

I am honored, and I am humbled, to step onto this platform - and to speak from this platform - at your Commencement this day.

At last, you have arrived at this time and this place. Each of you has traveled a rough and a rocky trail - with a torrent of troubles, hardships and hard knocks. Yet throughout your journey, every one of you has advanced with the courage - and with the conviction - of your countless steps.

Our dictionaries offer many meanings of step: a small space or short distance; a flat surface or a single rest for the foot; an advance made by raising one foot ascending or descending; a manner of walking to a new position; a sequential measure leading to a result; and a level in a series, a rank or a degree.

And you define the meaning of step by ascending a mountain of challenges and of choices - with resolution and resourcefulness - during your rigorous and vigorous venture. So, let us today retrace the pace of your steps.

First, you stepped up to state your aim and to map your terrain – even as you set foot into a valley of frustrations with ridges of reservations. You would make good your promise not to give in, and you would make firm your pledge not to give up - and you never stepped away.

Next, you stepped off to bare your strengths and to air your skills – even as you faced a foothill of facts with hillsides of information. You would bravely shoulder your courses, and you would ably carry your credits - and you never stepped aside.

Then, you stepped ahead to outdistance your timelines and to outdo your deadlines – even as you climbed a cliff of class notes with ledges of footnotes. You would weather your lectures and labs, and you would withstand your quizzes and exams - and you never stepped back.

And finally, you stepped above to seek the elevations and to reach the peak of your higher education – even as you scaled a slope of shortfalls with plateaus of pitfalls. You would gain a foothold in your knowledge, and you would take hold of your knowhow - and you never stepped down.

Now you stand at the summit of your success. Now you stand ready to take a step once again – a step to be inspired not by your footprints from your past, but to be inspired by your blueprints for your future: a step to explore new directions - a step to engage new diversions - and a step to enjoy new destinations.

And so, may each of you walk on your upward path with never a misstep. May each of you walk with your family and friends forever beside your footsteps. And may every one of you see your Commencement to be not solely your stepping stone, but to be your platform: your platform to step onto - your platform to speak from - and your platform to step closer to your dreams.

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