

PENN BACCALAUREATE 2021

Remarks delivered by Charles Howard, Vice President for Social Equity and Community and University Chaplain, during Penn's Baccalaureate ceremony on Sunday, May 16, 2021.

Baccalaureate Welcome and Closing



Vice President for Social Equity and University Chaplain Charles Howard

Welcome

Welcome and thank you for joining us, for the Baccalaureate ceremony in honor of the graduating Class of 2021. Normally, we'd be gathering in-person in Irvine Auditorium, here on our beautiful campus. Instead, this year, we're gathering virtually. Nonetheless, we still think you're in for a treat. It's going to be a beautiful ceremony. You'll hear from our University President, Dr. Amy Gutmann, our Provost, Wendell Pritchett, and you'll hear from Professor Justin McDaniel, who has a really special message for you. You're also going to be hearing from a number of your classmates and some of Penn's finest performing arts groups. Again, thank you so much for tuning in and joining us. Enjoy

Closing

To be honest, at times over this last year—for me—the gift of technology brought about exhaustion. Yet, today it has brought me gratitude.

I'm thankful that it's allowed us to connect with one another...over distance, wherever you are...and over time...whenever you may be watching this.

I'm grateful for President Gutmann, Provost Pritchett, [Senior Class President] Lizzie [Youshaei], all of the speakers, readers, and artists who took the time to be a part of this year's Baccalaureate Ceremony. Thank you especially, Professor McDaniel, for speaking from your heart to our hearts with words that I won't soon forget.

I'm thankful for the team at Arsenal Mediaworks, Perelman Quad, The President's, Provost's, and University Secretary's Offices, the Office of Student Affairs, Platt Performing Arts, and my team in the Chaplain's office—especially Patty, Steve, and Sana—who gave so much of their time in the crafting of this event.

You know our Muslim sisters and brothers just finished observing Ramadan, and these last few days of the school year are marked by the holiday of Shavuot. Two ancient and sacred legacies of counting—from crescent moon to crescent moon—and seven weeks after Passover.

So much of this year has been about counting and waiting and enduring days where time seemed to speed up and others where time seemed to drag on very slowly.

Graduates may you take your time. May you walk slowly enough to notice the beauty of the world all around you. May you take notice of each and every day—taking none for granted. Appreciate the time you have with loved ones, and may you always know that we appreciated the time we've had with you.

Go with our Blessing. Amen.

Penn President Amy Gutmann's Baccalaureate remarks given during Penn's Baccalaureate ceremony on Sunday, May 16, 2021.

President's Baccalaureate Welcome

Baccalaureate is an ancient tradition. It links us to centuries of university graduates, stretching all the way back to medieval Oxford.

To our parents, families, friends, and most of all to the amazing Class of 2021—welcome to this virtual Penn Baccalaureate.

No matter where each of you are, today we join as one beloved community—to celebrate the beautiful friendships formed, family bonds cherished, and great successes enjoyed by our incredible graduates.

We also reflect on and honor the sacrifices shouldered by so many people in so many ways. Here, our enduring values even more than our cherished traditions should, and indeed do, steer our actions.

In Jewish teachings, my faith, we hold to a timeless value—*Tikkun olam*: by saving one life, we save the world.

Never underestimate the value of your work to help even one person. The fruits of your work multiply, and together we renew the world.

I see our highest values thriving in this Class: in the steps you have taken to defeat a pandemic and combat racial injustice; in the milestones and pleasures you have foregone; and in the efforts and care of your families.

I am grateful to our student performers and leaders for making this event so very special for the Class of 2021. I am thankful to Chaz and his team. Most of all, I am deeply proud of all of you, our newest graduates.

Our celebrating you is also a celebration of better days to come, thanks



President Amy Gutmann

to the grit and resilience you have shown time and time again.

Be very proud of your role in that, as I am so very proud of you and what you have achieved. Congratulations and enjoy!

PENN BACCALAUREATE 2021

This year's Baccalaureate Address was delivered on Sunday, May 16, 2021 by Justin McDaniel, Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Endowed Professor of the Humanities and the undergraduate studies chair in the department of religious studies.

