well. It's a reminder that no matter how tough the journey gets, leaning on the people around you and staying the course can lead to incredible outcomes.

As you go forward, remember to take time to celebrate each accomplishment along the way. Every win, big or small, deserves to be acknowledged. It's easy to keep moving forward without pausing, but those moments of celebration are what fuel you to keep going. However, don't lose sight of the fact that discipline is what makes the journey fruitful. Don't take your eye off the prize; remind yourself daily that while achievements are to be enjoyed, it's the commitment and focus on your goal that will carry you through.

Each day, start by reminding yourself of your purpose. Make it a habit. Consider creating a vision board that reflects what truly matters to you, what you want to achieve, and who you want to become. Seeing those goals laid

out, visualizing them, gives you something to aim for every day. It becomes a compass, helping you stay on track even when life throws its inevitable challenges your way.

And let me tell you something crucial: You don't have to know everything. One of the most powerful tools you have at your disposal is networking. Life isn't a solo journey; it's filled with people who can support, challenge, and inspire you if you're open to it. So, be a connector. Build relationships and recognize that everyone has something to teach you. Seek to understand others, rather than to be understood. In the act of truly listening, you'll find perspectives that will enrich your path and help you see the world in ways you hadn't imagined.

As you navigate the journey ahead, remember that your character and reputation matter. How you conduct yourself, the honesty and respect you show others, and the integrity you bring to every situation will define you far more than any achievement or title. Build a reputation based on trustworthiness, kindness, and resilience. People may forget your accomplishments, but they will always remember the way you made them feel and the respect you showed them.

Yes, your education doesn't stop here. In fact, your journey of learning is only just beginning. And, even though you may feel like you should have it all figured out by now, let me reassure you: You don't have to know exactly what you want to do yet. Heck, most of us are still trying to figure that out ourselves.

The truth is, life is not a straight path. It's a winding, unpredictable journey that will take you to places you could never imagine. Embracing that uncertainty is part of what makes life exciting. Along the way, you're going to learn a lot about yourself—not just what you want to do, but also what you don't want to do. And knowing that is just as valuable.

This journey is not just about building a career; it's about making a difference. I truly believe that each of you, in your unique way, has the potential to create a lasting impact. Whether you're shaping communities, innovating in

business, championing justice, or inspiring others, remember that each step matters. You have within you the power to leave the world better than you found it. So don't hold back. Embrace the challenge, and let your actions ripple outward.

And as you do, I encourage you to make a commitment—not only to lifelong learning but to a life of giving back. Knowledge is a gift, and it grows when shared. So, don't let your education end here; let it inspire a passion to keep seeking, keep questioning, and keep growing. Be relentless in your pursuit of knowledge, but also in your pursuit of kindness and generosity.

Remember, it's not what you take from this world that will define you, but what you give back. True success isn't measured by the titles you earn or the accolades you receive. It's measured by the impact you make, by the lives you touch, and by how you leave every person and place better than you found them. Let everyone you encounter be better for having met you.

Whether it's through small acts of kindness or grand gestures of change, commit to giving the best of yourself to the world. In every interaction, every opportunity, aim to lift others up, to share your wisdom and your compassion, and to make your presence one that enriches the lives of those around you.

As you leave here today, go forward with confidence. Embrace the journey ahead, face the world with a spirit of adventure, and know that each step you take has the power to make a difference. There is so much waiting for you—more than you can see or even imagine right now.

Congratulations, Class of 2024 Now, go take on the world. We can't wait to see where the journey leads you. Thank you.