

PENN BACCALAUREATE 2023

Penn President Liz Magill's Baccalaureate remarks during Penn's Baccalaureate ceremony on Tuesday, May 9, 2023.

President Magill's Baccalaureate Remarks

Photos Courtesy of the President's Office



Penn President Liz Magill delivering remarks at the Baccalaureate Ceremony on May 9, 2023.

Thank you, Thomas [Kyong]. Welcome and congratulations, Class of 2023. We're gathered to honor you, to celebrate your years at Penn, and to show just how much you mean to us. It is so good to have all of you together this afternoon for Penn's Baccalaureate Ceremony.

Universities are among the oldest and most enduring institutions in our society. In 1776, thirteen colonies convened in Philadelphia to declare their independence. Penn was already decades old by then. It was one of eight schools of higher education in the fledgling nation. So much history precedes and informs the operations of universities like Penn. It should come as no surprise how much we honor and cherish our academic traditions.

Great among them is this ceremony, the baccalaureate.

The baccalaureate derives from the medieval tradition of honoring bachelor's degree candidates prior to the awarding of their degrees. Originally, it was not just a way to honor soon-to-be graduates—it was also a test. A statute dating to 1311 decreed that students standing for a bachelor's degree

at Oxford first needed to deliver a sermon—in Latin.

I am happy to tell you that at Penn we also love our traditions. But not that much. We will not be observing that particular 700-year-old tradition here today.

What this afternoon is about, really, is an opportunity to reflect. Next week, on Franklin Field, we will celebrate this Class with full pomp and circumstance. Flags will fly. Bands will play. Your family and loved ones will cheer you on.

Today is different—quiet without being sad; serious but not somber. This ceremony is about reaffirming the relationships you have cultivated here; reflecting on our bonds love, community, and faith; and cherishing fond Penn memories while contemplating a bright future.

As students—this great Class of 2023—you have learned and grown in so many ways over the past four years. You are the last class of the before times. You are the first class of the new normal. When you arrived in September of 2019, likely none of you knew what a coronavirus was. You had no idea of social distancing or pandemic protocols. How much we have all learned since then. Endured and learned. Not only about the life cycles of viruses, but also about human nature.

You are entering a world where much needs to be done. And though it might not have felt like it at the time, your experiences and skills that grew during the pandemic—reinforced by your Penn education—uniquely suit you to make a difference. You have capacity that's custom-made for this moment, and for the future. We celebrate today because we know you to be an enormous and potent force for good about to be released on the world. This is our opportunity to give thoughtful attention to all you are capable of achieving. Equally important, as I said at the start, this is a chance to give our heartfelt thanks for all you have meant to us in the years leading up to this moment—and for what you will forever mean to us in the years to come.

I am grateful to our student performers and leaders for making this event personal, thoughtful, and rich in meaning. I'm thankful to the Reverend Chaz Howard and his team. Most of all, looking out at all of you, I am so very proud to see embodied by this class the highest aims and ideals of our University.

Members of the Class of 2023, the Class of the New Normal: an ending is in sight, but so too is a glorious beginning. You emerged from the pandemic with exactly the resilience and skills required to answer the world's call. Your Penn experience has changed you, and your being here has changed Penn for the better.

On behalf of the University of Pennsylvania, I salute you, I thank you for calling this place home, and I welcome you to the start of this wonderful transition. Congratulations and enjoy.



A traditional Chinese lion dance at the Baccalaureate Ceremony on May 9, 2023.



The Penn Glee Club performs at the Baccalaureate Ceremony on May 9, 2023.

PENN COMMENCEMENT 2023

Invocation and dismissal given on Monday, May 15, 2023, by Charles Howard, Vice President for Social Equity and Community and University Chaplain.

Invocation and Benediction



Photos by Scott Spitzer and Eric Sucar.

Vice President for Social Equity and University Chaplain
Charles Howard during Commencement.

Invocation

Beloved graduates and all who are here to celebrate them, please join me in a spirit of prayer for the invocation...

Acknowledge the land.

The land that surrounds us is Lenapehoking, the traditional homelands of the Lenni-Lenape people. To recognize the land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation.

Acknowledge the love.

The love that has surrounded us on our journeys to Penn and our journeys through Penn. To recognize the love is also an expression of gratitude and appreciation.

Thus, we begin this morning with the simple words: "Thank you."

Thank you for families. Both our family of origin and family of choice. For those who raised us, provided for us and encouraged us. For those who drove us to school, practices or rehearsals. For those who quizzed us at

home before big tests. For those who taught us to walk or to read or to ride a bike or to drive. For those who took us on college tours and celebrated with us when we saw that first word, "Congratulations."