Baccalaureate Address



Justin McDaniel

Hello. Twenty five years ago I was in your seat. I had recently graduated and I was struggling with what I wanted to do with my life. I unapologetically studied classics and history in college because, frankly, I enjoyed them and I was good at them. But I also realized that I probably couldn't save the world with Latin. So I asked my dad for advice on what to do next.

We were in a bar. My dad always felt more comfortable in bars. I never knew why I asked him—he'd never gotten a higher education of any sort. He bounced around, he tried new things, he seemed to be pretty mediocre at most things. However, he was the happiest person I knew. And I thought, since most of the supposedly successful people I knew

seemed sad, why don't I ask a happy one?

I also admired my dad because he had this way of making everyone around him feel like they mattered. It was disarming. He had these huge hands that comforted shoulders more than they formed fists. And he said these words to me: "Justin, I am 52 years old and I don't know what I want to do when I grow up. And I don't want to ever have to decide because then I'll have to be a grownup, and who the hell would ever want to be a grownup?"

That was the type of advice my dad gave me growing up. And it was the type of gift he gave me growing up, the greatest gift a parent could ever give a child: the gift of no expectations. He didn't care if I was successful, graduated, went to certain schools, or knew certain people. He didn't even care if I found myself, my calling, my vocation, my passion. He didn't believe in any of that junk. He believed in being present with people, listening to them, meeting them where they were, and allowing them to express that complexity of their many selves. I didn't have to live up to anything. That is the best gift I could give you, the one I was given. I could pretty much end the graduation speech here—I think that says enough—but I was told to fill five minutes. I'll tell you a little bit more.

My dad died six weeks ago from COVID. Nine days before he died, I sat in that hospital day after day, slowly watching him die, and I could do nothing about it. I have a PhD from a fancy school. I read and speak multiple languages. I've written award-winning books. I've taught thousands of students. None of it mattered. I couldn't increase his blood gas saturation, I couldn't regulate his heartbeat, I couldn't even tell him goodbye because he was in a coma and he was experiencing cascading organ failure. It was actually strangely liberating being on the corner with my goggles and double mask and a purple plastic gown, where I knew none of the words and no one expected me to be an expert in anything. I give lectures and I write for a living at an Ivy League school and all I can do is sit there in silence.

I watched this beautiful choreography every day—this choreography of empathy and duty, science and softness—that the nurses displayed in caring for a man they knew wouldn't make it. They gave me hope day after day, even when we all knew there wasn't any. They had such a bad year watching so many people die. And what made that year even worse was that no one could express their sorrow because to do so would be to almost weaponize their pain. I felt particularly self-indulgent expressing my pain. My dad's rapidly worsening condition wasn't a tragedy; it was a statistic. The rest of the planet was suffering more. I was sitting in a perfectly well-equipped medical center, I had a job that I could take a few days off from, and being a white guy, I was waved in by security and given respect just because of the color of my skin and my gender. It was easy on me.

So I just sat there not knowing what to do day after day, suffering from what famous writer Nabokov called "referential mania." One of Nabokov's stories is about parents whose son is in an asylum. He is suffering from this referential mania—he sees irrational connections between events, objects, and people. He creates meaning where there is none. His parents travel to see him—they travel across the city, they ride a bus, they wait at stops, they

climb steps to the hospital, they bring him a gift of twelve types of jam. They return to their lonely apartment after the visit, they eat fish, they receive two phone calls, both wrong numbers, and the story ends with no real events.

Nabokov kind of messed with his readers. He titled the story "Signs and Symbols," and he forces the reader to try to decipher the meaning of the jars of jam and the phone calls, and the reader is forced to think about the steps to the apartment, the color of the mother's stockings, and ask themselves, "what does it all mean?" Nabokov makes the reader feel just what the parents did—hopeless and grasping for signs, or something that will end their son's pain, and in turn, their own. The couple were trying to make meaning out of meaninglessness. And that's exactly what I was doing at the hospital—trying to make meaning out of random death.

Watching someone die can give you a serious case of referential mania; indeed, I wonder if COVID has forced the planet into a shared condition: Apophenia, or the condition of seeing abnormal meaning in meaningfulness, or imagining connections between things. It characterized Nabokov's life, actually. He was an expert in lepidoptery, which is the study of butterflies. He was also a chess strategist—he studied things that had a process, but no meaning. Chess games always end the same way—someone kills the king. It's the process of getting there that matters. The study of butterflies is the study of meaningless cycles—pretty, yes, but to what end? No great medicines come from butterflies; they're no great source of protein; even their flight really goes nowhere. They're polymorphic and they strive by mimicry. For gosh sakes, we can't even decide what to call butterflies! In most Indo-European languages, the names for insects are etymologically similar. But butterflies are a rare example of an insect whose name is radically different in each language. Mariposa. Farfalla. Papillon. Schmetterling. Sommerfugl. Babochka.

