

College of Social Sciences, Mathematics, and Education/Jack Geller

Geller Commencement Address

President Vaughn, members of the Board of Trustees, Family Members, and of course, the graduating class of 2021. As Dean of the College of Social Sciences, Mathematics and Education, I want to offer my sincerest congratulations. I have often noted that Graduation Day is the best day of the year. And today is certainly no exception!

But before we rejoice in your accomplishments, allow me to recognize your biggest cheerleaders: your parents, siblings, grandparents, and friends. The truth is that none of us go through this alone. For many of you it may feel like your time here at UT just flew by. But let's not forget those times when things got tough and stressful, or during times of uncertainty. And who was always there in your corner, always ready to pick you up when you needed it? ... your cheerleaders. So family members, please know that this day is for you as well.

Graduates, earning a college degree has always been challenging, but let's be honest, this year was a bit more challenging than most years. Behind the scenes we spent all summer developing plans for the safe return of in-person learning, as well as remote teaching and learning and many other scenarios. As seniors, some of what you experienced this year was familiar, but at the same time different. Sometimes you were learning in the classroom, sometimes you were attending class virtually, and sometimes you were even learning outside at the stadium or in the teaching tent. But the point is that you persevered; you met the challenges; you demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt and remain flexible.

And here we are today on Graduation Day.

You may not fully recognize it yet, but those attributes of adaptation, perseverance and flexibility will serve you well, long into the future. For you see, while you are graduating today, your learning will never end. Whether it's in the workplace or wherever life leads you, there's so much more for you to learn. But there is one big difference ... and that is for much of that learning, there will be no professors to guide you. If you are fortunate, you will find good mentors. But regardless, that is why for us, we invest so much of our time here at UT, helping you learn how to learn! Helping you to think both critically and analytically. And it is that understanding about lifelong learning and your ability to garner the learning resources you will need, that will differentiate you from your competition.

Now in hindsight, I should have known that you were prepared to meet whatever challenges you faced. After all, UT as an institution has been both growing and evolving for decades, with each new class of freshman being incrementally more prepared than the previous class. So, when many of you entered as freshman, I already knew you had the right stuff. I knew your average SAT or ACT score. I knew that you arrived from all 50 states and dozens of countries. And I knew whether you took us up on it or not, that nearly one in four of you, were academically eligible to

enter our honors program. So, it is really any surprise that your average graduating GPA today is as high as it is? As I said, I knew you had the right stuff.

Graduates, beginning today, you now take your place as an important part of that evolution and legacy of the University of Tampa. I sincerely hope you believe that during your time here, the University has changed you; because I can assure you, that you have changed the University. Over the past year what many of us thought might be impossible, became possible. We showed each other new ways to communicate and connect; to teach and learn; and to meaningfully engage. Take those lessons with you, so in the future when you face challenges, you have the confidence and the tools to keep moving forward and find success.

I also want to say a few words to our graduating masters' candidates; and specifically, share just a little bit of information with you about your hood. If you look at your hood you will notice that the color of the outer border represents your discipline, either a light blue for education or science gold for criminology. And the inner silk lining of the hood represents the colors of the University of Tampa. So as you think about it, from now on, every time you wear that hood you are telling the world that you are a Tampa Spartan. And that's pretty cool!

So to the graduating class of 2021, I salute you and wish you well. You are now part of an important legacy and network of alumni spread all across the globe. So please keep in touch; and I hope you will remember to return to your University of Tampa over and over again.

Congratulations.