

University of Delaware 170th Commencement
Saturday, June 1, 2019, Delaware Stadium

Good morning! What a wonderful day to graduate!

As your president, it is a great privilege and honor to welcome you all to UD's 170th commencement ceremony. We are joined this morning by so many special people ...

We have our distinguished faculty, our loyal staff and our dedicated Trustees.

We have our honorary degree recipients, who will be recognized today with the highest academic award bestowed by the University.

We have our amazing alumni, who are tireless ambassadors to the world.

We have all the loving families and friends of our graduates.

And, of course, we have you ... the Class of 2019, the best class ever to graduate from the University of Delaware!

Let me be the first to congratulate you on reaching this milestone in your lives. Well done!

And let me thank all of you — graduates, families, friends, faculty and guests — for your patience today as we deal with this construction project happening behind me.

I was a little worried we'd have to replace your mortarboards with hard hats today!

Delaware Stadium is long overdue for renovation. And we're building the Whitney Athletic Center to better serve our student-athletes. It's all going to be beautiful when it's finished, so I invite everyone to come back later to see what we've done with the place.

And if you are wondering if construction of the west stands with the chairbacks will be done in time to watch our football team this fall, the answer is yes — and we will show our Fightin' Blue Hen spirit even stronger than before!

These projects — and many others — are examples of our commitment to ensure that UD remains one of the nation's best universities.

Of course, that goes far beyond our buildings.

The University of Delaware is great because you make it so.

You've succeeded in so many ways, and we're proud of everything you've accomplished.

We're proud of the way you turned your ideas into action ... how you expressed yourselves and respected those with different opinions.

We're also proud of how you served others ... offering hope and improving the lives of people here in Delaware and around the world.

And — through UDance — you raised nearly \$8 million over the past four years to help eradicate childhood cancer!

All of you brought your curiosity, your passion and your energy to UD. You succeeded in the classroom and the lab ... on the athletic field ... and around the world.

In your class, there are more awards, scholarships and other achievements than we can possibly enumerate here today.

Let me recognize a few of our outstanding students.

We have our Warner and Taylor Award recipients, Bailey Weatherbee and Nicholas Konzelman. Bailey also earned a prestigious Gates Cambridge Scholarship so she can pursue a doctorate in physiology and neuroscience at the University of Cambridge this fall. And Nicholas is earning two Honors Bachelor's degrees today — one in Economics and one in Public Policy — as well as a Master's degree in Public Administration.

In your graduating class, we have a 17-way tie for the student with the perfect 4.0 GPA. To break the tie, we looked for the student who also earned the highest number of credits. So, congratulations to Kate Koluch, who is receiving a Bachelor's in Medical Laboratory Science and plans to work in the blood bank at du Pont Hospital for Children in Wilmington.

Opening today's ceremony, we heard from Cassidy Dixon, a Vocal Performance major who will be studying at the Peabody Institute at Johns Hopkins University this fall and plans to become an opera singer.

And we're so proud of our student-athletes, like the Women's Outdoor Track and Field Team, which won the Colonial Athletic Association Championship last month! Two seniors — Alexis Lipnicky and Jeanette Bendolph — won gold medals at the tournament. Alexis actually won the javelin throw by one centimeter!

We also have many, many students who made meaningful contributions to our community but who might have flown under the radar...

Students like Alex Ciolek, who is a captain in the Aetna volunteer fire company here in Newark. He's receiving his MBA today.

Or Nicole Mejia, whose own experience in an immigrant family fueled her desire to become a teacher. She's receiving an Honors degree in Elementary Teacher Education with a certification in Teaching English as a Second Language.

We have students like Keith Medley, who mentors his fellow students and runs his own youth wrestling camp in his spare time. He's earning his Associate in Arts degree today.

We have Shailja Gangrade, a double major in Marine Science and Environmental Engineering who is going on to a PhD program at the prestigious Scripps Institution of Oceanography in California.

And students like Kaitlin Gorrel, who worked with UD's Cooperative Extension to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables to low-income families in southern Delaware.

So many amazing students.

In fact, I want to acknowledge the hard work of all of our graduates.

As I call on your group, please stand and remain standing. And please hold your applause until the end.

If your academic achievements earned you a scholarship or award, please stand up.

If you studied in another country — and especially if you are a member of our very first graduating class of World Scholars ... please stand.

If you worked with a professor on a research project, ... please stand.

If you transformed a great idea into a business or a nonprofit ... please stand.

If you were a proud Blue Hen student-athlete ... please stand.

If you helped others through UD Alternative Breaks, a service organization or UDance ... please stand.

In case there's anyone left sitting, I've got one more: If you ever pulled an all-nighter to finish a project or prepare for a big test ... please stand!

Let's give all of our excellent graduates a big round of applause!

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Okay, clearly you worked hard, so you can sit down now.

A Commencement ceremony is a celebration of everything you've accomplished. But more importantly, it's an opportunity to consider what lies ahead.

I want all of you to bring your unwavering ideals, your versatile skills and your inexhaustible energy to whatever you choose to pursue beginning today.

I want you to keep striving for inclusive excellence ... keep reaching out to people of different cultures, different perspectives, different physical and mental abilities. Talk to each other — and more importantly, listen to each other.

Never forget ... that you are citizens of the world. Immerse yourselves in diverse cultures and always seek common ground with people you meet.

Collaborate across disciplines to solve the complex problems you'll face — challenges like climate change, civil rights, immigration, health care, extreme poverty, political discord and more. And build cultural bridges through art, music, language, design and philosophy.

In whatever field you've chosen, always think like an entrepreneur. Ask yourself: How can I use my creativity and talents to turn obstacles into opportunities? How can I look for answers

instead of excuses? How can I use my creativity to imagine the possibilities instead of the limitations?

Finally, never stop investing in the future — because investing in people and new opportunities is the only way we can build a new reality.

We are all here today because someone invested in us. Our families and friends believed that we could achieve our dreams and gave us the support and resources to do so. This university invested in you ... in your potential and in your vision for a better world.

And you invested so much of yourselves in your education — your early mornings and your late nights ... your energy, both intellectual and physical ... your sweat and sometimes even your tears.

I want you to keep educating your mind, and your heart, because, as Aristotle said, knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.

And I urge you to channel the growth from your investment in education back to your communities and society at large, as an engaged citizen.

To know yourself is to believe in yourself ... to believe in the limitless possibilities ahead ... and to invest in the opportunities where you can truly make a difference in the world.

We — your families, your friends, your professors and everyone here at the University of Delaware — believe in you, as well.

I am extremely optimistic about the future knowing that our Class of 2019 will be out there changing the world!

Congratulations! You are Blue Hens forever!

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