After nine days, we turned off the life support for my father, and anyone who is lucky enough to love someone knows that what that means is turning off your own life support. My dear mother, who met my dad on a blind date in 1966 when she was visiting Ireland looking for work, was permitted to spend the last two hours with him. My mom whispered to him for a long time, and when it was time, she rested her head on his chest. Neither of us knew what to expect. Would he shudder at the end? Would there be a death rattle? Would we feel a cold presence in the room? None of that happened. It just ended. It all seemed so meaningless—this tiny moment between life and death, like the senseless momentary season of a butterfly.

My father taught me that life isn't about finding the perfect career, your true calling, your passion, your soulmate. It's not about finding the meaning of life. It's about making meaning, about creating meaning out of the precious life you have, about deeply appreciating the meaning-making process of those struggling around you. Co-creating a more hopeful and kinder world with others. Nothing might matter in this cold, dark universe. But we have this rare chance every day to make others feel like they matter, to make them feel, if just for one moment, that their life has meaning.

So I expect nothing of you after you graduate. I don't expect that you'll find your passion or your vocation or your calling. I don't expect you'll find your special voice, or even your elusive and ever-adapting self. I simply ask you to be kind. To remind others that they matter—not to the universe, but to you at that moment. You all certainly matter to me, and you will always have a family here at Penn.

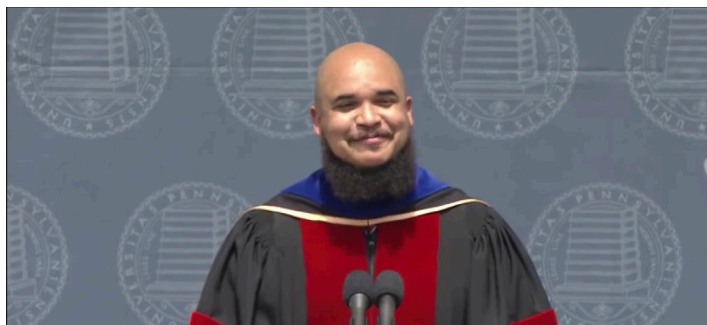
One week after my father's death, I went to visit my mother and we went back to the hospital to pick up the last of his belongings. The nurses had put his wedding ring in a urine sample jar to keep it safe! Next to the nurses' station were two clear plastic bags with my dad's name on them, filled with some medication that he would never need again, underwear, and one shirt. My mom and I picked up the bags and we drove to Red Lobster for lunch. My mom had fish and chips; I had the combo special. We didn't talk much. What I noticed was that she kept tearing up—not for my dad, but for this family that she saw in the restaurant, not too far from us. At a table in the corner, there was a family with a little girl who had cerebral palsy. She was in a wheelchair and her siblings doted over her, making sure she could slowly spoon food into her quivering mouth. These children formed this beautiful pattern of care, and my mom whispered, in her still-quite-noticeable Irish brogue, "some families really have it tough."

Watch the 2021 Baccalaureate ceremony at <https://chaplain.upenn.edu/baccalaureate2021/>.

PENN COMMENCEMENT 2021

Invocation and dismissal given on Monday, May 17, 2021, by Charles Howard, Vice President for Social Equity and Community and University Chaplain.

Invocation and Dismissal



Vice President for Social Equity and University Chaplain Charles Howard

Invocation

To you, whom so many of us have called upon so many times this last year and a half...

It is hard not to get emotional on a day like this. Seeing these graduates gathered together once more... after so long, after so much...

Phrases like "congratulations" seem to fall short of the gravity the occasion is due.

Looking out upon faces who sat in our classrooms; in meetings in our offices; whom we coached on this field, or in the Palestra, or in Penn Park; who performed on our stages; studied in our labs and libraries; protested in our streets; served in our communities...it's hard to hold back the tears and the smiles.

