

15 June 2017 UCLA Doctoral Hooding Ceremony Keynote

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It is a great privilege for me to speak with you today. This year, nearly 700 students will earn their doctorates from UCLA. Congratulations!

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

As teachers: you've inspired your students.

As scholars, you've forged new paths,
pushed back the frontiers of knowledge,
and brought distinction to yourselves and to UCLA.

To the many friends and family members: Welcome! We are so happy that you are here today 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 who have given our graduates their love and support: the parents, partners, spouses, siblings, children, mentors, friends, and other important people.

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, look to someone who is here for you, and say "thank you". Let's all give them a round of applause.

Thank you. Please be seated.

Today's UCLA doctoral degree recipients have engaged in extraordinary scholarship, made pioneering discoveries, and created work of great aesthetic value. You were introduced to two of them already, our student marshals Frederic and Susila. I'd like to say a little about several more graduates whose dissertation research is remarkable in its innovation, breadth and significance.

Peter Lockwood Haffner is earning his PhD in World Arts and Cultures|Dance. His dissertation argues that "Haitian Art" is really an invention, the result of the visual arts in Haiti being shaped by the movements of people, ideas and art objects, and influenced by politics, race and inequalities. These are transformative perspectives. Congratulations, Peter!

Sharon Cobb is one of the first UCLA-Charles Drew University /School of Nursing bridge scholars. She has been an excellent mentor for incoming doctoral students, and her research helps us understand how multiple chronic health conditions affect the health of older African Americans with serious mental illness. Thank you for addressing this complex public health challenge and congratulations, Sharon.

Arif Amiani is earning his doctorate in Education. His historical research on 19th and 20th century philosophies of education can help today's educators teach and construct better learning environments to help students develop their reasoning skills. Thank you and congratulations, Arif.

Theresa Stewart-Ambo will receive her doctorate in Education. Her dissertation examines the relationships between two UC universities, Berkeley and UCLA, and local tribal nations. She has been awarded a UC President's Postdoctoral Fellowship to continue her research at UC San Diego. And **Yve Chavez** has completed her PhD in Art History. Her dissertation, "Indigenous Artists and Ingenuity at the California Missions After 1769," expands upon her master's research on California Indian basket-weaving traditions. and provides a Native American perspective on the art of the California missions. Theresa Stewart-Ambo and Yve Chavez are the first women of Tongva

descent to earn doctoral degrees from UCLA, so their commencement represents an especially significant milestone for them and their families. Congratulations to both of you.

Each of the more than 300 doctoral degree recipients who will be hooded today has a similar story of exceptional accomplishments, hard won and richly deserved. Bravo!

My first doctoral hooding ceremony was in 2012. Yesterday, I looked back on what I said back then. As a preface to the traditional (and expected) motivational remarks:

- I expressed concern about declining support for higher education;
- And I observed that in an increasingly polarized political environment, it had become difficult to have reflective conversations that could actually help solve problems.
- And I expressed with some dismay that in an internet and social media-focused world, any and all opinions were getting equal play, whether informed by facts or not.

Today, those observations seem rather mild, maybe even quaint. Because now, there seems to be even greater disdain for facts (what is an “alternative fact,” really?), many people are unwilling *or unable* to distinguish facts from opinions, and we are all so exhausted by world events, political drama, faux celebrities and reality TV, and by our own excessive commitments.... It gets pretty hard for even the most thoughtful and warm-hearted among us to just pause, and *really listen* to people we don’t agree with, to keep our minds open to new ideas, and be willing to be persuaded to yield our ground and our surely-correct position on a particular issue.

And so, graduates... I challenge you: as accomplished and prepared intellectuals, as problem solvers and agents of change, to lead by example – through what you have done here at UCLA and what will do tomorrow. You know that the path forward is based on knowledge, discovery, discourse, reasoned and respectful debate, thoughtfulness and empathy, and a *willingness* to wrestle with complex, multi-sided questions that cannot be answered by just one person, or just one side.

This isn't a political speech, advocating for the left or the right or the middle. It's first a request to take good care of yourself, mind and body. Sleep, exercise, eat well, read for pleasure.

And second, create an action plan that can support your sense of well-being and accomplishment. Being a spectator can be stressful; action is empowering. Find ways to take responsibility for your future, and to contribute to the future of your family and community.

For example. Whether you are convinced, by the evidence, that climate change is real, *or not*, what we do know is that we are all healthier if our air and water are clean. And I'd like to think that we all want our neighbors and children and grandchildren to have clean air and water, too, today and tomorrow. So perhaps you might engage in efforts to help ensure the quality of the local or global environment.

Many of you faced financial challenges in earning your undergraduate or graduate degrees. As an undergrad, perhaps you took out a student loan for which you didn't have to pay interest until you finished your education, including graduate school. [I hate to remind you, but now that you've completed your doctorate your loan bill will come in a few weeks...] Now if interest had started adding up from day one, maybe graduate school wouldn't even have been an option for you. But that may be exactly the situation that your younger brothers or sisters, or your children, will face if that no-interest benefit goes away. So maybe higher education or student financial aid are arenas where you could be a credible and effective advocate.

Many of you were awarded a highly competitive graduate research fellowship from the National Science Foundation. Congratulations! Those three-year awards provided good stipends, paid most of your tuition and fees, and gave you a great line on your resume, marking you as a rising star in the social sciences, physical sciences, life sciences or engineering. But the budget proposal that Congress is considering now will cut the number of NSF graduate fellowships in half, with nothing to fill the gap. If that comes to pass, it will mean that many fewer students will have opportunities like you have had to earn their PhDs, and to prepare for careers as faculty, teachers and entrepreneurs. So perhaps you would be interested in advocating for continued support for science education, training and the research that leads to new technologies, medicines, and greater understanding of our world and the universe.

You may also want to think about what health care means to you. These days, few people stay in one job or at one company for their whole career. Would portable health insurance be important to you if you're in an adjunct professor position before you get your tenure track job? If someone close to you became seriously ill, what would you want for them, in terms of their medical care and its financial impact? Maybe you have opinions that are worth communicating to decision-makers.

It's possible that none of these issues is particularly important to you, but that others are: immigration, homelessness, data privacy... Whether you are passionate about saving something, or about doing something differently, taking action means you are investing in securing our shared future, and in making the world a better place. As UCLA doctoral degree recipients, you have experience, knowledge, and abilities that are exceptional, and which make you a credible force. You can set the stage and lead the way. The world actually is in your hands.

Graduates: It has been a privilege to be your teachers and mentors, your coaches and cheerleaders. We are truly fortunate to have watched and helped *you* reach this milestone. You have powered through plateaus and barriers, persevered, and have met and often exceeded our expectations. And here you are. Well done!

Looking ahead, many of you will go on to careers as faculty and researchers, others will pursue careers in industry or nonprofits, or become entrepreneurs or artists, and many already are, or will become, moms and dads. Whatever your path, please continue to strive, not only to reach professional milestones: getting the next grant or earning tenure, your promotion or performing in the next recital.... but also to fulfill a personal action plan that can support your health and well-being and that can help make the world a better place.

Graduates: 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. Let there be light, and Go Bruins!