Thank you for spouses and life partners and children who have cheered for us – cheering even today.

Thank you for friends who became family during our time here at Penn. For roommates we stayed up late with, for teammates we practiced and competed with, for those we made harmony with, moved to choreography with, rehearsed with. For those we pledged with, led clubs with, served in the community with, protested with, built with, healed with...and even partied with.

Thank you for professors and staff members, advisors, cultural center directors, campus ministers, coaches, counselors, and our college house families. For those who held us up during the lows and celebrated us during the highs.

Yes, let us begin this day in a spirit of joyful gratitude, acknowledging both land and love. For all of this... "Thank you." and Amen.

Benediction

In a few moments, after we sing "The Red and The Blue," many of us will return to College Green to take pictures while standing by many of the beautiful backdrops and public art sculptures that our campus has become known for.

On the Class of '59 Walk next to Van Pelt Library, just beyond the Peace Sign, there is a large sculpture that is relatively new to our campus entitled *Social Consciousness* by Jacob Epstein. It isn't as inviting or hopeful as the Love Statue, nor as fun as the Button. It's not as iconic as the stairs of College Hall or the Fisher Fine Arts Library. In fact, its location makes it difficult to get a great picture in front of it.

But you should still stand next to it anyway. Capture it and take it with you.

We don't often voice aloud the motto of the University: "Laws without morals are in vain." Well, a career, no matter how successful – without a deep social consciousness – is also in vain.

So go forth, carrying love. Go forth and have fun, And go make a difference in the lives of others. If you do so, you will not have lived in vain. Congratulations, dear Class of 2023.

Remarks given on Monday, May 15, 2023, by Tulia G. Falleti, Class of 1965 Endowed Term Professor of Political Science, director of the Center for Latin American and Latinx Studies, and 2023-2024 chair of the Faculty Senate.

Listen, Amplify, and Care *Hasta que la Dignidad se Haga Costumbre*

Congratulations, Class of 2023! Felicitaciones, clase del 2023! As incoming chair of the Faculty Senate, it is my distinct pleasure and honor to congratulate you and your loved ones on your graduation and to convey our gratitude.

Thank you for being in our classrooms, our labs, and during our hardest times together, thank you for being on our Zoom screens. Thank you for the contributions you have made to the co-creation of knowledge, for your engagement with communities near and far, and for all the relationships you have built while here. You have pushed us to become better teachers, researchers, and individuals. It has been our privilege to get to know you and, just as you have left your impact on Penn, I know you are leaving our campus with a world-class education.

For this reason, I would be remiss if I did not use this extraordinary opportunity to invite you to ask yourselves the two questions that our founder Benjamin Franklin asked daily: in the mornings, "what good shall I do this day?" and in the evenings, "what good have I done today?" There are two areas I would like to highlight.



Tulia G. Falleti

First, as a political scientist, and as an Argentine who grew up under a military dictatorship, I kindly ask you to focus on the good that you can do for democracy. If you have recently seen the excellent film *Argentina, 1985* (2022, dir. Santiago Mitre), you got a glimpse at the terror of that regime and how difficult it was to transition to democracy. Not only is democracy precious, it is also a process. It is enacted and nourished daily. Please be sure to vote, to run for elections, to participate in civic life, to defend political rights and civil liberties, and to encourage others to do the same.

Second, as a scholar of Indigenous studies, as the daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter of economic migrants, and as a first-generation college graduate, I also kindly ask you to focus on the good that you can do for historically marginalized populations, whether on the bases of social class, race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual or gender orientation. Use your talents to listen carefully to those who have been historically silenced and made invisible. Use your power to lift and amplify their voices. Learn from their experiences and care for them, as you do for yourself and for the planet.

Of course, many, if not all, of you are already doing this collective good for democracy and marginalized populations. This is why I say to you what people are saying in Latin America: let's do this collective good together. "*Hasta que la dignidad se haga costumbre*": let's do this collective good together until dignity for all becomes the social norm.

Our Place to Stand, Our Means to Move the World

Photos by Scott Spitzer and Eric Sucar.



President Liz Magill delivering remarks at Commencement on May 15, 2023.

Hello, Class of 2023!

This is my first time up here. And I am very proud that my first Penn Commencement is for your class.

Before we go any further, there is something we are called to do. Today culminates your individual paths at Penn. But on those paths, you did not walk alone. Graduates, would you please rise?

Graduates to my left: Would you please turn and face the nearest stands?

Graduates to my right: Would you please turn and face the nearest stands?

