

President Dennis Assanis
Class of 2023 Commencement
May 27, 2023, Delaware Stadium

Thank you, Provost Carlson.

Well, good morning, Blue Hens! Let me be among the first to congratulate you, the amazing Class of 2023 ... the best class to ever graduate from the University of Delaware! Well done!

You picked a beautiful and memorable day to graduate.

And we have an amazing guest with us today ... Dr. Mae Jemison!

We are so excited to welcome Dr. Jemison because she embodies the bold spirit of exploration and discovery that has always been at the heart of the University of Delaware experience. She has made remarkable achievements in science, medicine, engineering and education.

And she might be the first person I've met with their own Lego action figure!

While you may not have your own Lego action figure — yet — so many of you have distinguished yourselves through your achievements at UD.

The Class of 2023 includes students like Ishika Govil, who earned this year's highest grade-point index.

Ishika also earned a Goldwater Scholarship, as did Rebecca Beswick and Renea Briner.

There's also Willa Lane, who earned a Gates Cambridge Scholarship and is pursuing her doctorate in marine biology at Cambridge University.

In your class, 10 students have earned Fulbright Scholarships, and four have earned National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowships.

And here with us on stage are the recipients of the Warner and Taylor Awards for outstanding seniors, Aniya Brown and Brenden Swanik. I was fortunate to get to know both of them throughout the year as members of the President's Student Advisory Council.

Let's give all of them a round of applause.

I also want to call out a few students who exemplify the spirit of Blue Hen kindness that all of you exhibit in spades: Dominic Corona, Michael Ottone, Jared Yarworth and their friend David Rodriguez.

My wife, Eleni, and I are so grateful to them for rescuing our labradoodle puppies, Apollo and Coco, who got loose from our yard late one night in October and ended up wandering around by Deer Park. Luckily, these gentlemen had been at a ... "study group" at Deer Park and were walking home when they found our dogs.

Let's hear it for the puppy rescuers!

I want to recognize the hard work of all of our graduates, throughout your time at UD. As I call on your group, please stand and remain standing. And please hold your applause until the end.

If you earned a scholarship or award because of your academic achievements ... please stand.

If you studied in another country, or if you worked with a professor on a research project ... please stand.

If you had your picture taken by the book sculpture at Mentor's Circle, under the kissing arches, or in the fountain on the South Green ... please stand.

If you transformed a great idea into a business or a nonprofit, or if you helped your community through a service organization or UDance ... please stand.

If you were a proud Blue Hen student-athlete ... 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!

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

On behalf of your professors and the entire staff and administration of the University, I want to say how proud we are of you ... and how inspired we are by your indomitable spirit that has helped you overcome unprecedented obstacles during the past few years.

You have earned this moment to celebrate everything you have accomplished and to envision your future success as you begin this next chapter of your lives.

Of course, there will be challenges ahead, too — personal and professional. But I know you can rise to meet those challenges by drawing on the lessons you learned at the University of Delaware, both inside and outside the classroom.

As UD's newest alumni, you will also join the rest of society in trying to solve the complex problems that we all share.

How can we protect our planet and meet the growing demand for clean, sustainable energy sources? How can we keep each other safe and ensure equity, justice and opportunity for everyone? How can we heal our fractured society and learn to cooperate and collaborate to advance the common good?

These are incredibly difficult questions — far too difficult for artificial intelligence to figure out. Answering them will require you to work together — drawing on your knowledge of science and engineering, the arts and the humanities, public policy, education, business ... everything you've learned during your time at UD.

In addition — and perhaps even more importantly — we need your ingenuity and your innovative mindset ... your curiosity and creativity ... your persistence and your optimism in the power of possibility.

I understand that a positive view of the future can sometimes be hard to muster and maintain when we see so much strife and suffering in the world.

But we need you to believe — as I believe, and as all of your professors and advisors believe — that the world can be a better place ... and that we — together — can make it so.

I truly believe this because I've seen it happen ... in you.

You've encountered adversity, and you've supported each other. You've spoken out against injustice and complacency to demand change. You generously gave your time and energy when you saw that others needed help.

Indeed, in ways large and small, you're already changing the world.

As you leave the UD campus today, remember that there are no problems you cannot solve ... no summits that you cannot reach ... no vision of a brighter future that is outside your grasp.

I am extremely optimistic because I know that you — the University of Delaware Class of 2023 — will be out there, continuing to change the world!

Congratulations, Class of 2023!

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