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SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY STUDENT COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

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Good morning class of 2020! I am beyond thrilled to be here with you today.

Throughout the past 4 years, Southern Utah University has become a very meaningful place to me, as I'm sure it has for all of us. I'm grateful to be finishing up my experience here with

some of the most impressive people I know.

I'd like to use my few minutes with you today to speak about hope. I know you're probably rolling your eyes right now at how cheesy and cliché that sounds, but isn't that what graduation is all about?

Webster's Dictionary defines hope as...

Just kidding, I'm not going to be that guy. However, I thought a definition would fit in nicely, so I spoke with a few of you graduates here today about what hope means to you. Here were some of my favorite responses:

"Hope is going through life expecting with confidence that everything will be OK."

"Hope is the desire that drives me to achieve a goal."

"Hope is choosing light. It's choosing to believe that there are good things and your life will work out."

And perhaps my personal favorite, "Hope - our ONLY hope - is Obi-Wan Kenobi."

Today I want to share my hopes for our class as we move on from SUU.

First, I hope that we remember SUU's motto: "Learning Lives Forever." The word "learning" has significance in this phrase. Think of all the other words that could have portrayed a similar message: knowledge, education, intelligence, wisdom. Instead, the word "learning" was used to convey the action meant behind the statement. I hope we don't use our graduation today as an excuse to stop learning and growing. This is not our peak; we have MUCH more to do and become! Though we may be completing our formal education today, I hope we remain humble and teachable, learning forever through our experiences.

Next, I hope as we learn from our experiences, we move forward with gratitude for the privilege we had to earn a college degree. Let's be real, we all had a less-than-ideal senior year. We were thrown into a stress-filled, anxiety-inducing whirlwind of uncertainty that made for a final semester that I'm sure none of us could have anticipated. Over the past six months, the world has given us countless reasons to lose hope - hope in a cure, in our political climate, in our job prospects, in our relationships, in our fellow man.

So yes, while the world has absolutely handed us all seemingly insurmountable challenges lately, both collectively and individually, hope can still be found. Just think; right now, we are part of only 7% of the WORLD population who hold a college degree! We all had the opportunity to attend a great university that offered us a quality education. We had help and support from our loved ones, many of whom are celebrating with us today. We made meaningful connections with stellar peers and mentors, many of whom will remain our lifelong friends. Despite a divisive political climate, we all have the right to speak up for what we hold dear. We live in a country which offers us freedom to choose our own path, with very few limits to what we can become.

I hope as we move forward, we use the immense privilege of our newly received degrees and experiences to make the world a safer, smarter, brighter, more compassionate place.

Speaking of making the world a better place, I hope we don't allow the journey of progression to overshadow the things we each value most. We have all worked tremendously hard to get to this point. We've sacrificed comfort. We've given up entertainment and leisure to pursue the things we value most. We've completed a semester of schooling unexpectedly online, all while trying to navigate a worldwide pandemic.

While this is all true, there's no denying that we can ALWAYS try harder, and we can ALWAYS be better. At the end of the day, I hope we have the courage and maturity to do the best we can WITHOUT giving up the things that we value most. I hope we continuously set and meet high expectations for ourselves, all the while remembering to find balance when each aspect of our lives can easily become the ONLY aspect if we allow it. I hope we can allow our lofty aspirations to coincide with high levels of self-compassion.

One of my biggest hopes for us is that we don't view our success here today as any less because we see others succeeding differently. Regardless of how successful you feel you are, the truth remains that today you're closer to the person you want to be than to the person you were when you started your education at SUU. If you don't believe me, I challenge you to think of yourself as a freshman, sitting in the Centrum at new student induction. Since then, we have accomplished things we once looked at and said, "there is no way I could EVER do that." We've stepped outside our comfort zones in countless ways. We've become better problem-solvers, writers, conversationalists, and friends. It doesn't matter what amazing things your friends are doing, or how accomplished your brother was at your age; today you are GRADUATING UNIVERSITY. This is a huge accomplishment, so savor it and

don't allow yourself for a moment to minimize the magnitude of what this day means.

I could go on for much longer about my hopes for our class. I hope we find fulfillment, I hope we develop meaningful relationships, I hope we drink enough water and find time to pursue our interests. I hope we find a way to watch "The Office" after it's taken off of Netflix in January. Above all, though, I hope we remember that it was not hope alone that got us through the last four years; it was 16 action. As we leave SUU today, let's remember the actions that made us who we are now. Let's hope for a better future, and then let's use the knowledge and passion we have discovered within this institution and put that hope to good use through our devoted action.

Congratulations class of 2020! I can't wait to see where we go.