

Sydney Campus Graduation 2021
Farewell Address
June 9 2021: 9:00 AM Ceremony
2020 graduates from the Schools of Arts & Sciences, Education, and
Philosophy & Theology

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THE SONG OF YOURSELF IS JUST BEGINNING

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, distinguished guests, University staff, fellow graduates, ladies and gentlemen - thank you for joining us here today as we celebrate our 2020 graduates. I would also like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, and pay my respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

I'm so honoured to be here representing my fellow graduates, and so thankful that we are finally able to share this experience in-person.

We've lived through some strange, dare I say *unprecedented*, times recently, and yet here we all are. Not to sound like a cliché, but we made it! We are so lucky to be here. It's incredibly humbling to have made it this far - so many people don't have access to the same opportunities that we have been given, so as we sit here today let us take a moment to consider what an honour and a privilege it is to be given access to such an excellent education.

With that being said, I'd like to start off with a few necessary thank you's. Thank you to all the staff of Notre Dame, academic and otherwise, for their ongoing support and encouragement over the last few years. Thank you *specifically* to all the lecturers I've had the privilege of studying under and working alongside. And a special mention to all of Notre Dame's administrative staff, who keep this university running and who have made today possible. Thank you to my parents for cheering me on as I raced to meet competing deadlines - diamonds are made under pressure. And to my friends, thank you for the last few years. I'll be forever indebted to Notre Dame for bringing us together - I wouldn't have made it this far without you.

On that note, I have to say that one of the best parts of Notre Dame is the people.

Somewhere in the middle of second-year, I started keeping a list of things my lecturers said to me.

Some of them are funny: "There's people out there building bridges, and here we are fiddling about with words."

Others are anecdotal: "The autocorrect on my phone has broken and it's pretty much ruined my life."

Others still are academic: "You'd be amazed what difference a nicely formatted assignment would make."

But my favourite quotes are the ones said in passing. They're not meant to be inspirational - they just are. I remember sitting in a writing class two years ago, analysing Walt Whitman's

Song of Myself. Our lecturer turned to the class, looked us over, and said, "The song of yourself is just beginning."

I think she's right.

We are all artists - filmmakers, journalists, counsellors, writers, sociologists, actors. The world needs us now more than ever. Regardless of where we all end up, I hope we always remember that. There is always art to be made, always work to be done.

I don't think anything will ever compare to the feeling I got on closing night of *The Light Burns Blue*, the play I stage-managed as part of the theatre department's Text Based Production Workshop in 2018. *Lights down. Hold. Hold. House lights up, outro music - go. We did it.* My adrenaline was so high I felt like I was vibrating as the cast called me and the assistant director on stage. They gave us flowers and hugs, and said "Thank you, Stage Mum" for the last time as the audience clapped over the sounds of The Dubliners *The Lark in the Morning*. The noise felt deafening in our homey little theatre - it may as well have been Broadway. I guess, in a way, it was.

Maya Angelou said that "people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." So, as we venture out into the world and try to find our place in it, I hope we can all remember the *feeling* of the past few years. Notre Dame is sending us out into the world with incredible education, yes, but I hope we can also leave knowing we've built friendships that will last for the rest of our lives. I for one have connected with lecturers, fellow students, and staff members in a way I didn't know was possible.

I'll miss them, and Notre Dame, dearly. I'll miss the way the courtyard glows in the afternoon sunlight. I'll miss dancing around St Ben's hall in between classes, and I'll miss the coffee runs to Benito's during hours-long study sessions in the library. I won't miss the assignment deadlines, but I'll miss the lecturers who congratulated me every time I hit 'submit'.

I'm not going to pretend that I can summarise the university experience of everyone in front of me in a five minute speech, but I hope you can all walk out of here today with the knowledge that you've achieved something incredible. It certainly hasn't been easy, but we did it anyway - and now the world is waiting.

It's *all* waiting, out there. Life is branching out before us like Sylvia Plath's fig tree. "From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckon[s] and wink[s]."

So let's go and get it.