Others watching this commencement via video are feeling it too, looking longingly and lovingly for individuals they raised, taught to read, to walk, to ride a bike, to drive a car. Individuals to whom they passed on a love for learning and cheered with after hearing back from Penn Admissions.

Each graduation is already a whirlwind of emotions: joy, excitement, grief, fear, pride, and gratitude. Yet, who could deny how this graduation is very different, for a class that is very different?

All of our emotions are thus amplified, oh Gracious One. It's all been too much, almost beyond words. Thus, let us begin this 265th Commencement with just two words.

Thank you.

Thank you for this class. Thank you for this day. Amen.

Dismissal

Just a minute or two walk from here is the amazing Penn Park Orchard. A space where students, faculty, staff, and members of our community can participate in "organic agriculture, sustainable food production, food justice, and the botany of urban ecosystems."

Visitors to the Orchard this past year helped to plant seeds that are now starting to blossom into a beautiful and healthy harvest this spring.

May the same be true for you...for all of us.

For what we have sown in tears, may we reap in joy and peace in the future.

For what we have sown in patience and sacrifice, in lost time with friends, and remote school and work...

May we reap in a new closeness with loved ones we missed so dearly.

For what we have sown in caution and diligence with mask-wearing...

May we reap in days full of smiles that are easily seen and easily shared.

For what we have sown in preparation and hard work over this exhausting year...

May we reap in rest, in renewal, and healing.

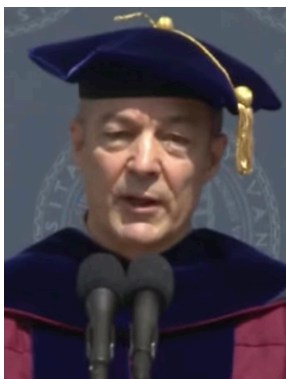
And graduates, as you move into this new season, may you emerge from the dark soil of the last year, feel healing rain hit your face, move up towards light, and may your lives grow and blossom into something new and something beautiful.

Some of the most nourishing and flourishing things grow in the harshest conditions and the rockiest gardens.

May it be so for you. Amen.

Remarks given on Monday, May 17, 2021, by William Braham, professor of architecture in the Weitzman School and incoming Chair of the Faculty Senate.

Franklin's Walk Across New Jersey



William Braham

Good morning President Gutmann, Provost Pritchett, Trustees, honorary degree recipients, faculty colleagues, families, friends, and most of all, congratulations to the Class of 2021.

The first statue of Benjamin Franklin to appear on the Penn campus was commissioned by the Class of 1904. It is located in front of Weitzman Hall, at what was then the center of the campus. It depicts a young Franklin with his walking stick and satchel, as he would have appeared on his way to Philadelphia in 1723, when he was 17. He took a ship from Boston to New York, and when he couldn't find work there, he walked to Philadelphia, where he eventually found a job as a printer. He soon sailed for London

to obtain materials to start his own print shop, absorbing its metropolitan lessons for a couple of years, but then returned to Philadelphia.

I could point out that Franklin walked through Princeton on the way, and did not stop to start a university there, but I cite this statue to make a different point. Franklin's statue opens a window into an earlier and strikingly different world, when climate change was still in the future. Let me say it simply: Franklin walked from New York to Philadelphia to look for work. The New Jersey that he walked across was all field and forest, with a climate that had been stable since the last ice age. The London in which Franklin landed was probably the largest metropolis ever powered by wood, wind, and water, but within the century, its explosive growth would be fueled by

coal. Eighteenth-century London offers us a valuable point of comparison for the transition to renewable resources that we now face and illustrates how many times the world has changed radically in the short life of this country. My grandmother was born in a world without cars, refrigerators, or radios, and at the end was flying to London to visit friends, just as I was born in a world without the internet or responsive electronics, while you interact digitally with complex friend groups beyond my experience. The invention of a low-carbon economy is not just a technical project, but a social, political, and economic one, in which we all have to invent new ways of living and working together. My point is that this country has been adapting to radical change since Franklin walked across New Jersey, so we look to your generation to imagine and build the low-carbon world that must come next.

