**Commencement Address**

**Sunday, May 14, 2023**

**Ceremony V: College of Education; Succeed Certificate Program**

**Amber Simpson, PhD  
University of Missouri – St. Louis**

Graduates, it is such an honor to be with you all this afternoon. Standing before you takes me back to when I was sitting in one of those chairs—particularly when I earned my doctorate. It was the first trimester of my pregnancy, and I was having a hard time. Before the processional, my advisor lovingly gave me a plastic bag that I strategically hid under the sleeve of my gown—just in case. While I was so excited to have reached this great milestone in my academic and professional career, all I could think about during the speeches was…please don't be too long. I don't want to cause a scene! So, in that spirit, I promise you all that I'll be brief!

I want you to take a moment and really reflect on the significance of this day. Today is a culmination of countless hours studying, doing research, completing projects, and working with students and clients of all ages. We have our undergraduates—representing our newest K-12 teachers, community educators and sports management professionals.

Then there is the vast array of our graduate, professional and certificate earning candidates—whether you're first-time teachers or adding credentials, school psychologists, counselors, school leaders, Higher Ed professionals and educators of other types.

And, of course we must recognize and celebrate our SUCCEED graduates!

All of you have arrived here today as shining examples of excellence, grit, passion, and purpose. Walking in the mission of this University—you have chosen to "transform lives". And, friends, that is a challenging road. To be successful, and stay the course, you need the three C's: Care, Competency & Community.

Let's start with Care. When I was an undergrad, I had the privilege of learning from a phenomenal educator, the late Dr. Jim McLeod. He developed what he called the Habits of Achievement. One that sticks with me to this day is, "don't forget to ESE—Eat. Sleep. Exercise." It sounds simple, but the stress of the daily grind—both at work and at home—can often lead to neglecting self-care. As purpose driven educators, we often are so busy pouring into others that we aren't systematically filling our own cups. If you're not at your personal best, how can you fully show up to transform someone else's life? So, first C – Care.

Second C: Competency. This is my current work domain. As educators, simple knowledge transfer is not enough. It's about performance—the ability to apply knowledge. Our goal is to support and accelerate speed to proficiency and mastery of our learners. In order to do that, WE have to be continuous learners with a growth mindset. Which leads to the third C—Community.

Wherever your path takes you—you'll be a part of a community. Thriving communities are built through positive, trusting relationships amongst its members. Be that spark of positivity and trust in your workplace. Be generous with your time and expertise. Be quick in seeking to understand before reacting. Be vulnerable, be gracious, be kind. For it will only be as a community—in partnering with parents/caregivers, colleagues, and community members at large—that you will successfully transform the lives of your students and clients.

Care, Competency, Community—these are the elements that will sustain you through difficult times and make your triumphs even sweeter.

As you walk across this stage, some for the first time and others for the second time or more, know that you are part of a legacy of Tritons transforming lives locally, nationally, and across the globe. For this, I salute you. Congratulations graduates!