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## #UDStrong

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# #UDStrong : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Sunday May 8, 2022

## #UDStrong

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By Eric F. Spina

***(The University of Dayton conferred 2,050 degrees in commencement ceremonies the weekend of May 7-8. University of Dayton President Eric F. Spina made these remarks at the undergraduate ceremony.)***

Good morning! And what a joyous morning!

Congratulations to the Class of 2022! Take a deep breath. Pause. Exhale. And let the realization of this moment wash over you. You. Did. It!

I offer a special welcome to all of our families, particularly those who traveled far — even from overseas — to share this moment. I can feel your happiness, your pride, and yes, even a little bit of relief. This day is *finally* here! This is a day you'll always remember and cherish.

And to all the mothers with us today — and especially the mothers of the graduates — Happy Mother’s Day! What wonderful, lifelong gifts your son or daughter is giving you today: a college diploma and a memory of a lifetime!

Graduates, will you please rise, face your mother and other family members and friends, and give them a rousing round of applause for their support and love that made this day possible!

Some of you are first-generation college graduates. You personify the American dream, and you will continue to open doors of opportunity — not just for yourselves, but for future generations of your family. We’re so proud of you AND so proud of the family members who made your dream — and theirs — come true.

Let’s have a special round of applause for all the first-generation college graduates and their families!

Members of the faculty and staff: Thank \*you\* for creating an environment that has allowed these about-to-be graduates to stretch themselves academically, to dream big, to dare to be great. You have prepared them to use their education and faith to make a difference — a real difference — in a world hungry for their community-building skills and innovative thinking.

It’s always a challenge to find the right words to share at commencement. Commencement speakers, including me, strive to find words that touch the heart and soul. Words that resonate years later. Words to live by. Words that will matter to you, the graduates.

This year, I didn’t look very far to find a muse. I simply asked some members of the Class of 2022 for advice on what you might want to hear. As you will see, it was a wise decision!

Your class has navigated through adversity with resilience, grace, and genuine care for each other, and I could not be more proud of you.

Starting on a light note, who can forget the invasion of the cicadas, back after a 17-year hiatus?

And on the academic front, you’ll always be known as the first class that jumped on the Dayton Flyer and took classes downtown at the newly restored Dayton Arcade — a symbol of the University’s commitment to community.

But decades from now, those memories won’t be the first to jump out. During your days at UD, you and your classmates lived through a global pandemic and witnessed scenes of inhumanity in Ukraine, devastating tornado damage near campus, tragedy in Dayton’s Oregon District, racial injustice, and growing political polarization.

Through it all, you have shown that you may be the most resilient class in UD history. There should be an asterisk on your official transcript noting this accomplishment because you’ve taken a crash course in resiliency and aced it. You are #UDStrong.

**Eleanor Blincoe**, a senior class representative in the Student Government Association, a president's emissary, and a future dentist, notes:

"I think something needs to be said about a class that endured almost two whole years of a pandemic and came out stronger than in the beginning. A large part of our college experience," she wrote to me, "was marred by social distancing, masks, and adjusting to all the changes that COVID brought. However," she continued, "I've been inspired by my classmates' ability to bounce back and continue to lead the school. As the only class on campus that has had a full 'normal' year, it has been up to us to maintain the sense of community that makes Dayton feel like home. I have been amazed by the leadership ability and creativity of some of the leaders in this class."

**Lindsay Hampo**, a president's emissary, student tour guide, and future electrical engineer, said the Class of 2022 learned an important lesson in adaptability. Looking forward, she said, "We have so much to bring to the table to teach others how to be empathetic, empowered during tough times, and how to make change even when it's hard."

**Katie Kohlen**, a Marianist Leadership Scholar, a student representative on the Academic Senate, and a future doctor, called the experience "chaotic and disruptive, yet exciting and fulfilling." With sacrifice, though, came a sense of solidarity.

