

2016 Commencement Ceremony | 2:30 p.m. | December 18, 2016

Good afternoon and Welcome! And, congratulations graduates!

Today we celebrate 630 new UM Flint graduates. We honor the hard work and accomplishment that has brought each of you here and we recognize that all along this journey, you have been supported by parents, grandparents, spouses and partners, extended family and friends. Few of us reach this milestone alone. Let's start today by thanking everyone who is here with you today and everyone who has lifted you up along the way.

Also I want to recognize the faculty and staff who care so deeply for our students and have worked hard on your behalf during your time here. They are the heart and soul of our campus, and let's thank them for all they do.

You are graduating from UM Flint at a very special time in history. This year marks our 60th anniversary. It was in 1956 that Charles Stewart Mott galvanized the community to support a University of Michigan campus in Flint, and pledged a million-dollar gift to help support our founding. Now you will become one of 44,000 alumni who have graduated from this campus since that visionary gift – 44,000 men and women who are making a difference in their communities and our world.

And now you, too, graduates, will continue the tradition of serving the city, the state, the nation and the world that needs all you have to offer: the hard work and determination that brought you here, all you have learned here, and who you have become here.

But you are also graduating in a time of fractiousness and fracture. Too often, now, we are a divided people. It is “us” versus “them.” Comedian and talk show host Trevor Noah recently wrote an essay in the New York Times about this. He said that, quote, “instead of speaking in measured tones about what unites us, we are screaming at each other about what divides us.”

Noah grew up in apartheid South Africa, and knows very well about societal divisions. His essay reflected on the critical role Nelson Mandela played in bringing that very divided nation together. Mandela, he said, never wavered from his convictions and his insistence on equality, and yet his compassionate leadership reached out to include all. Mandela said “Our human compassion binds us to one another – not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.”

Hope for the future. I am looking at hope for the future, all around us here today. It is in our ability to harness the education we have worked so hard to attain, and combine it with the compassionate leadership Mr. Mandela so exemplified, and we can emulate.

As leaders and best, we can work to better understand one another, better help one another, and better serve in building a just and fair society.

In a few minutes this university will inaugurate a new medal to mark our sixtieth anniversary. It will become one of the highest honors the university will award. The University of Michigan Flint Medal of Excellence and Leadership will signify a special and deep level of leadership and service. We are so pleased to award it to the Mott family, whose visionary gift to found this campus and tremendous, decades-long support for this region, reflect compassion, commitment and caring that have known no bounds. Ms. Maryanne Mott, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Ruth Ann Mott Foundation, will accept the award on behalf of her family.

Graduates, Mr. Mandela said that “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” You will be able to take what you’ve learned here – the critical and complex thinking – into all the parts of your life and our world. I just cannot wait to see what you’ll do with it.

We are proud of you. You ARE the leaders and best.

Congratulations again.

May the force be with you, and Go Blue!