

University of Guam
Fañomnåkan 2018 Commencement Ceremony
May 20, 2018, 2:00 p.m., Calvo Field House

COMMENCEMENT REMARKS

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President, University of Guam

Buenas tatdes todos hamyo, hamyo ni' manmagradu'a pa'go na ha'ane, hamyo ni' manmanayuda, hamyo ni' manaina, hamyo ni' manasagua, hamyo ni' mamprufisot, hamyo ni' man gaige guini na buniton ha'ane- para tododo i manaotao Guahan, otro siha na isla yan enteriru i tano' en saluda hamyo, en respeta hamyo yan en ekstetende i kannai-mami, i guinaiyan-mami yan en baba i gima'-mami para hamyo.

As President, I am presiding over these Commencement Exercises at the University of Guam for the twenty-first time. In addition, I have given the Commencement Address in 1993, guided the Commencement Exercises as Academic Vice President twice and attended at least 10 other times as a faculty member and Dean. But as Nerissa Underwood, my wife and partner during the past ten years would gently say, “who cares, this isn’t about you.”

She would be right. It isn’t about me. I am just a witness to an event which is a combination of the Super Bowl, the World Series, a birthday party, an anniversary party and a wedding for the recipients of over seven thousand diplomas that I have signed over the years.

This is your event, this is your celebration and I am just the guy who gets to talk. So you do your part- celebrate and I will do mine- I will talk

It is hard to find words to inspire a group of graduates when you have done it 21 times. It is hard to find the sentiment that will capture the spirit and the hard work that brings us together today in your name as graduates. Fortunately, we have previous commencement speakers to copy and I will some and I will add my own thoughts.

The great football coach Vince Lombardi told graduates eager to enter the world of work, “If you aren’t fired with enthusiasm, you will be fired with enthusiasm.”

Robert Underwood says “every time I have been fired, I got fired up to move forward and not look back.”

Apple’s Steve Jobs told graduates eager to engage challenges, “changing the world starts with following a vision, not following a path.”

Robert Underwood says, “And when you run into a tree, go around it.”

The late comedian Robin Williams told graduating students, “Spring is nature’s way of saying ‘lets party’”

Robert Underwood says, “Fañomnåkan is UOG’s way of saying ‘lets party’”

Mark Lewis (the clinical psychologist) told graduates, “the person who you're with most in life is yourself and if you don't like yourself you're always with somebody you don't like.”

Robert Underwood says, “like yourself.”

And lastly,

Dr. Seuss said through a book and not a personal appearance,

You have brains in your head.

You have feet in your shoes.

You can steer yourself in any direction you choose.

You're on your own.

And you know what you know.

You are the guy who'll decide where to go.

Robert Underwood says, “I agree.”

We are here to understand the meaning of those words and the meaning of the diploma and the degree that it represents. Along the way, we are supposed to figure out the meaning of this stage of our life and the hopes and aspirations of the next stage yet to follow.

We hope to hear a few soaring words like challenge, achievement, support and opportunity. We will slap each other on the back, give each other a high five, hug each other, offer the Trident salute, give a few *bibas* and enjoy the moment. All of this is expected and much of it has been done before. Most of it will be done again.

But what is the meaning of the experiences that led to the degree today and to the time ahead of us. I told a group of student gathered together the other night in a party organized the Student Government Association the following. I am not only the 10th President of the University, I have been President ten years. And in fact, most of them were probably only 10 years old when I became President.

But the most important ten years is the next ten years. Read the headlines in the newspapers or more likely check them out in your favorite social media. We have concerns about the homeless, drug abuse, child abuse, sexual abuse, government policy abuse, abuse of authority, abuse of the truth. People don't just lie, they don't bother to pretend they are telling the truth. They say this is true to me so therefore it is as true as your truth. If I can issue press releases every hour, type fast on my cell phone, I could get many of you to believe that a deficit is a surplus, that borrowing is income and that a pothole is a smooth road under repair.

There is a lot to correct, there is a lot to do, there is a lot of work ahead of us. You are armed with a diploma from this institution and expected, I would say commanded to engage the problems of the world and solve them in the best way you know how—through health care, through opening a business, through inspiring young people in a classroom, through social activism, through political action, through community engagement, by getting your hands dirty with the soil of the islands or your hair wet with the waters that surround us, through hard work, through recognition that the truth is the truth and it will always set us free or at the very least start us on the right path.

The University of Guam is devoted to a search for truth. We are supposed to look for the truth, discover it, let it inform us, inspire us and motivate us. We do so through evidence, through careful thought and analysis. All of this is represented in the diploma that you will soon have in your hands and share with those close to you.

We have many role models and we should use them to inspire us, but we should be also creating new models; we have time-tested paths to follow, but we should also chart some new paths, we have traditions to honor, but we should also create new traditions.

We should be restless, we should be curious, we should be concerned and we should be engaged.

