

2015 UCLA Conferral of Doctoral Degrees Hoarding Ceremony Keynote Address

Robin L. Garrell

Vice Provost for Graduate Education & Dean, Graduate Division

Welcome

It is a great privilege for me to speak with you today. This year, 772 students will earn their doctorates in 79 different majors from UCLA. Congratulations!

To the graduates: On behalf of all UCLA faculty, I want to express our enormous delight and pride in all you have accomplished at our great university.

As scholars, you have forged new paths.

You have pushed back the frontiers of knowledge,

and brought distinction to yourselves and to UCLA.

And as teachers and mentors: you've inspired your students.

To the many friends and family members who join us today: we are so happy that you could be here to celebrate the culmination of your student's graduate career: the conferral of the doctoral degree. Congratulations to all of you!

Let's first take this opportunity thank the many people here today who have given their love and support to our students: the parents, partners, spouses, siblings, children, mentors, friends, and other important people in the lives of our graduates.

Your support has taken many forms: financial, emotional, time, and personal sacrifice.... May I ask all of those who are being hooded today to please stand, turn around, see someone who is here for you, and say "thank you".

Let's all give them a round of applause. Thank you. Please be seated.

Dr. Malcom and You

Thank you, Dr. Malcom, for being with us today. We are truly inspired by your intelligence and endeavor, your perseverance, and your lifelong commitment to public service. Thank you for dedicating your life to making the road broader and smoother for so many young people, and for giving them the opportunity to excel in the science and engineering fields that they have grown to love.

Dr. Malcom's life story is remarkable. She came from a small rural town in Alabama, and now holds a senior leadership role in the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the world's largest general scientific organization.

We are also inspired by our student marshals, and by Deborah Cohen, who at 73 is today's most senior graduate. Her life journey has taken her to great heights: her doctoral research explores

Tibetan contemporary arts and culture and sheds new light on ancient traditions. Congratulations Deborah!

New graduates: I think that each of you has a lot in common with Dr. Malcom. Like her, you each have extraordinary abilities: you are brilliant and creative, analytical and sensitive. You are outstanding communicators. And perhaps you are also musical, or athletic, or artistic.

Dr. Malcom is also distinguished by her character. Her life's journey is a testament to her perseverance, strong work ethic and tenacity. She is also very kind and generous. In these ways you, our graduates, may also be a lot like her, having overcome significant challenges to reach this day. Many of you – and your families – have faced financial challenges or illness. People around you may have discouraged you from your ambition to earn your doctoral degree. And every one of you has faced some major difficulty in your research. Indeed, how to overcome such roadblocks is the principal lesson that all PhD's learn.

For Dr. Malcolm, as for many of you, ability and character were necessary, but not sufficient, ingredients for success. At a key juncture in Dr. Malcom's doctoral studies at Penn State, a mentor took a moment to really *see* her, to *hear* her, and to *guide* her. To recognize her talents and aspirations, and to provide an opportunity that she could seize, and that would set her on the road that brings her here today.

Almost certainly, each of you has experienced such a moment, or a period of time at UCLA when a teacher or mentor made a difference, and did something that changed your life. They might have offered a word of encouragement, a pat on the head, a shoulder to cry on at just the right moment. They might have provided a steadfast and nurturing relationship, or an environment that enabled you to thrive. Or just opened a door.

It's really all three ingredients: abilities, character, and a helping hand (or a pat on the back, or a little shove --- whatever it took!), combined with tremendous effort that have led to your success at UCLA.

UCLA and You

The notion that everyone has the capacity to learn and grow, and to become a productive and engaged citizen, dates back to the Age of Enlightenment, in the 17th and 18th century centuries. Before then, education was geared towards training men, the nobility and merchant class, to become doctors and lawyers, scribes and clergy. The scientific revolution and religious upheaval set the stage for transformation. John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau were early advocates for childhood education, and Locke argued that education should not be restricted to class or gender. Their ideas paved the way for universal education.

Yet even today, in our nation, our state and our city, we know that opportunities to learn and succeed vary considerably. And the consequences of that are that people get left out or are left behind, despite their talents and strength of character. So what can we do?

Just as others have made a difference to you, you can make a difference for others. And you already have:

- the time you stayed late in office hours to help a struggling freshman;
- the classmate who asked you to read a draft of a paper just one more time before he handed it in;
- the time you coached a friend on their job talk.

Today's medalist has shown us through her life's story and work just how transformational such moments can be.

This hooding ceremony, your doctoral commencement, marks the time when you leave the university. Many of you are looking forward to the next big thing: a postdoctoral fellowship, or a research position in industry, or a faculty position.... Or maybe for now you'll just spend time with family, or take a vacation. And maybe a few of you are just craving a good night's sleep!

But after you take a breath and a snooze, I hope you will begin to consider how you will move forward from your experience at UCLA over the last several years, with all that you have learned and accomplished. In Buddhism, enlightenment is not a destination that we strive to reach. No, it is an ongoing process of renewal, a determination to grow as a person and to have a positive impact on the lives of those around us. And your impact may be far broader than you can imagine.

For today's medalist, and for each of you, a confluence of abilities, character, and helping hands has enabled you to reach this milestone. Your creativity and scholarship, your discoveries and stories, have the power to inspire young and old, to open doors, and to bring light into shadows. You have the power to enlighten. Take the opportunity when you have it.

Live the UCLA motto: "Fiat Lux": **Let there be light!**

Graduates:

Today we celebrate your accomplishments. They are....

Substantial,

important,

creative,

impactful,

inspiring, one and all...

Our hearts are filled with joy and hope and love for every one of you.

Congratulations from the entire UCLA community! We can't wait to see what you do next. Fiat Lux.