

Remarks for Commencement 2024

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Good morning professors, staff, family, and friends, and most importantly, graduates. We did it! I can't begin to express how proud I am of each one of you. Could I get a big round of applause for our graduates, please.

When I was made aware I would be giving the CAS student commencement speech, I was shaking in my boots, not necessarily from fear but from utter surprise. As many of you know, we are the COVID-19 class, which means that many of us didn't get to experience a high school graduation. In high school, I also had the opportunity to give a speech. Due to COVID-19, however, I was never able to give that speech live to my peers. So, when I said I was shaking in my boots, I meant that although excited, I did not want to mess this up! So let me know how I do.

The College of Arts and Science and Nursing and Health Professions encompasses a variety of different disciplines. It offers anything from biochemistry, political science, and nursing to my favorite public health and sociology, but I might be a little biased on that one. These programs were created to prepare each one of us to be changemakers. To go out there and make a positive impact in the world. And I am not just referring to an elaborate breakthrough like finding a cure for cancer, although I am sure you all have the potential to do so. I am also referring to those local-level changes you can make in your community, like being the first Spanish-speaking therapist/psychiatrist in your town, advocating for equal representation within your local government, or being the first teacher of color in a school with no representation. I have talked to many of you, you know how I like to yap, and I can confidently say that the future looks a little brighter because you're about to cross this stage today.

Many of us are first-generation college students like me, so I know the discipline and resilience it took for you to be here today. We all have unique lived experiences. Some of us moved out of state and away from our families, others worked one or more jobs, and some were nontraditional students, even mothers! Happy late Mother's Day to you all, by the way! I know your babies are so immensely proud! Regardless of what your circumstances are, from the bottom of my heart, congratulations. This degree is not being gifted to you; you earned it. You worked for it, and for that, you should be immensely proud, as I know your loved ones are of you.

Now, this wouldn't be the greatest graduation speech of all time if I didn't acknowledge the role of friends and family in reaching this milestone. In all seriousness, look around; we are surrounded by loved ones who were our pillar as we cried over a research paper because we couldn't meet the word count or when we went overboard, which was my case. Like I said, I love to yap! Their unconditional love and support have given us the strength to continue pushing through. They made those sleepless nights worth it. Before we give them the loudest applause, I want to say a few words to all the Spanish-speaking parents present today.

Hola padres de familia que nos acompañan hoy. No quería dar este discurso sin reconocer el inmenso papel que ustedes tuvieron en este logro. Aunque a veces no entendían ni lo que les decíamos mientras llorábamos a las 2 de la mañana, no se preocupen que ni yo entendía lo que decían mis amigas estudiando bioquímica, su amor y apoyo incondicional nos ayudó a seguir adelante. Esos mensajes de “échale ganas mijita” o “ya merito, no te me echas pa atrás ahora” nos ayudaron demasiado. Así que por eso muchas pero muchas gracias.

Este aplauso es para ustedes. Can be please give all our friends and family a hand.

Now, I am going to try to do this without crying, but I already feel the waterworks coming.

This is for my family.

Mami, papi, y hermanitos. La verdad no sé qué hubiera hecho sin su apoyo. Desde que nos vinimos de Mexico mi mas grande anelo ha sido hacerlos orgullosos. Nunca les podré pagar el esfuerzo que hicieron en dejar todo, incluyendo su familia, buscando un mejor futuro para mí y mis hermanitos. Gracias mami por siempre creer en mí aunque yo misma dudaba de mis capacidades. Gracias papi for que aunque a veces negando me llevabas y recogías de mis activités en la high school y cargabas mis cajas pesadísimas a mi cuarto en Alumnae. Y eso que tengo un montón de cosas. A mi Cachi Bombo, mi primer hermanito y amigo, gracias por tomar el rol de hermano mayor después de que me tuve que ir al colegio. Yo se que eso no fue fácil, estoy muy orgullosa de ti. A mi Kimy Poo, mi slay queen, thank you for always making me feel less anxious after our little facetime calls and for making me smile with your TikToks. To my Pumpkin, thank you for always giving me the biggest hug when I got home and for being glued to me until it was time for me to leave again. A mis abuelitos que están aquí hoy, gracias por siempre querer lo mejor para mí, por rezar para que las puertas se abrieran. A mi abuelita en México, gracias por siempre tenerme en sus oraciones y por apoyarme sin importar nuestra distancia. A mi Bito en el Cielo, uno de sus sueños fue ver a uno de sus nietos graduarse. Pues fíjese mi Bito, ¡ya lo logre!

Now, I couldn't stand here today without acknowledging the state of the world today. As we celebrate today, the Palestinian people are suffering, and being murdered. We stand here in one of many universities in the US, while in Palestine, the last standing university has been bombed. Our brothers and sisters in Palestine cannot even mourn the loss of their loved ones. All for what? As I stand here today, an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, displaced by tactics of imperialism, I stand in solidarity with the Palestinian community. You cannot be neutral in times of blatant injustice and genocide. Youth historically have demonstrated their power and influence. Dr. Monroe consistently reminds us that youth are the vanguard for the future, for change, something Malcolm X deeply believed. So, I urge you to educate yourself on the topic and act. Your voice and actions have power. Together we will live to see a *free* Palestine, *free* Congo, *free* Haiti, *free* Puerto Rico, *free* Hawaii, *free* Sudan, a free world. We are together in the fight for liberation. So go out there and pay attention, ask questions, don't settle, refuse to be defined by societal norms, and if doors are closed shut in your face turn around and build yourself a new one. And remember, when you make it up there, to the tippy top, don't forget to unlock the door for those behind you. Thank you.