

Dr. Mary A. Papazian
President, San José State University
Commencement remarks
Event Center at San José State University and Avaya Stadium
May 23-35, 2018

Now I would like to offer my remarks to the Class of 2018.

Earlier this month, CSU Chancellor Tim White, the head of the 23-campus CSU system, wrote a letter to your class.

In that letter, Chancellor White underscored the importance of making time to truly celebrate this milestone.

“We are here to celebrate you,” he wrote, “. . . your determination, passion, drive and vision for the future — both your own future, and the one you will create for the world.”

End quote.

And here I’m tempted to just say, “what he said,” and call it a day.

But Chancellor White hit the right keyword: Celebrate.

And that is what we are here to do.

We are here to celebrate all that you have accomplished on the pathway to graduation. It can be a hard climb in some cases. It can be filled with unexpected twists and turns.

But you made it, and that is certainly something to celebrate.

We also are here today to celebrate—and to thank—the people who helped you on your journey. I’m talking about your professors, advisors, tutors, mentors, and friends, and, most of all, your families.

What do you say, Class of 2018? Can we show some Spartan love to the families who are with us today?

Yes.

This ceremony also marks a new beginning — a new commencement structure — for San José State.

For the first time, we are honoring *every single* Spartan who graduates this week, by name, as a campus community.

In a large university such as ours, it sometimes can be too easy to lose sight of the fact that we are all individuals — connected to a larger entity, yes, but still our own selves.

And today our calling out of your names as you cross the stage, one by one, is meant to acknowledge that vital truth.

It may take a village to raise a child, as the saying goes, but it takes *individuals* — with character, compassion, and their own special insights into life — to create a village.

And as we re-calibrate our graduation ceremonies—an effort that included extensive collaboration from all corners of our campus—we also, for the first time, have chosen to honor our university's place in the greater American tradition of commencement with our own mace.

The ceremonial use of the mace dates back centuries. It symbolizes San José State's authority to grant your degrees. You may have seen the mace as it was carried at the front of our processional this morning.

One of our very own faculty members ... and a Spartan alumna herself ... designed and crafted this mace. Lecturer Yvonne Escalante—a member of our Department of Art and Art History—made this element of the commencement tradition unique to our campus.

Our beautiful mace is truly original ... a blend of tradition and innovation, designed to reflect San José State's mission and its many strengths.

Traditions matter. And these new traditions are worth celebrating — the official recognition of each individual graduate, and the creation of our university's own unique graduation symbol.

Please join me in thanking all the members of the San José State community who worked so hard, and for so long, to make these new commencement ceremonies possible for all of our graduates and their family members.

Now, before we turn to the main event ... crossing the stage when your name is called ... I'd like to say a few words about the degree you're about to receive.

A college degree; a graduate degree — these are indicators of incredible achievement.

A San José State degree will do many things for you in the years ahead.

A San José State degree documents your ability to set a course, and to follow it through to completion.

Trust me, this is no small achievement.

With this degree you leave the overpopulated world of “could have, should have, would have”...

... And you enter the world of: “I DID IT.”

Let me add here that one out of four San José State students, on average, are the first in their families to attend college.

For those of you here today who belong to that cohort, let me say that what you have achieved also sends a powerful message to your entire family. To your brothers and sisters ... to your children ... to your cousins, nieces, and nephews.

Your degree says, “I did it — and *you* can do it, too.”

A San José State degree also reflects the knowledge you have absorbed in your years of study here.

Curricula are not built by accident. They are designed with a purpose: to make sure our graduates intellectually are as well-equipped as possible to enter into — and to engage with — a fast-changing world.

[FOR COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES AND ARTS]

I can tell by the wide range of activities conducted by the members of our College of Applied Sciences and Arts ...

... whether promoting the well-being of our campus community through the annual CASA Health and Wellness Week ...

... or serving the families of our region through field internships ...

... or assessing better outcomes for juvenile justice through our Department of Justice Studies ...
the oldest degree-granting criminal justice program in our country ...

