

Greetings! Welcome to Beach Commencement 2021 – *at Angel Stadium.*

While we're not in the usual confines at our track and stadium, with the Pyramid looming behind the stage, I venture to say that this is one of the more interesting spots we could hold commencement.

Like you, I'm thrilled that we can all be together in one place – in-person, rather than virtually. I appreciate that these times call for distancing and other public health measures, but I'm sure I speak for everyone when I say, *"I'm so done with doing things remotely."*

Still, being here at Angels Stadium isn't the first place I think of when "commencement" comes to mind. Instead, it has me thinking of long line drives to the outfield; vendors hawking peanuts in the stands; and the PA announcer telling us who is coming up to bat. But we're here, and I can also imagine the generation of Long Beach State Dirtbags who have played right here.

I want to begin by thanking your family members, faculty, staff and friends for their wisdom, love, care, guidance, patience and support. Thank you for all you have done to make this moment possible.

Now, class of 2021.

Your commencement represents success and is a cause for celebration – ***for all of us!*** That's what we mean when we talk about the OneBeach spirit. You may not realize it, but commencement is as joyous for faculty and staff as it is for you. We love celebrating your success and seeing your accomplishments and promise.

Your education at The Beach was just the beginning of your journey with us. Commencement, by no means, is ever the end – this is your next step on our journey together. We trust that you are forever joined to the Beach. I can commit that we will be here to help you connect to other alumni, on-campus opportunities, events, and more. You came to us as a student and today, you'll move on as one of our more than 350,000 alumni and take your places as professional and community leaders.

You're taking this step with fresh memories of a year unlike any other. Seared into our hearts and minds were: a chaotic political scene; unrest throughout our nation; eroding civil rights; violence under the color of authority; an attempted insurrection; hate crimes; a faltering economy; immigration concerns; and a pandemic. These are just a few of the issues that have hung over us this past year, and I have no doubt these experiences will influence and impact the way you live for years to come – perhaps for the rest of your life.

In any time of crisis, there is a temptation to ask, "Why us? Why now?" especially when it comes to dealing with your own challenges – like graduating and beginning a new career, pursuing another degree, taking up a new interest or taking the next step in a relationship. I would like to encourage you to see it all as just a part of a bigger picture and take what you have learned and use it to redefine this and future eras – to use it to transform your life and the lives of those around you.

Over this past year, I have been heartened to see the remarkable impact that members of our Beach Family are making: They lead in all levels of government; are on the frontlines as first responders and in health care and social work; continue providing learning opportunities to students of all types; and perform a host of other essential services that have kept society intact and running. Through it all, I heard from Beach alumni or read stories about them that highlighted how their Cal

State Long Beach education made it possible for them to make real and lasting differences. And now it's your turn.

I told the class of 2020 at last year's commencement that better times are ahead. Considering what's behind us that might seem like an easy call, but I feel confident the challenges we've met along the way have positioned each of us for greater things. The improvements and healing may take time and occasionally be painful, but we are on our way.

That said, challenging times lie before us, and you'll be called on to rise up and persist. But that's the way it's always been for all the generations before us who managed plagues, famines, world wars and world-wide depressions. Frankly, that's the real reason we devote time, energy, money and more to education. It's prepared you, as it prepared me, to overcome adversity, shown us how to serve others, and taught us how to create opportunities out of hardship.

You have been prepared to collaborate with others, think and problem-solve creatively through a responsive, flexible, disciplinary, and interdisciplinary curriculum. You have been prepared to become an engaged citizen and leader – a person who can build and strengthen communities that are compassionate, innovative, inclusive and respectful.

You have come this far, through all this, because of your resiliency. I encourage you to continue to cultivate resilience. It's the basis of your current and future success. It's brought you here and will launch you forward to new adventures and accomplishments. Keep it going! Use that to fuel your efforts in the tough times and use the good times to replenish that reserve – you will call on it throughout your life.

For me, one of the best parts of any commencement is telling graduates, "Congratulations and good luck!" as they get their diplomas,

move the tassel on their cap, and celebrate with classmates and loved ones. My favorite part, though, watching you take what you've learned here and marveling at how you use it to make our world a better place.

We are all counting on you to do just that.

Congratulations, good luck...and ***Go Beach!***