Franklin's statue also reminds us of the grit and persistence needed for success. This is the story Franklin told in his *Autobiography*, and it is a lesson you have already absorbed, or you wouldn't be here. Among all of Franklin's many written words, the Class of 1904 chose these for the base of the statue, and I quote: "I have been the more particular in this description of my journey, that you may compare such unlikely beginnings with the figure I have since made there." Franklin was justifiably proud of his accomplishments, but I think there is a more subtle point we can read in his comment, which is that many accomplished people are never fully convinced of their success. I offer that as further encouragement to persist as you find your own path, and as a caution to be considerate of those with whom you are competing.

Through his long career Franklin came to personify thrift, and I can think of no better virtue to recommend in the face of global climate change. As the latest book on Franklin argues, thrift means "working productively, consuming wisely, saving proportionally, and giving generously."

PENN COMMENCEMENT 2021

Penn Commencement Address delivered on Monday, May 17, 2021, by President Amy Gutmann at Franklin Field.

When We're All For One, We All Pull Through

Hello, Class of 2021! I have never seen a more beautiful sight. Every Commencement at Penn is historic. But none quite like this one. To each graduate on the field, and to every graduate joining us online: you have done it. Here, at the turning of the tides, you make history.

Our seniors, however, have a problem. A technicality, really. I cannot declare you graduates because I didn't have the chance to declare you seniors. Hey, I don't make the rules. But we can fix this. You know that red bag beneath your seats? Please open it now and take out what you find. That's right! Your Hey Day is long overdue! Would all of you please stand? Stand, stand, stand. You've got to do the customary quiz. For just a little bit, stand.

You must answer three questions for me to officially declare you seniors. Ready?

Question 1 is a simple yes or no: was 2020 the longest year ever?

[Audience responds "yes!"]

That was easy.

Now for question 2, and be honest: in the era of online everything, jeans or sweatpants?

[Mixed audience responses.]

OK, interesting. A little division.

Here's the final. Finally, for number 3, a true or false statement. True or false: nothing—and I mean nothing—can stop the amazing Class of 2021!

[Audience responds "true!"]

You aced it. Now, to seal the deal, with me on the count of three, you are going to snap a piece off of your hat. One, two, three. Now, stand up. At long last, I now can officially declare you seniors!

Please be seated.

A painful sacrifice endured, a joyous promise fulfilled. So many things we cherish and love, we put on hold out of the utmost necessity. To save lives. To speed the day when everyone everywhere can move past this pandemic. Speaking now to all graduates participating remotely: you have sacrificed and you have endured, including at this very moment. I wish so much you were here. But know this: we celebrate as one today. Though we're apart, we are with you now.

United, it is your collective everyday acts, some as weighty as voting and some as simple as masking up, that brought us to this moment of growing, glowing hope. Your solidarity with others is key. I saw it when you and millions marched for Black Lives Matter, speaking and singing out for racial justice now. I saw it when the specter of violence struck our Asian and Asian American friends and family. When we join together to fight racism, when we shield others from social and viral ills, we make it clear. Each of us gets through this only when all of us are through this. For a just society, a healthy world, a life of maximum good, we know: when we're all for one, we all pull through.

In this, you join a proud Penn tradition. A century ago, the Class of 1919 gathered for their commencement. They sat where you sit. The influenza pandemic was still at large and World War I was recently over. Their yearbook captured the disruption and the hopeful work that followed. Hear their words.

"The class entered the University unconscious of the responsibilities it would assume. It will always be remembered that as the class advanced, it helped those who followed. As it received, it also gave."

You, too, advanced while helping those who follow. As you received, you also gave. When we evacuated campus last spring, Penn students immediately sought to make a difference. You organized a national campaign, sending heartfelt thank you's to nurses and doctors fighting COVID. Lockdown Letters was born. More than 25,000 health care workers have received your letters. Boosting morale. Making a difference. An everyday act, exponentially stronger through solidarity. We didn't have the money, said one lockdown co-founder. But the idea was really clear. We could still do something meaningful.

Doing something meaningful. That's core to Penn's ethos, embodied by our students, exemplified by our people. Our work is the work of lifting all others. And that includes the vaccines now defeating the pandemic. It was Penn Medicine's Drew Weissman, Kati Karikó, and their team who



Photo courtesy of Penn Today

President Amy Gutmann

pioneered mRNA technology. Their breakthroughs make the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines possible. It took them 20 years but then it was a matter of weeks to find the platform that kicked this virus in the butt. A few months ago, Drew and Kati gathered to receive their own doses. A reporter asked what was going through Drew's head. His answer was simple. "I always wanted to develop something that helps people."

