

2016 Spring Commencement Ceremonies | 11 a.m. & 3 p.m. | May 1, 2016

Good morning/afternoon graduates!

It's great to be here to celebrate your achievement today! Some of you came as freshmen, some of you transferred, some completed your degrees while working full-time, some of you came from India, Saudi Arabia... others Flushing, Grand Blanc and Flint... where ever you came from and however you achieved your degree, today you join more than 40,000 alumni who share your block M degree.

As I look around this celebration today, I am reminded of all of those who helped us get here.

Few of us achieve this kind of accomplishment alone. Each of our networks of support might look a bit different — for some of you it includes parents or grandparents, spouses or partners, siblings or even children — who supported you toward your accomplishment.

And, there are others too: There are financial aid officers, study partners and faculty who challenged and supported you, provided research opportunities and worked with you to reach this moment.

To all of you: family, friends, faculty and staff — thank you.

And, I would like to take a moment to also allow our graduates to thank you. Graduates, please rise (wait) and applaud those who are here with you today and all those who helped you get to achieve your degree.

While you will likely not remember much about this ceremony beyond actually receiving your diploma and, of course, the words of our amazing speaker... You will certainly remember the context of this time and for us this year includes the Flint water crisis.

When I look back at this year, I will always remember how this university came together — before the rest of the world knew or cared about our water issues — to serve our community, to offer our expertise, to be problem-solvers.

A UM-Flint degree prepares you to make a contribution to your community. A central core of the learning experience and a key part of the University's mission is advancing our local and global communities ... We value engaged citizenship, excellence in teaching and learning and scholarship ... in this unanticipated crisis, we saw all of those values displayed.

- Students and faculty explored issues of social justice and equity in the face of a man-made crisis with a significant impact on underserved communities.
- Nursing students tested children's blood, pledging to continue until every at-risk child was tested.

- A student's capstone project became a course that our Department of Public Health and Health Sciences offered free to hundreds from the community.
- Two computer science students developed an app so city residents could quickly and easily find help when they needed it.
- Dance students incorporated thousands of empty water bottles falling from the ceiling during their spring recital.
- The Geographic Information Center mapped and provided the first analysis of where city records showed lead pipes are located.

All of these things — and so much more — are what make you the leaders and the best. Thank you.

I had the chance recently to visit with a group of our students who talked about why they would recommend UM-Flint ... The students talked about faculty and staff who are committed to their success. They talked about the diversity of their peers and how much stronger that diversity made discussions in classrooms... They talked about falling in love with Flint, about being a part of a family, about life-changing experiences — all of it because they chose UM-Flint.

I was reminded again, like I so often am, about why I am so proud to be a part of this academic community.

Today this is what we celebrate — your accomplishments, your degrees, your contributions, the differences you each make and will continue to make as you begin the next chapters of your lives...

You are leaders and best!

Congratulations.

Go Blue.