

Written for Commencement  
May 8, 2020

Hello. My name is David Boocker, and I have the privilege of serving as UNO's Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

On behalf of the faculty and staff of the College of Arts and Sciences, I congratulate you on achieving one of life's major milestones. You should be proud of your accomplishment, being recognized here in this commencement ceremony and I regret that I will be unable to personally congratulate each and every one of you as you cross the graduation platform to receive your diploma.

Let me remind you, however, that the meaning of the word commencement is "beginning or start." Today, you begin the next leg of life's journey.

On the one hand, this new journey begins with much uncertainty with the world thrown into turmoil because of a global pandemic. Indeed, every generation of college graduates has confronted its own unique challenges and opportunities.

But if there ever was a time to demonstrate the value of your pursuit of a college education in preparing you to begin your journey, now is the time to prove it.

Please allow me to read a passage from a book called *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* by Steven Pinker. Imagine, for a moment, that Mr. Pinker is your commencement speaker. Here is his message about the value of your education:

“You can refine your faculty of reason itself by learning and debating. You can seek explanations of the natural world through science, and insight into the human condition through the arts and humanities . . . You can appreciate the beauty and richness of the natural and cultural world . . . You have been endowed with a sense of *sympathy*—the ability to like, love respect, help, and show kindness . . . [And] history shows that when we sympathize with others and apply our ingenuity to improving the human condition, we can make progress in doing so, and you can help continue that progress.”

So begin your journey with optimism; yes, problems are inevitable, but problems can be solved. You belong to the next generation of problem solvers.

