

Good evening!

Graduates, faculty, family, friends and loved ones. It is a privilege for me to stand here today addressing the graduating Class of 2024.

I'll use the old cliché and say that it feels like yesterday when I was sitting where you're sitting, waiting patiently for the guest speaker to finish so that I could hear my name, walk up and shake the faculty's hands and go off to celebrate with my family. So, I promise to keep my speech short and hopefully, not put you to sleep.

I want to thank Professor Binder for that kind introduction and for inviting me to address you tonight.

I'll be honest. When I got the invitation to give this speech, I didn't know why I was chosen. I'm a graduate of this very school and I personally know economists far more talented and skilled than me. Not knowing why I was chosen, I accepted and reflected on this opportunity.

I thought – “this is a good opportunity for me to share my story and hopefully instill some inspiration in you”.

I'm the son of hard-working immigrants who worked any available job there was to provide for me and my brothers, and so that we could get an education and live a better life. Moving to a different country not knowing the language, traditions, customs or how to navigate its bureaucracy presented a sizable challenge.

I still recall my first day in school as being the hardest day of my life. The bell rang and I just stood there in the middle of the hallway not knowing where to go or what to do. And I knew I couldn't ask for help. But then what seemed out of nowhere, a teacher who spoke Spanish saw me and approached me. She walked me to my first class and sat me next to kids who spoke Spanish. But as she left, I knew that the rest was up to me.

I believe that that experience shaped my worldview. From then on, I knew that all I needed was an opportunity and that the rest was up to me.

I want to encourage you to knock on doors, to look for opportunities, to not think less of yourself. You are about to be economics graduates. Whatever field you choose, or wherever your career takes you, never stop learning, never stop believing that you can overcome adversities.

Going back to that first day in school when I felt helpless, now I know that I was wrong. So, don't be afraid to ask for help. Take every opportunity that comes your way and make the most of it. It could be that internship that you didn't want to apply for, it could be that relocation at work that scares you. You never know what awaits you on the other side.

I'd like to close by sharing a story. Early in my career with the state government I was asked to take a look at an analysis of a tax provision that would increase the funding to the New Mexico School for the Deaf. After reviewing the analysis our agency had published, I realized that the

funding expectations had been significantly overstated. Feeling nervous and quite honestly scared, I gathered the courage to report to my supervisor. After explaining how we were wrong we realized we had to tell the bad news to representatives from the School for the Deaf. We scheduled a meeting and on we went, prepared with a 'mea culpa' and with an alternative solution. What didn't occur to me was that school representatives were deaf. Through a sign language interpreter, we delivered the bad news.

Sitting there, giving them the bad news – that the school would receive less money and that they should look for other means of funding – made everything I had worked on so real. It was then that I realized that my work was not just about gathering and analyzing data. It meant that my work had real-life implications.

If there are any highlights to take from this story, always remember that your work matters. You are about to step into the real world. You'll be in places where your econometric model results are different from your colleagues. You'll be in a world where the data is messy, where your clients are late in giving you the data. But don't ever forget that your work matters. Your work is real. And you have the tools to succeed. Remember to ask for help, look for opportunities, and when the door opens, walk through that door. Seize that opportunity. You have the tools to succeed.

As you walk away tonight as graduates of economics, remember now that rest is up to you. Thank you.