

## Ming Commencement Remarks 2024

As an avid people watcher and introvert, shower singer, and dreamer, I was convinced my education would lead me to finding me...Yes, the real me. This education would lead me from south St. Louis city to an office somewhere in Washington DC where I would wear the finest high heels with a long wool peacoat...I could feel my hair blowing the wind as the elevator door to my office opened to take me to the 28th floor. I would have five boyfriends (sorry to my husband) and drive a red sports car...this education would lead me away from my mother who worked 12 hour shifts as a nurse, and my father who worked in the medical records department at Cardinal Glennon Hospital for over 20 years. This education would lead me to a career where I would make a real difference and REAL \$. Then, I blinked three times. When I opened my eyes, it was the end of my Freshman year at an HBCU in Alabama; I was moving out of my dorm, transferring back to UMSL where I declared Secondary Education English as my major.

More time passed, I was far away from that peacoat and high heeled woman with the five boyfriends, I envisioned in Washington DC. I was still here in St. Louis, married to my high school sweetheart, completing my first four years of teaching... I had the highest English End of Course exam scores and loved coaching Varsity cheerleading, but I was heavily burnt out from working full-time while completing my masters and still uncovering and finding me. We fast forward again and time brings us to May 11th, your graduation day...9 years from the last time I sat in the very seats you are seating in. AND after 16 years in education, I am deeply connected to the work WE—yes, you and I, the work, we choose to do. Who I am and where I was meant to be has become so much clearer.

Graduates, go on this journey with me...On your first blink, think of what led you to enter into your course at UMSL or to return to school for a graduate degree.

On your second blink back in time, envision the defining obstacles you have experienced while working to complete your degree.

And on this third blink to the future, think of the impact you will have to change the lives of young people in our region.

When I left high school, I thought I was going on a journey to find me...but graduates, the career path that we have chosen, this path we find something much greater.

See, you walk this path, this path that you are on and we find mentors and teachers and **Deans**, who will speak life into us (Remember, when I told you, I was burnt out after my first four years of teaching. Well, it is common knowledge that many teachers do not make it to year 5, but I found a Dean who saw something in me. She spent some time with me one evening and spoke life back into me-reinvigorating my love of teaching, so I stayed in the profession).

Tonight is the first night I am able to tell Dean Ann Taylor, on her final graduation ceremony at the university, **thank you** for picking me up, when I wanted to quit.

Graduates, as you look to your left and your right, you find your new tribe... In this auditorium could be your next school principal, guidance counselor, or superintendent who will push you to think critically about how we can get children to continue to hope and wonder, despite the tragedy we are exposed to everyday..or this tribe, we tell you to be still and rest, because in order to do the work, we do well. You must practice self-care. Do not underestimate the power of this tribe and the power in this tribe.

This path you have chosen is like no other. It will not be easy, but it will be worth it. We find principals and professors who were once our grade school teachers or custodians, who then have the pleasure of hiring us or turning to us to teach and coach their children and grandchildren.

What we find on our path is like nothing you could fathom, it is children who grow into adults who return to our classrooms and offices or a podium to share with us, that the words we spoke during a lunch detention, the letter we wrote in their yearbooks or the lessons we taught in geometry, changed the very course of their lives.

I left high school, hoping to find me, but through my career in education I have found generations of children and adults who will reshape the world in ways we cannot imagine. There are mixed feelings about our careers in education because many do not know who we would choose to work this hard, for such little money. But graduates, I am so excited for you to find what I have found over the last sixteen years.

Continue to discover and find so much more than you. In this work, we find purpose and passion, we find wonder and grit; we find immeasurable grief coupled with immeasurable joy. Most importantly, we find ways to encourage children to reach, DREAM, jump, and scream.

I have one final question for you, as asked of me by a gifted 7th grade teacher, who believed it was her job to change the life of every student who sat in her class. She would end every day by saying to her class. I am counting on you, and they would joyously say, "Count me in." Let's try it.

To the graduating class of 2024, I am counting, "Count me in."

Thank you and be well.