Good. Do you see what I see? I see an army of people who lent their love and support toward your success. Your families and dear ones, your spouses and partners, your friends and mentors. Graduates, all together now, let's thank them with our longest and loudest applause. Let's hear it! Yes, thank you. Wow. Please be seated.

The volume of your cheers; the scope of your army; the community that helped carry you here: They illustrate my message to you today. Success is not solitary. That story of a genius going it alone and changing the world? The genius exists, of course. But the solitary nature of her achievements? A myth. Even the once-in-a-generation genius — she had people who nurtured her, who sparked her creativity, who helped her surmount barriers to success. Our ability to do the big things, things great and good, depends on the community around us.

Think about the pandemic and how you persevered. I mean, I know how much you, your parents, and loved ones miss doing everything on Zoom...

But think about it. We had to isolate, yet you made a commitment to connect. To engage in remote coursework with your peers. To check in with loved ones and friends. To sing and play in virtual performances, boosting morale.

Some of you chose to break isolation to care for your patients and clients, placing their health and well-being before your own—to the endless admiration of us all.

Throughout it all, that solidarity with others allowed you not only to survive, but to thrive. All for one. One for all. And much of it on Zoom.

There was a secret to your success. Allow me to give you an image. Imagine a very large rock. A rock that stands between you and your diploma. Too wide to skirt, too big to lift, too heavy to roll. Yet moving that rock is exactly what you need to do.

It's a story as old as humankind. From our earliest days, one of our defining features has been our drive to do things beyond the ability of any one person. So humanity's earliest tools were things that amplified our strength and reach. Tools like the fulcrum and the lever. If a person has a stick long enough and a fulcrum in the right spot, they can move great weight.

We understand how levers work thanks to the ancient Greek inventor Archimedes. He was the first to discover the mathematical proof for what, in physics, is known as a force multiplier.

Now, let's get back to your rock. You push and heave and swear. You kick it and bruise your foot. But that rock doesn't budge.

Ah, but then! You bring to bear your lever—your force multiplier—et voilà! The rock heaves aside. Your path clears. Your diploma, now in reach.

Of the principle Archimedes discovered and the profound implications of force multipliers, he had this to say: "Give me a place to stand, and I will move the world."

Force multipliers go far beyond our mechanical inventions. I'm talking about the power of our social inventions. Community as force multiplier. Your place to stand and your means to move the world.

This idea encompasses family both blood and chosen. People who, when they heard of your dreams and goals, sacrificed to help you attain them. It is the friend by your side, bouncing ideas, pulling all-nighters, and not pulling their punches when you needed some tough love. It is the mentor, coach, or teacher who, sensing greatness, devoted extra time to elevate your game, hone your skills, or advance your research. It is the multitude who, in numberless ways, amplify your strength and reach.

This is by no means a one-way street. As you benefit, so too do you contribute. You yourself act as a force multiplier, helping to amplify the strength and reach of those around you. Something we should always strive to do.

This kind of community is what places like Penn are all about. We get the word "university" from the Latin *universitas*, which means "the entirety" or "the whole." As individuals, we bring our own insights, skills, and goals to the table. Together, however, we can do so much more than any one of us could do alone.

Exhibit A: The fact that we are here now in person. All jokes about Zoom aside, we're together and not all logging on to a web stream because of the collaboration of two Penn scientists, Drs. Kati Karikó and Drew Weissman. Supported by an extensive, innovative community at Penn and beyond, they created messenger RNA technology, technology that enables the COVID vaccines that, in turn, make possible today's celebration.

Exhibit B: Think about what drew you here. Whether an undergraduate, graduate, or professional student: You came here to excel by working with people who are here for the same reason. To do great things and become the best person you can be, in tandem with others. Learning from faculty and peers, partnering in classes, labs, and clubs, collaborating in the arts, athletics, and more. Even when you were just kicking back and having fun, like at the GAPSA Carnival. Or at Hey Day. Spring Fling. Econ Scream. Or countless other moments that comprise your Penn experience.

These truths are baked into your Penn heritage. They connect you directly to one of the most prolific force multipliers of his era, Benjamin Franklin. A French admirer once called Franklin "the Archimedes of his country." And in the year 1751, he was cooking up another revolutionary idea.

At that point, Franklin's greatest hits already included unlocking the secrets of lightning, founding the nation's first public library and its first volunteer fire department, and of course, founding Penn.

Next, he pitched his fellow Philadelphians on another first: A public hospital for the poor, funded by the community. He printed a proposal to help drum up support. It was a rhetorical master class in persuasion. But allow me to paraphrase lightly one of the more striking lines.

Franklin observed, the good we can do separately is small compared with what we can do collectively. One more time: The good we can do separately is small compared with what we can do collectively.

