

Thank you Dean Broome, esteemed faculty, support staff, friends, families, and graduates. As introduced, my name is Leslie Jo Mitchell, and I am honored and proud to be here with all of you.

Most speeches of this sort, start off with a joke, something witty, a cute opening line, but because I will be graduating with a Master's in *Nursing Education*, I'd like to start off with a pop quiz. What did you expect?

No worries, though, it's open book, you can phone a friend, and I promise to grade on a curve. You'll do fine.

OK, Question 1: Who in the room is here today *in support* of a nursing graduate? May I have a show of hands?

Question 2: Is there anyone here who is proud, very proud of a graduate here today? I thought so.

Question 3: Who thinks that Duke University School of Nursing has helped create some of the finest nurses in the industry? [after hands raised] Right you are. Great job. A +s for everyone.

Here's a bonus question for you: Why are we all here?

When you look around the room, seeing all the smiles, hugs, and tears of joy, it would seem obvious. We are all here to celebrate graduation and celebrate our accomplishments. We're here in this beautiful place to say hi to our friends, some of whom are study buddies we only know from online projects. We can shake some hands, take some happy pictures in our outfits and post them online. This is a day for celebrating all that we've done in our time here at DUSON.

But what I mean is, why are we all *here*, here specifically at Duke University?

I would imagine, we choose Duke School of Nursing for many different reasons. After all, we come from many different states, countries, backgrounds, and disciplines. We have a great deal of diversity in our professional and social lives, too.

You may have chosen Duke because of the reputation of the school, the innovative sim labs, the teaching and research opportunities, or the incredible faculty and scholarly work being done here. It may have been the ability to have online classes and technologies available for higher learning. Or maybe it was because of the supportive peer groups, extracurricular activities, or a plethora of the resources and access to other healthcare professionals. It also could have been the campus itself and the wonderful study and social areas.

Whether you are graduating with a BSN, MSN, or DNP degree, whether you are specializing in orthopedics, HIV care, teaching, leadership, anesthesiology, informatics, peds, neonatal care, geriatrics, or women's health... We all chose Duke because we knew we would receive a quality education, plenty of support from faculty and each other, and that *these* elements would serve us very well in our future endeavors. Regardless of what degree we have earned, we will be working in diverse interprofessional teams as healthcare continues to evolve.

Duke has offered us a unique opportunity to practice this through training, research, and organizations like Duke *AHEAD*. Through my work, as the lead for the student arm of Duke *AHEAD*, I have come to realize, Duke is a *place* like no other. *Whatever* your reasons were for coming to here, I think we can all agree on that.

Some of you will leave here and start your *first* nursing position. Some will become a Nurse Executive at a Fortune 500 company. Some will gain a faculty position and teach students just like us. Some will be treating patients in clinics, hospitals, and in the community.

So no matter *what* brought us here, no matter *what* we do when we leave here, rest assured, we leave here with an *immense* sense of pride and confidence in ourselves and our ability to practice. I *know* we are up to the task.

How do I know this? *Because* we were given the tools to be leaders and team players, to be critical thinkers and problem solvers.

We are innovators and dedicated nurses who know what it takes to *get the job done*. [pause]

I think you will agree, the road to get here has not been easy, but we made it. There are some of us who have given up a significant amount family time, work activities, and social opportunities to make this degree possible. I happen to know there are students among us who have started families, changed jobs, moved to other countries, studied from abroad, deployed with the military, and still, somehow, have had the gumption and dedication to get through this.

Mind you, as truly talented and amazing as *this* graduate group is here today, we did not get here on our own. There were spouses, partners, siblings, parents, grand-parents, great-grandparents, friends, faculty, advisors, and probably a few sympathetic supervisors out there that helped this educational dream become a reality.

So when you look back at all the sacrifices we've made, we must also realize what we've gained. That's the good stuff. We've gained new friendships, new connections, and a new direction. We are empowered to do big and amazing things with the knowledge and skills we now possess.

So I'd like to leave you with a quote from Bob Marley that sums up our experiences nicely: the greatness of a man – or woman - is not in how much wealth he acquires, but in his integrity and his ability to affect those around him positively. We *can* do that, and we *will* do that.

So be true to yourselves, be true to the nursing practice, and go out there and do good work like only Blue Devils can!

Congratulations to *each* and every one of you!

Thank you