Helping people was also top of mind when I chaired President Obama's bioethics commission. Among the renowned leaders in public health who testified before the commission was Dr. Tony Fauci. Maybe you've heard of him?

We were addressing the U.S. and global response to the deadly Ebola outbreak in three West Africa countries. I asked Tony, "When the fear of helping others outweighs the need to help others, what do we lose?" He replied, "The best way to protect Americans is by going over to help." On COVID, the message remains undeniably powerful. "A global pandemic requires a global response." We all benefit by strengthening public health worldwide.

It is our united action with and for others that unlocks the common good. Solidarity, our salvation. In Tony's testimony, in the Commission's work, in all that you and we have done as one university and one community, this truth resounds: when we're all for one, we all pull through. And pull through we will.

Learning online, masking up, remotely singing with Counterparts or playing with the Penn Band, marching for justice, missing milestones so that others may enjoy more life: never forget and always be proud that it wasn't the mighty that brought us to this moment. We're at the threshold of a bright future thanks to your everyday acts in solidarity with and for others. I could not be more proud. So momentous is this turning point that I find myself seeking a special theme for the occasion. And I think I've found one. Here, with the incomparable Class of 2021, we celebrate the next bright chapter. Starting right now...

[Screens show "Not long ago on a campus not far away..." and "A NEW PENN HOPE" in a pastiche of the Star Wars sequence.]

Today dawns A New Penn Hope! Among our honorary degree recipients is John Williams. He knows all about the moments and musical scores that define a generation. Its most fitting that we play his most famous work, the score from Star Wars. It celebrates everyday heroes who overcome great perils. Which is what I want us to do right now. Together, let us celebrate all of our heroes at home. I want you to stand, stand with me now. Let's give our longest and loudest applause for our parents, grandparents, families, and friends. For our fellow graduates, faculty, and staff. For the health care workers and so many others who have given their all in the fight against COVID. Let's hear it for our heroes! Thank you all so much and for enduring, overcoming, helping others, standing in solidarity.

And congratulations to the amazing Class of 2021.

Provost Wendell Pritchett introduced the commencement speaker, Laurene Powell Jobs, and presented the Academic Honors during the ceremony. To view the full list of honors recipients, [click here](#).

Penn Commencement address delivered on Monday, May 17, 2021, by Laurene Powell Jobs, C'85, W'85, H'21, at Franklin Field. Ms. Powell Jobs is an impact investor and social justice advocate. She is Founder and President of Emerson Collective, Founder and Board Chair of College Track, and Co-Founder and Board Chair of The XQ Institute.

Commencement Address

Thank you, Provost Pritchett. And thank you, President Gutmann and Board Chair David Cohen, for your outstanding stewardship of this American treasure during these unprecedented days.

Hello, Class of 2021! Hello graduates from around the world, from China, Switzerland, Kenya, and my home country, the small nation-state of New Jersey.

I am deeply honored and grateful to be with you today. I am here because of the education I received from this great university. Graduating from Penn is a real accomplishment. I rejoice with you that your efforts have brought you to this day. And congratulations to all the parents, families, and friends who coaxed you along, picked you up, and supported you every step of the way. As the mom of a college senior at another university, I celebrate with the parents, too.

You are no ordinary class of college graduates. History has seen to that! You faced more than the commonplace challenges of a rigorous education. You pursued your studies during a global pandemic, and many of you participated in our historic and long-overdue reckoning with racial injustice. The way you've adapted and triumphed this past year is truly impressive.

And I congratulate you on something even more impressive: as you adapted, you kept your sense of joy, and your readiness for adventure. When I graduated from Penn back in 1985, I remember feeling nervous about what my future held. And though the world you are graduating into feels, in so many ways, more precarious, my uncertainties and anxieties were real. Growing up, I was raised in a middle-class town and spent summers working on the Jersey Shore and listening to Bruce Springsteen. My mother had been a high school history teacher, and we lost my father when I was three. My father was a pilot in the Marines and he died in a midair collision while training other pilots. It was a shocking, scarring loss.