You should have learned that the University of Guam is a fountain of knowledge and students are there to drink. Some don't finish and just gargle. But if you are going to learn, you can't drink from the fountain with a straw; you must jump in and bathe in it and let it consume every aspect of your body and invigorate your mind.

Today, we should take the time to celebrate our accomplishments individually and as a University. I have been up here talking for many years. It is my last time as President of this great institution. It started in Maite as the Territorial College of Guam, it moved to Mangilao as the College of Guam, it was sparked in the minds of a few visionaries and caught fire in thousands of graduates. It became the only U.S. accredited baccalaureate institution on this side of the International Date Line. It is where people fell in love with learning and out of love with ignorance.

I learned to love the University of Guam. When I became President, I had already been involved in high profile activities in Guam and in Washington DC. I met several Presidents and former Presidents, I worked with national political leaders, I visited foreign capitals, I rode on Air Force all the way across the Pacific Ocean, I met Nelson Mandela and Rosa Parks. I served in the US Congress for ten years and I lost in an election for Governor not once, but twice.

I thought that I could not really be impressed or awed by anything. But then I heard students describe their poster sessions on research about complex topics I barely understood, I heard young people start speaking CHamoru better than their parents, I saw new nurses cry at their pinning ceremonies, I saw breath-taking senior art projects, I witnessed amazing capstone projects and I met grandmothers and even a great grandfather hug their great grandchildren with love and care, I began to be amazed and inspired by the work of others. I get much of the credit for re-branding the Big G, increased graduation rates, saying Biba UOG but in many ways, I just presided over the flowering of thousands of young minds led by hundreds of the best minds in Guam and under the care of hundreds of others who work tirelessly here at the University of Guam.

Their work is awe-inspiring and in the future, I may tell a story or two about making phone calls from Air Force One as the guest of President Clinton and I will remember the time I stood here and mistakenly said by the power vested in me as President of the United States. But the best times are when I looked into the eyes of proud parents, the joy of watching students conducting research in Costa Rica, the smart step of an ROTC candidate becoming an officer, talking to a UOG graduate nurse at GMH attending to one of my relatives. Now, these are awe-inspiring experiences and fulfilling in ways far beyond meeting famous people, by interacting with people doing famously well. Here at the University, we do not seek power, we are committed to empowerment. Here at UOG, we do not just try to be

noble, we seek to ennoble others. Here in this building, we tell graduates, do not seek to be self-serving, instead seek to serve others.

This is the *fisga*—sort of like the Trident that is carried by the Triton—it is the CHamoru version. It is my gift from a wonderful academic companion during the past five years, the office of the Senior Vice President led by Dr. Anita Borja Enriquez.

This is the tool that symbolizes what a diploma from the University of Guam should mean. It is my weapon to protect the island, the water, the reef against all threats. I will use it only as necessary but I will not hesitate to use it when I have to.

This is tool that I can use to secure my next meal, in fishing the waters, in providing for myself and others in order to sustain life and sustain a way of life in the process. It is my tool for survival.

This is the tool that you can use to create a path in the jungle. You can make a new path. This is the tool for the future.

This is the tool that reflects my respect for my past as I dream about and create a future. It tells me that the future of any island society as unique as Guahan must be built on its traditions, not trample them, must respect the people who made the name *Guahan, Mangilao, Inafa'maolek, Fanuchanan, Fañomnåkan* possible not dishonor or ignore them

The is the tool that represents the dignity of who we are as islanders, as Tritons, as proud graduates of the University of Guam. We use it to stand guard, to preside, to represent, to remind us of the principles of respect, love and responsibility.

I will take the *fisga* with me because it is a gift, but I pray that we never forget what the *fisga* stands for in the hopes and aspirations of the people of the islands that we are fortunate enough to live in.

As I step away from this podium and will no longer wear this robe or carry this heavy medal, the symbol of this University, I know that the University is in great hands. In the 40 years that I have worked here, I remember the faces of students, their children and even grandchildren, fellow professors, academics, accountants, secretaries, custodians, workmen who live their lives to perfect the mission of this institution – to search for truth, to uplift us all and to serve mankind. It is in very good hands. I am grateful for those of who have said I have left big shoes to fill. But as Nerissa has reminded me the University needs new shoes and new feet. Every great experience must come to an end, but the values that move us forward will never end – *ina, deskubre setbe*. Para i minaolek-ta kumu taotao tano', kumu taotao isla, kumu taotao Guahan.

Five years ago, I ended my commencement remarks with this charge, with this responsibility that all of us have learned here at UOG-

We have a CHamoru tradition to protect; we have a multicultural society to strengthen; we have a service to provide; we have patients to attend to; we have students to inspire; we have a land to take care of; we have a business to build; we have families to love and we will do all of these things in the spirit of fairness and social justice and ethical standards that speak to all of us not just as holders of degrees, but as educated Tritons ready to engage the world, ready to shape the future, holding the *Fisga* and always ready to say Biba UOG, Biba UOG.”