

CLASS DAY 2020

JUNE 12

Greer Baxter, Class of 2020

Congratulations to the Class of 2020! And a big thank you to family, faculty, and community members here who supported and encouraged us to always strive to be our best selves. You are part of what allowed us to thrive here, so today we celebrate you as well. We are grateful—even though we might not have always been clear about that!

Emily Dickinson wrote:

“We never know how high we are
Till we are called to rise;
And then, if we are true to plan,
Our statures touch the skies.

This sums up the UChicago experience. We rose up to meet its challenges, and now, as graduates, we will rise up to meet the new ones ahead. It is a privilege to be able to attend any college, but here at UChicago I have been so humbled by the intellects around me, and I am a better person for having gotten to know so many of you.

I remember the Fall of 2016, the sound of bagpipes as we walked through the quad and through Hull gate, saying goodbye to my parents who were being handed tissues for their tears in front of Rockefeller Chapel. I remember being told not to step on the seal in Reynolds Club – and accidentally stepping on the seal in Reynolds Club. Rituals uniquely UChicago. And there are many. Here I've heard discourse among students in the library that would make Foucault and Wittgenstein proud. The passion was contagious even if it hurt my head sometimes, but it mostly made me think and rethink.

So, what is a UChicago class of 2020 student? We are primal screams, picnics at the point and frisbees on the quad, late nights in the Reg and early morning Kuvia, we are debaters, artists, athletes, performers, problem solvers, entrepreneurs. We love to eat a fourth meal and make a late night Harold's run. We are poets and advocates and innovators. We stand strong for what we believe and we raise our voices for those who have none. We agree and we disagree and we follow rules but know when they are meant to be broken. If we fail and fall, we try to pick ourselves up. UChicago students have the courage to be themselves, because we are amazing human beings in the making. And this University and the people we have been surrounded by here have helped form who we are.

And now, we are ready to go. I don't know if we ever really feel ready. But we are brave because we take on the unknown, making us vulnerable, but also strong. The University of Chicago gave us the

lessons and the tools to take this next big leap. Here we were given the freedom and the confidence to bring our own meaning to life, with a sense of conviction that will set us apart. Whether we know it or not we are "ready".

This – right now – is our time. And it's incumbent on us to take on the world, fight for it, better it. We go at our own speed, draw deliberate lines, and find our individual paths. And it starts today. So let's make some noise. Let's dream and disrupt. Like our phoenix, we are rising.

As Joseph Campbell said: "follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be. The cave you fear to enter holds the treasures you seek".

See you in that cave! Congratulations Class of 2020.

Now I have the honor of introducing this year's distinguished Class Day keynote speaker, Dr. Otis W. Brawley. Dr. Brawley currently serves as the Bloomberg Distinguished Professor of Oncology and Epidemiology at Johns Hopkins University. Previous he held the position of chief medical and scientific officer of the American Cancer Society where he oversaw the largest private program funding cancer research in the United States. In 2019, Dr. Brawley was awarded the University of Chicago Alumni Professional Achievement Award for outstanding accomplishments in his field, and all of us in the College are very grateful that he has agreed to come share some of his wisdom with us today. So please join me in welcoming Dr. Otis W. Brawley.