

Good evening and a warm welcome to all, President Horner, families, faculty, distinguished guests, and 2019 graduates.

I am honored to be the commencement speaker for the class of 2019. There is truly nothing like standing in front of a terrifying number of people on a sweet summer's evening; especially, when half of the crowd expects you to share profound wisdom about the future, and the other half can't wait to get to the reception.

Milestones like this always invite nostalgic little trips down memory lane. I am specifically reminded of a letter I wrote to my younger sister when she graduated high school. I'm not going to lie, some of it contained college advice like "liquor before beer you're in the clear." But, as I stand here today, in my own cap and gown, I recall a single paragraph. I wrote:

"Tonight, before the ceremony, take a long look at yourself in the mirror. Not the cap and gown, not your sophisticated hairstyle. Those will be captured a million times tonight. Take a mental snapshot of who you are, and say goodbye. You'll never be this same person again. It sounds scary, but I promise you, it will be alright. In the next few years all you will do is change; your clothes and hairstyle, your taste in music and food,

maybe even your college major. You will be growing and developing, and change is the key to that process. It doesn't make you less you."

I had barely entered college myself when I wrote that letter, and I was wrong about a lot of things, including the beer thing. But, I was right about one thing — these four years **were** a time of profound change and evolution. We Deree graduates were fortunate enough to attend a college that allowed us endless opportunity to explore what it means to be us, as individuals, as contemporary global citizens. All these years, we were not simply students; we were creatives, transforming the campus into an interactive art gallery. We were athletes, travelling as far as the Middle East to compete in international sporting events. We were colleagues, working together on the dreaded group projects, some of which even became real businesses. We were interns for global corporations and volunteers for causes close to home. We learned the importance of making commitments, but, most importantly, we learned that we are all intricate individuals, full of potential, and to limit ourselves to our major or GPA, is to cheat ourselves of our beautiful complexity.

Moving away from this institution we call home, we will always remember that exploring these aspects of selfhood was a privilege. I am full of gratitude, and, on behalf of the class of 2019, would like to thank everyone who encouraged, challenged and inspired us: our parents, for all their love, support, and patience; our professors, who explained as much about theories as they did about life; our coaches, for teaching us physical and mental strength. And finally, a big thank you to every single one of you fellow graduates. You made this experience everything it was.

Thank you.