

CLASS DAY 2021

JUNE 11

Emily Robb, Class of 2021

If I look back far enough in my texts, I could probably find the one I sent to my mom from my boarding school dorm room when I learned I got into UChicago. I don't need the screenshot to remember her exact words, "That's so great sweetie...I didn't know you applied to state school in Illinois!" And while she'll never admit to saying it, my mom's words have underscored so much of what this school has meant to me. The University of Chicago is always trying; trying to overcome its geographical name, trying to reject its reputation as the place "where fun comes to die", and oftentimes even trying to embrace it as a point of pride! Just like our school, we are all trying, too.

We are try-hards. We pushed ourselves in high school to get into a top college. We pushed ourselves through this place, starting at a sprint and signing up for every list-host imaginable before realizing we're actually running a marathon. Some of us were intent on being Computer Science students at the outset, only to find a passion for Creative Writing and conducting tours for Admissions along the way. Others thought they'd study East Asian Languages and Civilizations, but somehow found themselves picking up a dead language and a second major just for fun. I decided to major in philosophy so when people inevitably ask who my favorite philosopher is, I can respond, "Me!" — it's an expensive joke, I know. But all of these routes are what we make of them. There is no wrong turn in these journeys, and each new choice only contributes to the broader path of our interdisciplinary liberal arts education that has prepared us for our next chapter.

And just to be clear, my mom is the most powerful, courageous, supportive, steel-willed woman I know. She single-handedly raised me and my brother, our fearless cheerleader and advocate, jumping through all sorts of hoops behind the scenes unbeknownst to us. Of the colleges I applied to, UChicago was the only one that didn't give me a hard time about my financial aid application or ask me to provide proof as to why my abusive father wasn't included on it. It was the first time my mom didn't have to go to bat for me and my circumstances, giving her a moment to breathe, a small gift from the school that meant the world to me. But now is your time to pause, to reflect, and to take that breath of relief for yourself. Think about your cheerleaders, parents, friends, professors, mentors and more, who have held their breath for you to be here today. You've made them proud by running the most exploratory marathon of them all, meandering through confusion at some points, picking up the pace at others, and adapting to the challenges you've encountered in unforeseen turns. Somehow, we've found ourselves at the finish line, all together, a little bit tired, and a tad nervous for what's next. Whether it be grad school or a full-time role in a new city, or another adventure that is still in the works, know that you have the tools to succeed; you've already run the marathon that is this University without even realizing it.

So, take one last victory lap and finish strong to celebrate yourself and those that got you here — ride a Divvy bike downtown, grab a smoothie from Robust, or visit the lake at Promontory Point

one last time. For me, I'll be on the quad with a fish tank pretending I'm at our senior week Shedd Aquarium formal, but mark these last days with celebrations old and new, however you can, wherever you may be. Pat yourself on the back and take a deep breath. You've made it to the finish line.

Congratulations, Class of 2021.

Now, I have been given the honor of introducing this year's distinguished Class Day keynote speaker, Congressman Andy Kim. Congressman Kim currently serves the Third Congressional District of New Jersey and was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2018. We are honored to have the Congressman with us today. An alum of the College, the Congressman majored in political science, and after graduating in 2004, he went on to study International Relations at Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar and Truman Scholar.

So please join me in welcoming, Congressman Andy Kim.