

**2017 Graduate Commencement Ceremony
Welcoming and Closing Remarks
Jamie White**

Welcome Remarks:

Good afternoon, all, and welcome to the 2017 graduate convocation ceremony for Northwestern's School of Education and Social Policy, or SESP as we affectionately call it. My name is Jamie White, and as now a two-time Northwestern graduate, I am honored and overwhelmed with pride and pleasure to be surrounded by this fiercely brilliant pack of peers – full of passion, of purpose, of positivity, and of course, purple. And before I go any further, let me be one of many today who stops to say - to the graduates, the faculty, staff, and our squads who have assembled here with us today – CONGRATULATIONS!

Today we individually and collectively celebrate our tremendous accomplishments of intellect and effort, which culminate here in our graduation. For some, graduation is a day in which we celebrate the completion and conclusion of formal education. As students of *SESP*, however, we desire and seek education and learning in every facet of our worlds. We seek to understand and improve learning at every stage of life and in all contexts. So, to my fellow graduates, who have *generously* shared with me your diverse backgrounds, perspectives, experiences, and insights, and who have given me a more robust toolbox with which I hope to shape this world – I offer this perspective:

Today, let us not celebrate the *completion* of our learning, but instead the enrichment of our ability to learn in the future.

Let us not only thank our *incredible* faculty and staff for the support and training they've given us, but *also* for the way they have empowered us to become thought-leaders and educators ourselves.

Let us not just toast with our classmates for surviving, but for *thriving* as a community that constantly seeks to expand, not narrow, our points of view, and as a community that is truly passionate about helping others. Let's toast to the friendships we've made – and to committing to deliberately forging paths that intertwine, so that we may continue to be sharpened and inspired by each other.

Let us not hug our families and friends in gratitude for the sacrifices they've made to support us, but for the immeasurable ways in which they have shaped us and expanded our understanding of the world and of ourselves. //

When I think about the influence and impact that each one of us graduates will have on the world, and then I think about the influence and impact of each faculty, staff, family and friend here in this room – I cannot help but be excited for the tomorrow we will build. But for just an afternoon, let's leave tomorrow for tomorrow, and let's be present in celebrating and learning right here, right now, today – our day. Now, on with the show!

Closing remarks:

It has been the highest honor of my young life to be a part of the Northwestern and SESP community, and my deepest gratitude goes to each of you for the impact you have made on me, and on each other. Northwestern does not change *what* we think, it transforms *how* we think. As graduates of this distinguished school, we all are now able to think across disciplines, across departments, across silos, across borders. We can innovate amongst people, practices, policies and technologies. While I encourage you to think innovatively and creatively once we exit beyond the doors of this auditorium, I *do* have some rather prescriptive instructions to share with you to *literally* exit beyond the doors of this auditorium:

The recessional will begin with the platform, followed by the graduates exiting the auditorium. Graduates, please wait until you are cued to leave by the ushers. Friends, family, and guests, you've all been so patient with us for the past few years as we completed our degrees, we kindly ask for your patience one last time and wait until all graduates have left the auditorium before you exit.

In recognition of our accomplishments, and to lure us out of the auditorium promptly, the fine folks at SESP have coordinated a reception in the in the sorority quads behind Scott Hall. Everyone is welcome and I hope you will come to toast to our accomplishments and future successes. If you would look just through the (*gesture*) wall on your left (some of you will try, you cannot), you will see the sorority quads just south and west of this auditorium. The undergraduate ceremony begins shortly after this graduate ceremony concludes, so we kindly ask that you move to the reception quickly, and not congregate in the lobby. Your photos will be much more attractive in natural

lighting, anyways. Please pick up your programs as you leave. Please use the south exit (*gesture*) so as not to disrupt those already lining up at the north doors to enter for the next ceremony.

While you are a group of independent and divergent thinkers, I have great confidence that you will be able to diligently follow these instructions.

As we conclude our formal festivities, I want to once again acknowledge those who have helped us get here. Though we all come from wildly different backgrounds, we are united in our appreciation of our individual support networks. To those who love us – from near, from afar, and from above – we share today with you, because we're only who we are because of how you've poured into us. Thank you for investing into us, so that we may invest into those around us.

As a community of lifelong learners with a posture towards helping others, we are the ones equipped to navigate the complex challenges of tomorrow. Northwestern's motto, *Quaecumque Sunt Vera*, translates into *whatsoever things are true*, and the original text beckons us to think upon these things. There is nothing more absolutely, universally true than those things which we have studied: the way humans interact with each other, with our organizations, and with the world. We are students of the small school that thinks big. Our proclivity for big thinking has brought us to this moment, our commencement, and brings us far beyond this moment. Let us continue to think big, and let us continue to seek truth. And there's one thing that is absolutely true: WE DID IT! Congratulations to the Northwestern University School of Education and Social Policy Graduate Class of 2017. I have said it before, and I'll say it again... GO 'CATS!