As Katie observed,

"My classmates, our professors, our mentors, and staff have had to adapt to our drastically changing environments, completely rethink the way we learn, teach, communicate, and form relationships. ...As a graduate, I feel tired and a little burnt out, but I also hold an incredible amount of hope in my heart."

I hold much hope in my heart, too. Your class has shown grit, endurance, and persistence. These are life skills, the kind that go well beyond a textbook.

That leads to the first of three lessons.

**Lesson #1: Resilience**. What tests us makes us stronger. While we can't predict the challenges the future holds, I urge you to internalize the philosophy of Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, founder of the Marianists, after he survived the bloody French Revolution and founded a new religious order. He said:

"I am like a brook that makes no effort to overcome obstacles in its way. All the obstacles can do is hold me up for a while, as a brook is held up; but during that time it grows broader and deeper and after a while it overflows the obstruction and flows along again. This is how I am going to work."

**Jada Brown**, a future doctor and the president of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority who's also served as a peer educator, a neighborhood fellow, and an SGA senator during her highly engaged four years on campus, points out that this class has helped the University move the needle on diversity, equity, and inclusion. "A great number of students graduating today have fulfilled huge leadership roles that have forever changed the University," she told me.

As a sophomore, Jada and other students raised the need for the Student Government Association to be a stronger advocate for all students, especially those from historically marginalized groups. Fast forward to this spring when SGA approved a strategic plan making diversity, equity, and inclusion a top priority as it promised to "hear every voice across campus."

**Elena Ramos**, a Fulbright Scholar and future teacher, makes the point that students of color were the driving force behind the establishment of the National PanHellenic Council Legacy Terrace in the heart of the Kennedy Union Plaza, through which tens of thousands of people pass each academic year. The nine monuments recognize the role of historically Black fraternities and sororities in fostering student success while enriching the campus culture. As importantly, they symbolize that this Catholic, Marianist university is committed to making every member of our campus community feel that they belong here. This is the home for each of us, created in the image of God. We are one family who respects the dignity and the gifts of all our brothers and sisters.

That leads to another important takeaway for your class.

**Lesson #2: Inclusivity.** As graduates of a Marianist university, you are builders of community who have learned to welcome diverse voices. As you enter diverse workplaces and communities, remember to hear — and respect — every voice around the table. It's more than just the right thing to do, it is what Jesus asked us to do. In addition, diverse teams — diverse in multiple ways — are more creative, more innovative, more engaged, and more successful.

And now the final lesson. **Lesson #3: Great Purpose.**

**Caroline Gosswein**, senior vice president of the business fraternity Delta Sigma Pi, a member of Flyer Consulting, and a future leader in finance, noticed another defining character trait of the graduating class. She called it "the drive to be the best version of ourselves and what God is pushing us to achieve."

That's your calling. As a University of Dayton graduate, you have a special obligation to use your learning, your curiosity, and your faith in a way that will transform your life and the lives of others for the better. Accept that responsibility willingly and joyfully.

After living and learning at this Catholic, Marianist university with its dedication to social justice, with its special focus on building community, with its commitment to preparing you to work across differences, I know that — just like Eleanor, Lindsay, Katie, Jada, Elena, and Caroline — you will enter the world prepared to change it.

It's not just because your résumé is strong, though it is. It's not just because you are armed with marketable skills, though you are. It's not just because you hold a college degree, though you do — proudly.

It's because you have navigated the headwinds of change, and you know that you can adapt to any Plan B the future throws at you. You have come to understand that flexibility is the watchword no matter what profession you enter.

As you imagine and shape your future, I urge you to dream boldly, act with conviction, and lean into the moment. Keep moving forward, without fear, toward lives of great purpose and service.

As your president — and as a representative of the UD faculty, staff, vowed religious, Board of Trustees, and all of Flyer Nation — I salute you and your accomplishments in this moment of human need and across your time as a University of Dayton student.

Congratulations, Class of 2022! May God bless you and keep you in his grace.

Go, Flyers!