To do great things, like enduring pandemics and ending them. To do good things, like improving the lives of those around us. And to contribute just as we benefit: Graduates, always remember that community is our force multiplier. It is our place to stand and our means to move the world. Throughout your time here, you have shown us the truth of that.

At the start, I asked you to stand. Now, the shoe is on the other foot. I call on everyone else here—families and friends, Trustees and alumni, faculty, staff, and guests, our big Penn community—please stand with me. Stand and show just how proud we are of everything these fine graduates have accomplished. Please join me in recognizing the great Class of 2023.

Interim Provost Beth A. Winkelstein introduced the Commencement speaker, Idina Menzel, and presented the academic honors during the ceremony.

PENN COMMENCEMENT 2023

Penn Commencement address delivered on Monday, May 15, 2023, by Idina Menzel, a Tony-Award winning actress, singer/songwriter, producer, and author.

Commencement Address

Now, graduates, before I speak to you, I want to hear from you. You can shout. You can sing. You can sign. Just don't hold back.

Pretend you're at the Annenberg Center and the curtain just fell.

Pretend you're at the Palestra and Kayla Paddilla just sank a three-pointer. C'mon, let's hear it.

Okay. Since I was a small child, people have told me that my power is my voice. And now I know, Class of 2023, we definitely have that in common.

Thank you, President Magill, Interim Provost Winkelstein, board members, faculty members, staff members, family members, fellow honorees.

Thank you, Class of 2023!

Graduates, in your short lives, you have experienced recession and inflation, pandemic and insurrection, the rollback of Roe and the rise of #MeToo, a racial reckoning, a climate crisis.

Not to mention smartphones and streaming and social media, the mapping of the human genome, the miracles of modern medicine.

And that's to say nothing of what I'm sure has been going on in here [points to head] and in here [points to heart].

In times like this, it can be really hard to know when to use your voice— and how. Whether to yell or to whisper, to declare or to question, to speak or to listen.

Whether your words will be amplified, or attacked, or ignored altogether.

And whether that even matters. Whether your anger is allowed, whether your sadness is sensible, whether your ideas are any good.

Even sitting here, you might feel that tension... As you end something incredible and start something unimaginable...

Your heart, both aching and full.

Graduates, I am here today with a single message: Don't hold back. Harness any tension you feel. And let your voice be heard.

Today is May 15, 2023. Exactly 20 years ago, on May 15, 2003, I was actually in rehearsals, preparing to take the stage in San Francisco for the world premiere of *Wicked*. And let me tell you, getting the role of Elphaba, was not a given.

At one audition early on, the creative team asked me to sing the song "Defying Gravity."

Ask any Penn Player here today, and they'll tell you: It is an incredible song with an incredibly high note at the end. So I practiced and I practiced,

And when I stood in front of the director and producers, I really thought I was ready.

But just as I went to hit that note...

[Sings]

My voice cracked. I was so mad at myself. I shouted. Loudly. Profanely and loudly. And I fought the instinct to run.

And then I took a deep breath and I looked at the accompanist, and I said, we're gonna do that again. And I then hit that note. I nailed it!

Look, we are all human. Even you, Class of 2023, with your world-class education and your relentless determination. Your business



Photos by Scott Spitzer and Eric Sucar.

Idina Menzel delivers the Commencement address.

might struggle. Your experiment might falter. Your voice might crack. Some of you, like me, might express your anger. Some of you might shut down. Feel whatever you feel, all that you feel, and then keep going.

A few years after that audition, the director of *Wicked*, Joe Mantello, told me that he knew I was right for the part in the moments after I missed the note. Because grit won him over... and that other four-letter word sealed the deal.

While perfection is elusive, humanity is certain. And it will get you where you want to go, where you need to be.

I performed *Wicked* eight shows a week, for years. I hit that high note in "Defying Gravity" more times than I can count, and my voice cracked a few times, too. A performer's life is, in some ways, a life of repetition. Of saying the same words again and again. Of singing the same tune again and again.

How many of you have sung...or heard your siblings sing... a certain Disney song again and again? I apologize for that.

I'm going to let you in on a secret: I really don't mind repeating myself. In fact, I love repeating myself. After all, I'm an actor; I like hearing myself talk. I like the attention.

No really, I love repeating myself because I am grateful for the opportunity to use my voice.

But also because when I repeat myself... I open myself up to trying new riffs on the melody... And finding new meaning in the lyrics... And finding new ways to connect with the material and the audience.

A few years ago, I was in Pittsburgh. It was just

a couple of weeks after the Tree of Life shooting. I was doing a concert and I was conflicted because I knew members of the audience would be mourning... Just as I was, and all Jewish people were, and all good people everywhere were.

