

## CLASS DAY 2021

JUNE 11

### Justine Shih, Class of 2021

Hi everyone! I am so thrilled to finally be able to say these words. We tend to measure most of the biggest milestones in our lives by the destination - and yet here we are, where that destination doesn't look the way we thought it would, because it's not filled with family and friends, hugs, or parties. We can recognize our privilege in the world, and still mourn the losses we feel, because relative pain is not diminished. This past year is proof that the means are often as important as the end, and the value that something like graduation holds is in everything that came before this point.

So what came before? There are 1500 of us. Think about the sheer number of experiences you've had over these four years, and multiply that by 1500. We are all such uniquely different people, molded by the experiences that we alone have gone through, and yet somehow, we are still able to find where we are similar, and those matter more. We have felt dismayed by elections, here and beyond, we have gasped as we read *The Maroon* or *New York Times*, we have smiled through tears, and masks, we have grumbled about hum, gotten a drink from our favorite coffee shop, stayed up far too late, made stupid and smart mistakes, we have sat in the quad on the first day of nice weather in a while and thought, "this isn't too bad." We've been knocked over by Chicago winds and UChicago burdens and ourselves, and we're still here. There were times we felt hopeless in the face of an assignment that felt like the end of the world, and there were times we really thought *our* world was ending. But it never did. We made our way across those cobblestones, even when it flooded a ridiculous amount every time it rained, even when there were three winters before a spring.

So if you ask me to look back, I think it is through challenge that we learn of the meaningfulness of some things, from the journeys that were unpaved or uphill, but we took anyway. Maybe you'll think of the test you failed, but the relationship you forged with a professor or TA through getting their help, and the RSO event that went far from perfect, but created a stronger bond between members, and the friendships that were born out of shared difficulties - a tough class, a late night at the Reg, a bad decision here and there.

These relationships endow us with the strength to move forward. See, what we share is a period of time between 2017 and 2021 of memories, both good and bad, but that have made their mark and come to define us nonetheless. As we branch off, move on, and move away, the world is even bigger and scarier out there, and there's no question that we will face uncertainties that we never expected. But that's what keeps it exciting, is the fact that we never stop learning. If there's one thing this school has taught me, it's that. This is just the beginning, and it's prepared us well. We are bound by this mark of strength of now being a graduate from The University of Chicago. I know that is something that I will never forget, and I hope you do too.