My mother, who was only 30 years-old, had four children under the age of six. Yet, she found grace amid the suffering, modeling a resilience that we all internalized as our own. To attend Penn, I needed some creative financing. So I took out multiple student loans. I had scholarships of all sizes, like anyone else. But that wasn't enough, I waitressed at Smokey Joe's on the weekends. Yes, I did. But most importantly, I held a work-study job as the receptionist at Penn Student Agencies. As I was working there during the spring of my freshman year, I had an idea for a new agency. The director took a risk on me and I started Parent Services, creating care packages and delivering birthday cakes to students.

One night, we delivered a surprise care package to the University President, thinking he would be a good influencer for our sales. We unintentionally triggered a silent alarm and the next morning we were visited by the University Police, who told us the cake was eaten by the President's guard dog. And while I have no doubt that the dog enjoyed the cake, he was not a good influencer for our sales. That idea was a failure, but I caught the entrepreneurship bug at Penn and have had it ever since. Not to worry, the dog was fine.



Laurene Powell Jobs, C'85, W'85, H'21

I share all this to say, I may not know what it's like to graduate during a pandemic, or to enter a job market like this one, but I do know what it's like to feel excitement and trepidation about what lies on the other side of a college degree. I know that in times like these, times of hardship and uncertainty, it can feel like the world is conspiring to shrink our sense of possibility, to sour us to the daring adventure of life. I'm here to say, don't let it.

I suspect many of you are feeling concerned because you don't know exactly what you want to do for the rest of your lives. I didn't, either. But I did know I wanted a life that included service. I interviewed with the Peace Corps, but my financial reality wouldn't allow that path. Instead, I ended up on the fixed-income trading floor at Goldman Sachs. No, it wasn't the Peace Corps, but I did learn survival skills! And I did something very important to me: I supported myself in New York City, and after a few years, paid off all my student loans. So thank you, Goldman.

My experience at Goldman gave me something even more valuable: when I told my boss I was leaving, he assured me that there would always be a position at the company if I ever returned. In saying that, he gave me, for the first time in my life, a safety net to fall back on. It was more than a promise of financial security, though that was a wonderful relief. With this safety net, I had permission to imagine the world not as dangerous but as wondrous; to dream up different life paths. And from that moment on, I thought differently about what was possible to accomplish, what was possible to see, how I could possibly be helpful to others along my path.

I wish that same appetite for adventure, that same readiness for surprise and delight, for every one of you. Your sense of possibility will always be a great spiritual resource. Take good care of it. Teach it to others. For we are only as large as our horizons. We go to college to widen them, but the task of widening is the work of a lifetime. For me, I began to imagine how I could be useful to others. I felt myself changing. Change in ourselves and change in the world happens similarly. It comes slowly, slowly, and then all at once. What matters is your readiness for the moment of revelation, of challenge, of opportunity. We have to be prepared to walk through the door when it opens, or, by our own power and pur-

pose, to open it ourselves. And sometimes we need to tear down walls, the ones within and the ones without.

We learned this at the end of the Cold War. Standing at the Berlin Wall, a symbol of oppression built to prevent people from escaping Soviet-controlled East Berlin into West Berlin, President Reagan challenged Russia's Gorbachev to tear down this wall! And then something even more startling happened: the wall was getting torn down. It was a turning point in world history, one of the defining moments of the 20th century. My best friend and I were determined to witness history and see that wall come down. We watched on television as German citizens were taking sledgehammers to this edifice, but we had no money for the journey. I was back in graduate school, and back in debt. So, we sold shares in our trip to old colleagues, promising in return to bring them a piece of the Berlin Wall.

That wall was made of concrete, rebar, and old ideas. Then just like that, people reconnected, and a new world was born. When I finished graduate school, I followed my dream of becoming an entrepreneur. I started an organic vegetarian food company called Terravera. This was a rather radical idea 30 years ago. It was aligned with my passion to make healthy, delicious food more convenient and more ubiquitous. Within a few years, we were supplying northern California's Whole Foods and Safeways with fresh, prepared food every day and running a fleet of food trucks that we affectionately called Earth cruisers. Life was full. I had two young children. My husband was working long days. And I was running this startup.