And so, I lit a candle on stage and sang a song that I had sung thousands of times before: A song from *Rent* called "No Day But Today."

[Sings]

"There's only now, there's only here, Give into love or live in fear." Those words took on new meaning that day.

There are educators among you who will teach the same history lessons year after year. What new meaning might you find in the present circumstance?

There are economists who will look at the same market trends over and over. What vision for the future might challenge you?

I'm not worried about the jazz musicians; you know how to improvise. Or the marching band members; you know how to beat the drum.

But the rest of you, what will you do when you have to repeat yourself? What will you do when you have to persist?

Which brings me to my final point. You, graduates, contain multitudes. As a group, yes.

But also as individuals. Don't ever forget that. Our world is obsessed with labels. With binaries, with fitting everyone and everything into boxes.

The truth is, you are more than one thing. You are more than many things. You are everything.

Now, I want to be clear, I'm not asking you

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to do it all, and I'm certainly not promising you can have it all. But I am asking you to live the fullness of who you are. Play every role you were put on this earth to play.

Class of 2023, if the bard is correct and all the world's a stage... Today, you step out onto it. You have rehearsed for four long years— or maybe five, or maybe six, or even longer for the graduate students! (Between us? The production process always takes longer than you think.)

But now, you're here. You know all your lines. You are ready to play your part.

And still, nothing is ever perfectly scripted. You may have to ad lib because it turns out that the world is more experimental than traditional. It's more dissonant than harmonious.

It's more off-off-Broadway, than Broadway, if you get my drift.

So, as you step into the spotlight, no one's going to blame you for a bit of stage fright. But I'd ask you, from one performer to another, please don't let that stop you. Don't let that hold you back.

Channel your emotion into determination... Find exhilaration in the repetition... And put all of yourself into this role of a lifetime. This role of your lifetime. Class of 2023, as you proved at the very start, we all have a voice.

Inside each of us, there are lengths of ligament and muscle and tissue. And when those cords are brought together, and air flows over them, the tension creates vibration.

And when you harness that tension, you can sigh deeply, or speak out loudly.

You can even sing.

[Sings]

"And when the night is cloudy there is still a light that shines on me. Shinin' until tomorrow, let it be. I wake up to the sound of music, Mother Mary comes to me. Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.

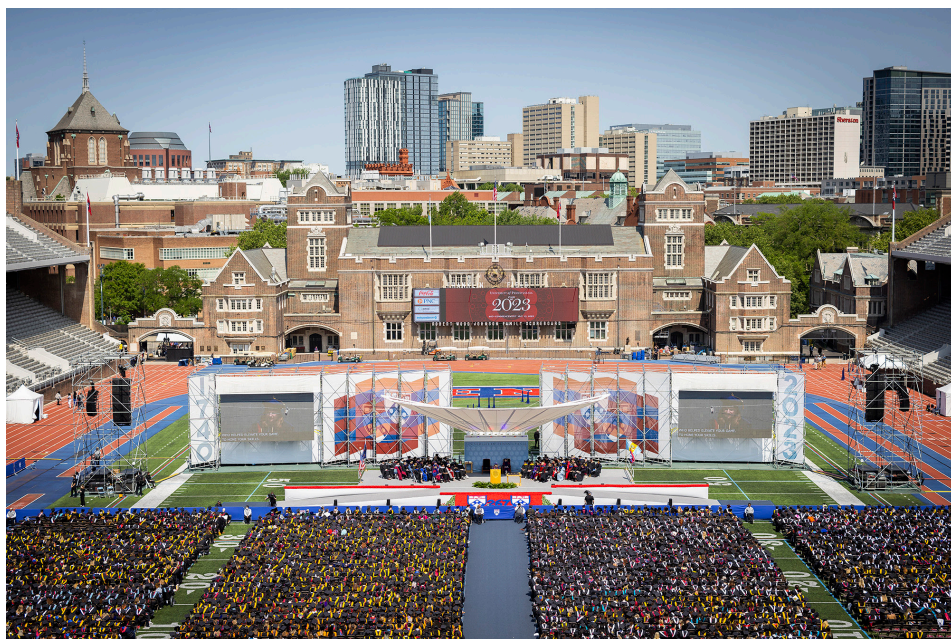
And let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be.

Whisper words of wisdom, let it be."

Let your voice be heard. Congratulations, Class of 2023. Thank you.



Graduates at Penn's 267th Commencement Celebration on Monday, May 15.



An aerial view of Penn's 267th Commencement Celebration on Monday, May 15.