



Patrick F. Leahy

Graduate Commencement | May 20, 2017

Well, congratulations, graduates. You did it. We are so proud of all of you. The president of my undergraduate institution once famously said, “Universities need commencement ceremonies. It’s proof that something actually happens around here.” Thank you all for coming and for helping to prove that something actually happens around Wilkes.

Before I address our most recent alumni, allow me to thank some people.

First, let me thank the hardest working person here today, our sign language interpreter, Jamie Lynn Hill. Thank you, Jamie, for making this ceremony accessible to all of our guests.

Next, let me recognize both the Wilkes Civic Band, under the direction of Professor Phil Simon, and the Wilkes Chorus, under the direction of Professor Steven Thomas. Thank you all for enriching this ceremony. Also, while I’m at it, I’d like to thank the unsung heroes of this weekend here at Wilkes — all of our colleagues in the physical plant, public safety and food service — for their hard work in preparing the campus for this celebration. Thank you, colleagues, for all the ways you support our students.

And, finally, I’d like to thank our commencement speaker today, Dr. Bernie Graham, for his inspirational address. More importantly, I’d like to thank Dr. Graham for his 22 years of service to Wilkes University. He was the founding dean of our Nesbitt School of Pharmacy and built it into the prestigious program that it is today. He was dean for our first graduate and our 1,000th graduate, constantly tending to his creation and building it into a nationally-known program. Bernie, we at Wilkes will be forever grateful for your dedication and leadership. Please join me in thanking Dr. Graham for his service to Wilkes.

Today, we return to a centuries-old ritual that brings students, faculty, staff and families together to celebrate a new beginning, not an ending. After all, for years this day has been called commencement day, not completion day, but commencement day. It marks a beginning. After all of the many hours you have spent in Wilkes classrooms here on campus, or at any of our off-campus locations throughout the state of Pennsylvania, or in one of our online classrooms, you have made it to this day. We prefer to think of this day as the first day of the rest of your life, not the last day of your time with Wilkes University.

So, as we conclude this commencement ceremony together, I’d like to offer two thoughts for our graduates to ponder: the first is gratitude; the second is dreams.

First, gratitude. I know that all of you graduates have mixed emotions today: pride, relief, satisfaction, maybe some anxiety. But, I hope you also feel a deep sense of gratitude. In particular, I hope you feel a sense of gratitude for all of the people in your life today. No one arrives at a commencement day without the help of many people along the way: family members, friends, Wilkes faculty, classmates, even employers. An ancient German theologian reportedly said, “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.” I hope you will find a special way today – your commencement day – to say “thank you” to all of these people for helping to make today possible for you.

And second, dreams. For many of you, this commencement day is the fulfillment of a dream: to obtain a graduate degree from an American, private university — the best education at this level in the world. Upon receiving your diploma, you will have achieved something that very few people worldwide obtain: a master’s or doctoral degree. In fact, if the entire world’s population were just 100 people, only one (maybe two) would have a graduate degree. Congratulations on achieving this dream.

But I hope the realization of this dream today simply makes possible what it is you really dream about. Start today — on your commencement day — to dream anew. Dreams give life purpose and meaning. Eleanor Roosevelt said, “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.” And Lawrence of Arabia had this to say about dreams: “All men (and women) dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds, wake in the day to find that it was vanity; but the dreamers of the day are dangerous, for they may act on their dreams with open eyes, to make them possible.” All of you have the capacity, even the responsibility, to dream big, beautiful dreams. I hope you will. And I hope you will begin today, on your commencement day. Then, in the years ahead, I hope you will act on your dreams with open eyes.

So, as we celebrate your commencement day, I ask you to think about gratitude and dreams. If you can wake up and start each day both with gratitude for all of the people in your life and with dreams for the future, today really will be the first day of the rest of your life — the first day of a full, rich, meaningful life.

Congratulations, graduates. It has been our privilege here at Wilkes to play a small part in helping you achieve your dreams. And thank you for the contributions that you have made to enhance this special learning community called Wilkes University. We wish you all the very best.