

2015 Spring Commencement Ceremonies | 11 a.m. & 3 p.m. | May 3, 2015

“Good afternoon. Thank you Provost Dixon and thank you Regent Behm, colleagues, students, supporters, friends and family members for begin here to celebrate the University of Michigan-Flint’s Class of 2015.

It is such a privilege to be here, at a University with such a remarkable tradition, over 550,000 UM alumni, over 33,000 from UM-Flint. Without a doubt, today is the very best day to be Chancellor of the University of Michigan-Flint.

Graduates, it has been a pleasure getting to know many of you over this past year. You have introduced me to Flint, attended open forums to talk about what was on your mind, volunteered in multiple ways throughout this community. You have danced and sang /sung, built, tested, written and played hockey!!

You have been passionate about justice, equity and shaping a better tomorrow. For that I am grateful!

And here we are, in this moment to celebrate your achievement, your accomplishments and your attainment of a college degree. Out of curiosity, how many of you are the first in your family to attend college?

Each of you have your own story, your own reason for seeking and attaining your degree and while I do not know all those reasons, I do know that the experience of earning a degree makes us different, shapes us in ways we couldn't have expected... and it is only the beginning.

Expect more, Engage more, Experience more.

That is what we say a UM-Flint degree is about. I like to think that is what sets us apart from degrees at other universities and colleges.

Expect more... of yourselves, of your communities, of your friends, of your alma matre, of your world. Do not settle. Do not let anyone talk you into lowering your expectations.

You have demonstrated success in countless ways as you have completed your degree. I have never met anyone who regretted their decision to get their degree, it is something no one can take from you.

Engage more.

As some of you know, I am a first generation college student. I went to college to “get out of here”. Here meaning downriver, about 70 miles south of here. I made little effort to stay connected to my community. It was a period of time in education when we were coached to leave our community behind for the promise of something better. I am sorry to say it took nearly 20 years for me to realize that while I was no longer situated in my community... I had been so shaped by it-- it was so much at the core of who I was.

One cold, gray February day I was sitting in the driveway of my grandparents house. I had flown in from CA and they were both sick, he with asbestos cancer, she with alzheimers. As I sat in the driveway I was struck to the core, remembering how much they had done to raise my brother and me.... And I began to wonder what I was trying to get “out of”. I had to rethink what my education meant... what was the purpose.... What

was the point of me leaving everything behind? Over the course of the next several years my research convinced me that education is about relationship, period. Relationship is the ability to engage. With different ideas, different voices, different people. Education at it's best is about being able to navigate the world in a way that leaves it better.

Experience more

One of my favorite quotes by Jack London:

“I would rather be ashes than dust!

I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than it should be stifled by dry rot.

I would rather be a superb meteor,
every atom of me in magnificent glow,
than a sleepy and permanent planet.

The proper function of man (a person) is to live, not to exist. I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them.

I shall use my time.”

Step boldly into your future, do not wait for someone to make opportunities for you, give you a break... Make your break... People have long said was lucky... and in many ways I am very fortunate, but I also have worked very hard to make my luck. In pool it's called a good leave. Cue ball left well for the next shot. Live like that, take every opportunity to make certain you are ready for your next step, whatever that step may be. Use your time.

My hope for all of you today is that you will be successful, and that you will also remain true to yourself, your values, and to your community. Dr.

Martin Luther King said "the function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character, that is the goal of true education."

I am so proud of your achievements. Congratulations on earning your degree from the University of Michigan-Flint and Go Blue!"