Right about that time, a local high school teacher invited me to speak to her class of first-generation college-bound students. I agreed, not knowing that my life was about to change. It was the fall of the students' senior year. I was so impressed with these students. They had everything it takes to succeed in college: grit, tenacity, talent and a will to persevere. In fact, they spoke about their college ambitions with excitement and joy. But it soon became clear that none of them had taken, or planned to take, the SATs. Nobody had told them they needed to. Most had never visited a college campus. And worse yet, only three of the 35 students had

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taken the classes they needed to apply to a four-year college. When I left the class, I couldn't stop thinking about the students. Public education, I believe, is central to the promise of America. It was designed to be our great equalizer. My own education changed my life and my opportunities. And yet, through the randomness of where they were born, these students' possibilities were narrowed for them.

That day at Carlmont High School, well over twenty years ago, laid bare a disturbing truth in our country that while talent is equally distributed, opportunity is not. At some point in all of our lives, we must ask ourselves: what happens when you confront an unacceptable reality? Do you act, or do you look away? I chose the former. I returned to the class every Friday that fall and served as their unofficial college advisor. Soon after that, I stepped back from Terravera. It was a big life decision. I had wanted to start a company since I was here at Penn. It's why I went to graduate school. But when life opens a door, as it will for all of you, we must be prepared to walk through it. It was from that experience that College Track was born. We began with 25 ninth-graders, knowing that if we changed just one of their lives, the whole effort would have been worth it. And today, we're serving thousands of students in more than a dozen centers across our country, accompanying them, supporting them, on their journeys through high school and college.

There is no higher or better use of your time on this planet than to be helpful to others. I learned this at College Track. All the systems in our society were created by people no smarter, and no more capable, than any of you. And through your energy, intention, and force of will, you can change them. But only if you understand them.

Identifying systemic breakdowns and then imagining new structures is why I started Emerson Collective. I wanted to do more to address the multitude of interlocking injustices that were evident from working with students and their families. At Emerson, we work in the realm of ideas, design, and action. We know that system redesign often requires policy redesign, and we work on that as well. But overriding everything is a recognition that humanity is bound together, and we realize our own potential only



Photos courtesy of Penn Today

An aerial view of graduation on Franklin Field.

by caring for each other.

Think about your own relationships here at Penn: who cared for you and who you cared for. All of life is reciprocity, filled with the circular joy in giving and grace in receiving. It's important to partner your joy with humility. Even as we use our heads, we must learn to bow them. Humility and ambition need not contradict each other. We should all be ambitious to be good stewards of our planet, and good caretakers of one another during the brief time we have together. Because sometimes our time here is briefer than we desire.

We lost my husband, Steve [Jobs], almost ten years ago. My children and I grieved along with people across the world. And I'd like to share what I learned about loss through that experience. We do not pass through grief and leave it behind. Instead, I found, we integrate it—along with all the joyful memories, all the laughter, all the love we feel—into who we are. One of life's most beautiful dimensions is integrating

those you've loved and lost into your own being. We see more, and we understand more, and we love more. Steve used to say, "your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work." And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. Let his words guide you as they've guided me. The only way to do great work is to love what you do. And while you're doing it, love who you do it for and love who you are while you do it.

As long ago as Socrates, we have been praising the examined life. But the examination of a life is not an idea, it is a daily practice. Discover or create your own practices. They do not have to be grandiose, but they must be regular. Make space for them, and make time. Tend to your soul and to your community. Infuse your values into every part of what you do and how you live.

Your values should be like your fingerprints: proof of where you have been and what you have touched. Well, a few months ago, I had the opportunity to speak with several members of your graduating class, truly extraordinary students with deep commitment to the world outside of their academic pursuits.

With all of you in mind, Emerson Collective is making a gift to the education nonprofit DonorsChoose—a gift that will help teachers prepare their own students for college. So, in honor of each of you 3,000 graduates, we will support 3,000 classrooms.

Graduates, you will all have opportunities to serve throughout your lives. Don't let them pass by. Align your talents, spirit, and energy to make this world more equal and just. I assure you, the attempt itself will fill your soul. It is its own reward. I cannot wait to see everything you accomplish: the changes you make, the healing you bring, the better, more humane world that you and your generation create. What an honor it is to be part of your graduating class.

Congratulations, Class of 2021.



Graduates on Franklin Field.

Watch the 2021 Commencement ceremony at <https://commencement.upenn.edu/grad2021>.