

## ***Welcome***

Good morning family, friends, esteemed guests and you, the guests of honor – UMSL's graduating class of 2023!

Congratulations on completing this milestone in your journey.

Congratulations on embracing *this* moment to reflect and to celebrate the culmination of *every* moment from the mundane to the momentous that brought you to this day. It is my joy and honor to offer a few words of affirmation and encouragement to you today and, for the days ahead.

## ***Congratulations***

It is serendipitous that I have been given the opportunity to honor you on this date, December 16, which also happens to be my mother's birthday. I am a proud first-generation daughter of Caribbean immigrants who came to the mainland to pursue

educational opportunity. The first in my nuclear family to obtain a college degree, while working two part-time jobs so that I could support my son as a broke single mama attending school full time – often with my son in tow. While some questioned how (or why) I would take all that on, I couldn't imagine any other choice, so I dug in and did everything I could to ensure my and my son's future success.

For those of you who have defied the odds, done the impossible and embody the outlier [the data point that differs significantly from other observations] in the data – I see you.

And I celebrate you.

For those of you who have been fierce supporters and relentless advocates for these extraordinary outliers, for those who have sacrificed to create room for their dreams – we thank you.

## ***#UMSLProud***

I feel a sense of connection and pride as I watch you seated in your regalia, moments from the culminating ritual in this stage of your journey. I too chose UMSL. As a faculty member who saw firsthand the brilliance and grit that UMSL students embody and as a graduate student who is living vicariously through the accomplishment of those of you who are ***Phinished***, I am #UMSLProud.

As graduates of the region's premier public institution, you will join the ranks of changemakers throughout our region and beyond. As you join or deepen your role within the business and healthcare sectors of our region, you are vital to the fabric of our region's success. If America runs on Dunkin – St. Louis runs on UMSL. I encourage you to carry forward the lessons and the values that characterize what it means to be a Triton.

## ***Find Your M.O.R.E.***

If you visit the “About Us” page of UMSL’s website you will read the following: “UMSL Tritons are driven to be more, innovate more, connect more, find solutions to more, and most of all, become more. There is no question more is what moves us.

Now, it’s time to discover what moves you.”

If I were to offer you any words of wisdom today it would be to encourage you to lean into your ***M.O.R.E.***

***Motivation:*** what motivates you? Find your why. I can guarantee that the path ahead will not always be easy. I have however found that knowing my “why” allows me to stay clear-eyed and focused – even on the days when my “have to do” list far outnumbered my “want to do list”. It is what has sustained me when I have questioned the path ahead or felt overwhelmed by the circumstances of the moment.

**Opportunity:** be open to new experiences and stay prepared; actively resist imposter syndrome and give yourself permission to learn, grow and rise to the occasion – even through your fear. When opportunity is met with preparation expectations are always exceeded.

**Respite:** how will you create space and give yourself permission to rest, recover and rejuvenate? We as human **beings** have the tendency to lean so heavily on our **doing** that we deplete our capacity to show up as our greatest selves and in our greatest potential. The best way to avoid burnout is to create a plan that includes firm boundaries, intentional rest and trusted partnerships that call one another in and hold ourselves accountable for putting our own oxygen mask on first.

**Engagement:** what are your passions and interests? What are you curious about and in what ways do you want to make a

difference? UMSL has one of the most civically engaged student bodies in the nation. As UMSL alumni, I encourage you to carry that tradition on with the countless arts, civic, health, sports, etc. organizations/hobbies across the region in ways that bring you joy, fulfillment, purpose and a sense of belonging.

### ***Conclusion***

As UMSL alumni, your charge should you choose to accept it is to find and live out your ***M.O.R.E.*** Congratulations once again on this celebration-worthy milestone! We are #UMSLProud and wish you success and ***more*** on the path ahead.