



GEORGIAN COURT UNIVERSITY

THE MERCY UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

Miriam Felicia Hunte '16
President of the Student Government Association Executive Board
GCU Undergraduate Commencement Remarks
May 20, 2016

Good Afternoon Board of Trustees, President Marbach, Provost Behre, Mr. Garbarino, Sister Maria Cordis, Guests, Administrators, Faculty, Staff, Alumni, Family, Friends, and my fellow graduates of the Class of 2016.

It is truly an honor to speak before you today. Confucius said, "The will to win, the desire to succeed, and the urge to reach your full potential . . . these are the keys that will unlock the door to personal excellence." I believe he was correct. It was indeed strong will, the desire to succeed, and the urge to reach one's potential that have gathered us here today. Of these three keys, I believe one's desire to succeed is what holds the most relevance.

I recently came across a cartoon picture on social media that I believe correctly captures the essence of a college student's journey. It illustrated an individual preparing to embark on a long path. When the individual reached the end of the path, there was a banner titled "Goals," and in her hand was a paper titled "Dreams." While the individual could clearly see the finish line, there were also some obvious challenges placed along the path to her goals. Some of these challenges included fear, guilt, doubt, discouragement, naysayers, and stereotypes. I believe that at some point here at GCU, each of us has encountered one or more of these challenges—whether through a class, a personal situation, or even with friends and family. Yet, each of us have persevered and pursued our goals. This is an accomplishment of which we should be proud.

Whether or not we are aware, our graduating today is an inspiration to others who may struggle to see the attainment of a degree as a reality. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, ONLY 33 percent of the population holds a bachelor's degree or higher. Some of us here today have come from challenged backgrounds; some of us will be the first in our families to graduate from college; nevertheless, we have stayed the course to pave a new path; we have set a new pace and have granted the next generation the permission to do the same. We are among the one-third who have been able to successfully attain a four-year college degree.

When many of us arrived in 2012, the Orientation theme for the class was "Make your mark!" The question then becomes: How will we make our mark? How will we make an impact on our world? How will we demonstrate the Mercy core values of justice, respect, integrity, compassion, and service? We start by being the leaders Georgian Court has prepared us to be. We have been equipped for greatness and excellence in our fields of study, our communities, and our families. Let us use the skills and knowledge we have gained over the years to improve, inspire, and cultivate. Let us define our success—whether that is attaining a dream job, pursuing another degree, starting a foundation, opening your own business, or simply telling your story to encourage others to pursue a degree themselves. Ask frequently, "What is success to ME"?

In more ways than one, we are leaders—not just in the fields we are about to enter, but in our families, communities, churches, and circles of friends. We have experienced loss and tragedy; we have doubted ourselves on the journey to achieving our goal. Some of us have lost loved ones and friends, but in the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "what lies behind us, and what lies before us, are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

As we celebrate today, it is important to understand that life is, in fact, a journey, and not a destination. So I charge each of you—never stop learning, never stop improving, and never stop inspiring others. This is how we will maintain our excellence and make our mark in this world.

Finally, in remembering all of the valuable lessons we have learned here at The Court, remember our alma mater—the next generation of young minds that have not yet been reached. Many people along the way have invested in us, and I think it is incumbent upon each of us to invest in those who will come after us; they will need our support, monetary and otherwise. Therefore, make it a point to give back, to reinvest in this university that invested in each of us. In closing, I leave you with the words of Marianne Williamson:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people will not feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Thank you, God, for showing me Georgian Court, and thank you, Georgian Court, for showing me God.

Congratulations to the Class of 2016; go forth and make your mark in the world!