



President Huddleston's Durham Commencement Address 2018

President Mark W. Huddleston

Durham Commencement Remarks 2018

Good morning, everyone! Congratulations, Class of 2018!

What an extraordinary day this is for you. You even managed to chase the predicted rain away, at least for a little while.

It's also a great day for some special guests who are here. In fact, our Commencement would not be possible without them.

You know who I'm talking about: Your parents and grandparents. Your sisters and brothers. Your partners and your friends. Would the Class of 2018 please stand, turn around and give your families and friends a great Wildcat ovation?

Besides your families, another group essential to getting you here today is comprised of your teachers, mentors and advisors. Believe it or not, your success is their proudest achievement. So, let's give a big round of thanks to our outstanding UNH faculty.

And how about those Wildcats who worked tirelessly behind the scenes? The ones that routinely got up really early, even on the coldest, darkest winter mornings, and fed you, counseled you, kept you safe, shoveled your sidewalks, kept the campus beautiful . . . and actually set up today's commencement ceremonies. Let's thank the members of the phenomenal UNH staff.

Then there are the alumni and friends who helped us this year conclude the largest fundraising campaign in UNH history. Together they contributed more than \$300 million dollars, with most of that sum dedicated to scholarship support for students like you. Those generous donors deserve serious recognition, too!

Last, but hardly least, I would note that the Class of 2018 includes 58 military veterans, as well as 21 young men and women who are about to step into military service as graduates of our fine Air Force and Army ROTC units. We are profoundly grateful to you, and oh-so-proud to count you as Wildcats. Please stand and be recognized.

It's a great day to be a Wildcat!

Our graduates have worked long and hard to get here. Most of you did it in four years. Others in even less time. And some, well...for some, it took a little longer.

In fact, it has taken me 11 years to graduate from UNH.

Like you, I feel kind of sad to be leaving, but excited about the future.

I'd like to say just a few words about that to my fellow graduates of the Class of 2018.

Despite what seems like a relentless assault of depressing news from our various media outlets, the fact is we are living at a remarkable time in human history. The world is richer, healthier and more peaceful than it has ever been before. Our air and water are cleaner. Global rates of poverty, hunger and illiteracy have dropped steadily. Life expectancy, children's health and access to clean water and electricity have improved dramatically.

Is there more work to be done? Absolutely. And you are just the group of talented, compassionate and hard-working young people to do that work.

But, please, don't let the steady drip-drip-drip of negativity—what one author has referred to as the “miserabilism of cable news and social media” wear you down.

Leave here with optimism and with pride. You live in the greatest country in the world. America is blessed with free markets that reward initiative, a long tradition of democratic governance, a deep commitment to the dignity and worth of every person, and an abiding commitment to individual liberty.

It is a remarkable heritage, one that makes us still, despite our national challenges, the envy of the world. And you . . . each one of you . . . has unbounded opportunity to use that heritage, those received values, to achieve whatever you want to achieve.

But always remember that with rights come responsibilities. We all have a duty to ensure that ours is not the last generation of Americans to receive that heritage. Our blessings have to be secured, to use the words of the Preamble to our constitution. They are precious and fragile. If we choose not to protect vigilantly the values that underlie the American experiment—including some, such as freedom of expression and due process, that are under assault in some quarters, including on some college campuses—our children and grandchildren will inherit a very different world.

But I have faith in you. You have displayed grit, determination, and character during your time at UNH. Even better, you project no sense of entitlement. You know that good outcomes require hard work.

Through your scholarship, volunteerism and activism, you contributed greatly to our campus's quality of life and to the lives of people far beyond Durham.

You pursued research on new and better ways to grow healthy, sustainable food. And when the crops you planted and the fish you farmed were ready for harvest, you made sure they were donated to the New Hampshire Food Bank.

You built instruments for NASA satellites, which are now orbiting the Earth. These will help make communications more reliable for commercial airliners, GPS devices and mobile phones.

You brought your innovative ideas into our research labs and out into the marketplace. At our recent Holloway Innovation-to-Market Competition – which is sort of the UNH version of “Shark Tank”—you pitched business plans ranging from an app that can help us manage our digital passwords to a start-up that allows anyone to own their own beehive and enjoy the honey, but without getting stung. That sounds like a sweet deal. Sorry, I couldn't resist...

You worked with Northeast Passage, our amazing, nationally recognized adaptive sports and

therapeutic recreation program, and made hockey, rugby, golf, biking and a slew of other sports accessible to the disabled.

You helped our Seacoast communities, threatened by climate change, predict and plan for rising sea levels.

You worked to help UNH live up to its ideals of being a truly supportive and welcoming place for all Wildcats, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, or national origin.

And you student athletes out there: You again showed us that it's possible to excel on and off the field, even at the highest levels of Division 1 sports. More than 70 percent of our athletes earned America East Academic Honors this past year. Among them is Elinor Purrier, who is now the reigning national champion in the indoor mile. She clocked a four minute, thirty one second mile at the NCAA national championships in College Station, Texas last March. Four and a half minutes. It takes me longer than that to tie the laces on my running shoes.

Elinor would you take one more run as a UNH undergrad and join me on stage?

We're not going to have to wait long.

[Elinor on stage]: Elinor is a 10-time All American, and a 16-time America East champion, which makes her the most decorated athlete in UNH history.

Congratulations, Elinor. You make us proud.

[Elinor returns to seat]

Elinor Purrier is just one of more than 3,000 talented graduates that we honor and celebrate today. The Class of 2018, like Elinor, has had a truly wonderful run at UNH. You will go far. I have the deepest faith in each of you, because I know that your UNH education, experiences and friendships will ever inspire your journey.

I want to thank all of our graduates, really the entire UNH community, for inspiring me. Wherever we go, you and I will always be proud Wildcats!

Congratulations, graduates! And thank you, everyone!

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