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Remarks to Graduate Commencement  
UMass Dartmouth  
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Chancellor, Distinguished Faculty, Members of the Class of 2009, Families and Friends of the graduates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I wish to thank the University for bestowing this honor upon me. I am truly humbled to address you and to represent, at least in some small way, the graduating class of 2009.

I have spent the most important years of my life here at UMass Dartmouth. In August 2003, I entered UMass as a young and energetic, but anxious and insecure, person. Today, I leave UMass as a mature, knowledgeable, and confident adult. These years at UMass Dartmouth have been a rewarding and challenging experience for me. These years have not only instilled in me advanced knowledge in my field of study, but have also taught me about humility, gratitude, moral values, integrity, compassion, and life in general.

I come from a middle-class family in Kathmandu, Nepal (approximately 7500 miles from where I stand right now). Yes, for those of you who are Bob Seger fans, there really, really is a Kathmandu! And it really, really is where some of us would like to go to.

Considering that I first came to UMass Dartmouth in 2003, it has been 5 years, 9 months, 3 days, 16 hours, and 23 minutes since I have seen my friends and family in Nepal. But who's counting?! I have gained a lot of friends here at UMass Dartmouth. Not once was I made to feel that I was in a foreign land. I spent more time with the faculty and friends here than with my own family. We all learned together, and shared our knowledge and creative processes. And in these years I have experienced with you pain, happiness, and compassion.

Observing the passion of the sports fans here in New England, it did not take me long to fall in love with the region and its sports clubs. We all felt the anguish of losing two game sevens in the past week – first the Bruins, then the Celtics. But we also look forward to opportunities that lie ahead.

We all cheered at Dave Roberts' ninth-inning stolen base en route to the Red Sox' game four win over the Yankees in 2004. There aren't any Yankee fans in the audience, are there? This launched the greatest comeback in sporting history from being down 0-3 to winning the American League Championship Series 4-3. We then watched as those same Red Sox went on to reverse the 86-year Curse of the Bambino by sweeping the 2004 World Series, and repeating the feat again in 2007. We all rooted for the Patriots who established a dynasty by winning 3 Super Bowls in this decade, and, in 2007, completing an undefeated regular season. The Celtics are back to being the good old Green with the Big Three. And the Bruins are back to being contenders. As Kevin Garnett has said "Anything is possible!"

Yes. "Anything is possible!" Today I live my dream. I become the first in my extended family with a Ph.D. degree. Here at UMass, my brother became the first in the family to earn a Master's degree. Here at UMass, my wife – who is with me today – became the first female in my family to earn a Master's degree. UMass holds a special place in my heart which I will cherish forever.

Earning a Ph.D. was no simple feat. But the academic hurdles were insignificant compared to the mental ones. Often during the doctoral program – as I saw my friends and colleagues from graduate and undergraduate classes grow professionally, earn good salary and enjoy a comfortable lifestyle – I asked myself: "Why, again, am I doing this?" It's a question that anyone seeking to get a Ph.D. should try to answer well in advance. Ph.D. salaries may often be higher than B.S. and M.S. salaries, but the difference, at least in the short term, doesn't make up for the income lost by staying in school longer.

For me, I had good reasons to pursue the Ph.D.

For one thing, it was a lifelong dream. I did not want to regret not making the effort and then live the rest of my life thinking “What if....” If I could not pass the qualifying and comprehensive exams, then at least I knew I tried and I could move on knowing that the doctoral degree was not meant for me.

Job satisfaction was another major reason for pursuing the Ph.D. The doctorate is of course not an end in itself. In many ways, it is only the beginning. But it puts me in a better position to lead an interesting, stimulating, and challenging research career.

For me, the goal was important enough that the obstacles could not prevent me from completing my journey. As Barack Obama once said, “If you’re walking down the right path and you’re willing to keep walking, eventually you’ll make progress.”

I am sure all of us have our own great stories about the struggles and hardships that we had to endure to get here today. It can be tempting to think that our own stories are the most touching, our own struggles the toughest, and our own achievement the most important. But I think it’s closer to the truth to recognize that what defines us and what shapes us is not just who we are and what we know, but who we surrounded ourselves with, the friends that we choose to keep, and the elders from whom we seek advice.

Please join me in a round of applause to thank our family, friends, and loved ones, and the faculty and staff here at UMass Dartmouth, who celebrate this occasion with us. Without their continued and unconditional support, mentoring, and dedication, we would not be here today.

The degrees we have earned are not the end of our education. On the contrary, a graduate education has trained us with the ability to learn how to learn, the ability to think, and to accept responsibility. Let us all pledge to keep learning, and to teach and train others.

An ailing economy may affect our job in the short term. But not the value of our degree over the long haul. Whether you are just starting your career, or re-starting it, the quality of a UMass Dartmouth education is indeed “world class.” Let us all play an integral role in making this world a better place to live for ourselves and our posterity. This is perhaps a typical exhortation for a commencement address, but no less true.

Dream big and live your dream. Be ambitious. Be patient. Be careful. I take much comfort in the serenity prayer: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Congratulations to the graduating class, best wishes, and good luck!