... I can tell that you have already started to make your way into our fast-changing world.

[FOR CHARLES W. DAVIDSON COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING]

I can tell by the wide range of activities conducted by the members of our Davidson College of Engineering ...

... whether mentoring local middle school students at our annual Science Extravaganza ...

... or leading our campus's Society of Women Engineers

... or competing in — and *winning* — the Silicon Valley Innovation Challenge, as part of the effort to build an entrepreneurial infrastructure in our city ...

... I can tell that you have already started to make your way into our fast-changing world.

[FOR COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND THE ARTS]

I can tell by the wide range of activities conducted by the members of our College of Humanities and the Arts ...

... whether editing Reed Magazine, our campus's literary journal, and the oldest one west of the Mississippi ...

... or engaging with the most complex of questions about the human experience in our philosophy courses ...311

... or performing for the public, 68each week, the powerful music of history's great composers in our Listening Hour series ...

... I can tell that you have already started to make your way into our fast-changing world.

[FOR CONNIE L. LURIE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION]

I can tell by the wide range of activities conducted by the members of our Lurie College of Education ...

... whether working as externs in schools and hospitals throughout Northern California ...

... or pursuing research on autism or learning disorders ...

... or participating in statewide conferences on how best to serve bilingual students ...

... I can tell that you have already started to make your way into our fast-changing world.

[FOR LUCAS COLLEGE AND GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS]

I can tell by the wide range of activities conducted by the members of our Lucas College and Graduate School of Business ...

... whether working on a team of students through our Thompson Global Internship Program ...

... or analyzing how to optimize our region's infrastructure at our Mineta Transportation Institute...

... or gaining on-the-job experience at some of Silicon Valley's most innovative organizations

...

... I can tell that you have already started to make your way into our fast-changing world.

[FOR COLLEGE OF SCIENCE]

I can tell by the wide range of activities conducted by the members of our College of Science ...

... whether analyzing the dynamics of global climate change ...

... or researching the ecology of our beautiful state through fieldwork and hands-on classes ...

... or presenting posters at our annual College of Science Student Research Day ...

... I can tell that you have already started to make your way into a fast-changing world.

[FOR COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES]

I can tell by the wide range of activities conducted by the members of our College of Social Sciences ...

... whether leading voter registration drives in our local neighborhoods ...

... or pursuing research on sustainable agriculture ...

... or presenting papers at the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies annual conference ...

... I can tell that you have already started to make your way into our fast-changing world.

These experiences broadened your education. They also, in many cases, have benefited communities beyond our campus borders.

And community service by its students is one of San José State's most distinguishing qualities. We do it as well, or better, than any other university in the country. And I say that as someone who has spent her entire career in higher education.

But there's a catch.

While the degrees you will receive in a few minutes provide proof-positive of what you achieved ... and of what that achievement represents ... going forward, it will be on *you* to maintain the momentum and energy that is so palpable in this stadium today.

It will be on *you* to stay active in your communities.

It will be on *you* to engage as citizens...to speak truth to power...to shine a light in darkness, and all the rest.

And it will be on *you* to remain active learners all your life.

I would argue that the most important thing you have learned in your time here is *how to learn*.

When it comes to learning, you have not reached the finish line. You are just settling into the starting blocks.

(You knew I had to toss in one Speed City reference, right?)

Here in the heart of the Silicon Valley, change is the one true constant. The rest of the world might be a few paces slower, but it's no different.

Expect change. Expect surprises. Expect setbacks.

But if you embrace change — if you prepare for it ... if you keep your minds open and make learning a lifetime hunger, never to be satiated — you will do just fine.

This, too, is on *you*.

But *you* are Spartans ... soon-to-be diploma-carrying Spartans. And I have every confidence you will leave this campus and do your part to strengthen our society and our state ... and to leave behind a world that is better than the one you came into.

Congratulations to *all* of you.

To the graduates.

To their friends and family.

To the faculty and staff members who helped make it happen.

Congratulations to you all.

Job well done ... and now the adventure begins.

Go Spartans!