

Madeline K. Sullivan
3/23/20
English 305
Prof. Kuenz

Commencement Speech

Hello everyone and welcome to USM's commencement ceremony for the class of 2021. My name is Madeline K. Sullivan (or Maddie as my friends know me) and I'd like to thank [person who nominated me] for giving me the opportunity to speak today. In a past life, I would have jumped out of a moving car, run into an avalanche, and even learned all of quantum physics before I gave a speech. But my time here at USM has given me the desire to put myself out there and to speak about the things that make me passionate.

I'll start off by saying I'm a transfer student from SMCC and a proud English major. It took me a long time for me to figure out what I wanted to study because I was strung between an Illustration major at a local private art school (one I will not be named because I don't believe they deserve the publicity), and here for my English major. The heart of my own passion is telling stories and sharing human experiences. Art and English both do this well, but I just couldn't decide when my time at SMCC was over. My visits between here and the art college really cemented my decision.

When I visited said art college I had an overwhelming sense that it was summer camp for kids just getting out of high school. They gave off this feeling that true greatness in the crafts they offered could only be achieved at their institution. It created a sense of exclusion from others, and if I may be frank, a snobby environment. I was skeptical (a feeling my English studies had later validated) because knowledge should not be for the select chosen. Knowledge should be for anyone with the drive to understand it.

When I visited USM I could immediately feel an overwhelming sense of community. Like a ready to be painted on canvas or a new thesis statement to elaborate on, the experience on campus felt like one I belonged to, no matter my income or my current talent or ability. I could find my people and have the flexibility to change my interests without a whole lot of financial repercussions. I could find and explore myself here, which is what in my opinion is the true college experience.

Some people think that your twenties are the most formative years of your life. An individual could presume they have their career path all set out for them based on the educational choices they have made or having the family background to inherit a trade or profession. But in a moment's notice life can push you, shake you, and even beat you into a different career. Illness of you or a family member (or an entire society even), injury, family crisis, and other trying events can transform how you see the world and how you approach it. Life for some is not as linear. Some of you might be older than some of your fellow graduates and that is even more commendable. But what binds us is the passion, grit, and persistence to be something, to change something, to improve something in our life that, no matter the conditions, will find their way to an honorable place of being.

You are all here today because of that drive of passion. It is the common trait between all of us in this room no matter what line of work you plan up taking after this ceremony. The courage to take up the label of the student, the artist, the engineer, the mathematician, the doctor, the social worker, the nurse, is not easily found. No matter the area of study, to take up the commitment and to find yourself at the end of a four (or more) year journey must be commended and celebrated. We are the bright minds that light up our societies' future and set an example for future generations (and maybe older) that progress is what drives a growing nation and world. That courage to be the minds that bring hope to those who have none, to treat illnesses despite the dangers involved, to figure out this decade's pressing issues, is a trait that should be promoted and taught to our future generations. We are all bound by our passion for our work and the courage to learn.

No matter where you are in your path, be it at the end of a bachelor's degree or starting of grad or law school, this is a day to recognize a stepping stone in your career and education. You have sacrificed your time and effort to achieve something to better yourself and the world around you. Congratulations and good luck out there. Thank you.