

# Selected Speeches

## Commencement 2016

May 20, 2016  
Royal Farms Arena

Traditionally, this is where I'd introduce the Commencement speaker. But there's no need this time.

You're lookin' at him.

I understand I'm not on the list of usual suspects. I'm not a celebrity. I'm not a best-selling author. I'm not a star athlete ... I mean, look at me. I'm not a titan of industry, or the leader of the free world. But I've got something on *all* of them.

I know you.

To be sure, the foremost privilege I have as president of UMB is to preside over this Commencement ceremony and wish you well as you go out to change the world.

Hands down, this the best part of my job. Today is the best day of my year.

Another privilege of being president is that most people are rather loath to tell you "no." And so when I said I wanted to deliver the Commencement address, though my colleagues were surely hoping for someone more impressive, more exciting—maybe taller—no one actually said "no." And in the pro column, I've got two big pluses: 1) You're not paying me anything extra to be here today; and 2) I've promised to be quick.

Right about now, it would probably help you feel more confident in my Commencement duties if I told you my credentials. But I already did.

I know you.

While I share you with our distinguished deans and faculty who have come to honor you today, I can truly say that you are my students. In fact, you're probably the first graduating class whose members—in total—arrived during my six years as UMB president.

I saw many of you for the first time during your orientation, when everything about this University was brand new—before the faculty here today became your mentors, and the classmates beside you became your friends.

Some of you have spent Tuesday afternoons with me treating young patients in my Clinic. Some of you have come to my home for Sunday brunch with my wife Andrea and me. Over the years, you've visited my office asking for advice. And as dynamic student leaders, you reciprocated—generously offering me your own guidance.

I know you.

So I asked to address you one last time—in your final moments here as students not because I have some pearls of wisdom I want to share about living a successful, fulfilling life. I imagine you'll do just fine in that regard. And I'm sure you've already gotten plenty of advice this week.

I asked to address you because I wanted to say “so long.” And I wanted to tell you how proud I am of everything you've achieved.

When I first spoke to you at orientation some years ago, I probably told you to be nice. I probably urged you to lead. I probably asked you to serve. I'm pretty sure I exhorted you to “leave the place better than you found it.”

Well “this place” is a big one. Bigger than your school. Bigger than this campus.

It's an expansive community of people, colleagues and classmates bound to one another and obligated to the oaths we take as professionals; patients and clients, near and far, reliant on our good care and our good counsel. And this community is so much better for your being here.

I've seen you give up your Saturday mornings—when a couple hours' sleep would have been welcome—to tutor middle and high school students and show them what a professional career might look like for them. I've seen you in the community—week in and week out—making sure that our neighbors with HIV are living with the disease, instead of dying from it.

You've taken our neighbors in your arms—from birth to death—and bent their trajectory toward health and happiness—from organizing active play that bonds infants with their parents, to dancing with neighborhood seniors, who maybe haven't danced in years.

As children from Central America poured into Maryland—fleeing violence and hardship in their home countries—you were their advocates, helping them navigate the immigration system, so they might feel a little less scared, a little less alone. You've worked to improve oral health care in Maryland's poor, underserved, and immigrant communities, with a stunning commitment to cultural competence, to truly understanding these populations that need your capable—and compassionate—care the most.

You've become a trusted presence in neighborhood schools, helping children tap into their own resilience—the strength of their families and communities—and change the despairing story that poverty might have written for them.

You've opened up tough conversations here on campus—conversations about race, culture, inclusion, and engagement. You asked hard questions about our institutional identity and our purpose: Who do we want to be? Are we modeling the values we've said are essential to this University? How do we get better at serving one another and our community? And then you candidly, unflinchingly assessed our progress.

You've rejected belligerence and bombast—when it seems they've become the “new normal” in our national discourse—and you've chosen, instead, to listen as much as you talk. Your example of leadership through service and civility is extraordinary. This University's credibility in the community belongs to you.

When the leaders of this city and this state talk about the goodwill and good works of UMB—and they do—they're talking about you. You are our courage and our passion and our strength.

And so my final request before you leave UMB is a simple one: Don't stop what you're doing. Because I say this with all sincerity: You are the leaders we need right now.

And people know it. So they're going to seek you out. They're going to ask you to help solve the perilous problems that threaten our best ideals. They're going to depend on the qualities you'll bring to the table: confidence leavened by your kindness; knowledge strengthened by your humanity.

Please say "yes" when they ask. I know you will.

Because I know you.

Amid the joy and chaos of new careers and growing families that will require your attention and love, please say "yes" to your communities, to the people who have neither your education nor your influence. Use your voice and your work for them.

When you first came to UMB, I asked you to make us better. And you did. Every day, you did. For that, I am so very, very grateful.

To the Class of 2016: Please keep being the wonderful people you are. Please keep doing the wonderful things you're doing. I am so proud of you!

Congratulations!