

Hey, Class of 2020, and hello to all of the friends, family, and loved ones who are tuning in to our virtual commencement celebration. I'm Lauren Kennon, and I'm a graduating senior at Drake University. As I was preparing these remarks, I wanted to do some research on the accomplishments that my peers in the Class of 2020 have achieved. In order to do this, I did what no one should do, and I scrolled to the beginning of the Drake Class of 2020 Facebook page.

As I was scrolling through this page, I learned two things. The first thing I learned is that we have grown. All I will say is that I am so proud of how far we have come and the people we are today. The second thing I learned is that there is not a chance I can combine all of our accomplishments into a single narrative. That being said, what I want you to do is take a moment to reflect on your own Drake journey. This includes the challenges, the achievements, the goals you met, and the goals you did not.

While our journeys may differ, what I suspect based on my own reflection is that each of you can think of a time or two where you were tested. Maybe this was a test of your social sphere or a test of your academic endurance or even a test of your personal identity. While these tests may be difficult to overcome and don't look the same for any of us, if there's one thing I've learned about the Class of 2020, it is that we do not let these tests defeat us. We either ace them, or we learn from them.

I'll offer a few examples of tests that I have witnessed the Class of 2020 overcome. When you saw issues that were not being addressed on campus, you created organizations and movements to bring awareness. When you lost a big game, you trained twice as hard for the next month. When you witnessed identities that were not being represented on campus, you created communities to lift each other up. When you were on the third exam of the week, you persevered and probably pulled a couple all-nighters in Cowles Library.

My point is that the Class of 2020 has faced and overcame test after test, but we are so much stronger because of it. Now we have reached the end of our undergraduate experience, and just when we thought our trials were coming to an end, the world decided to give us one final test. But once again, the Class of 2020 did not fail.

We have completed capstones from our childhood bedrooms and taken finals at our dining room tables, all while battling the new anxieties and stresses that come with a changing lifestyle. We have proven one final time that the Class of 2020 knows how to handle a test. We have proven that we

know how to approach challenges with a growth mindset, how to greet controversy with civility, and how to help each other overcome adversity. These qualities that define the Class of 2020 are crucial for the betterment of our communities in times of trial and uncertainty.

This leads me to say that the world needs the Class of 2020 now more than ever. The world needs a new generation of artists and scientists and politicians and businesspeople and free thinkers and dreamers who know how to handle life's curveballs, because these are the people who will propel us into a better future. You will propel us into a better future. I cannot think of a better time for our class to be unleashed on the world, because we are the ones who can bring much-needed change.

I know a commencement speaker is supposed to impart some sort of wisdom for the graduating seniors. But honestly, everything I have learned has come from watching the Class of 2020 overcome their trials and challenges. So as we prepare to influence great change on the world, I will remind you of just three lessons we have taught each other during our time at Drake.

The first lesson-- never stop growing. We have all come a long way during our time at Drake, but each and every one of us has so much more to learn about life, about others, and about our own biases and privileges. Identify what those items are for you, and set out to develop them, even if you have to make yourself uncomfortable.

Number two, pay attention to who has a seat at the table. More importantly, pay attention to who doesn't have a seat at the table. We reap the greatest benefit when we listen to the perspective of others and when we centralize the experiences of those who are so often left at the margins.

Third and finally, don't take yourself too seriously. Success is not defined by how much money you make or how many hours you work. Actually, success is defined however you want to define it. You are allowed to be imperfect and to make time just to take care of yourself. So relax, rejuvenate, and make time for the things you love, just because you love them.

If the Class of 2020 can learn and achieve so much in just a few short years, I cannot wait to see what we do with our futures. Although we cannot celebrate our final college experiences together, our lack of pomp and circumstance does not diminish all that we have accomplished during our time at Drake University.

So make time to celebrate this milestone however you can, and reach out to say thank you to everyone who had a hand in your development journey. This final test may have taken some sense of closure to this chapter in our lives, but I will remind you that this is not the end of our time as Drake

Bulldogs. We have simply crossed the bridge from accomplished students to proud alumni, and these Drake alumni will be some of the most resilient and influential that the world has ever seen. Congratulations, Class of 2020. We made it!