

President Dennis Assanis

University of Delaware

Commencement — May 27, 2017, Delaware Stadium

Good morning! What a great day to graduate!

It is a great privilege and honor to welcome you all to UD's 168th commencement ceremony. We are joined this morning by so many special people.

We have our distinguished faculty and Trustees — the leaders of our great university.

We have our honorary degree recipients:

- **Margaret Andersen**, who served UD for four decades as an outstanding professor and campus leader;
- **James Wagner**, president emeritus of Emory University and a proud Blue Hen from the Class of 1975;
- **Marna Whittington**, another one of our proud alumni and an accomplished leader in the financial industry;
- and our Commencement speaker: the **Honorable Jack Markell**, who served as the 73rd governor of Delaware and has always been a great friend to this University.

We have our esteemed **U.S. Senator Tom Carper** — a veteran and a dedicated public servant for more than 40 years — with us today.

We have our proud alumni, who are tireless ambassadors to the world.

We have all the loving families and friends of our graduates.

And, of course, we have you ... the incomparable Class of 2017 and our proud Blue Hens forever!

Let me be the first to congratulate you on reaching this milestone in your lives. Well done! Let's hear it for our graduates!

As you know, this is my first year as president of UD, and I could not be more honored to be your fellow Blue Hen. This is a great university — one of the world's best.

But that's not because of our celebrated history, our beautiful campus, or even our delicious UDairy ice cream ... all of which are pretty awesome.

The University of Delaware is great because you make it so.

Today, you're earning 312 Associate's degrees, 4,189 Bachelor's degrees, 1,061 Master's degrees and 311 doctoral degrees.

We have graduates from 45 states and 90 countries.

All of you brought your curiosity, your passion and your energy to UD. And you accomplished so much during your time on this campus. I'm proud of everything you've achieved — in the classroom and the lab ... on the athletic field ... and around the world.

Your Field Hockey team won the national NCAA championship. And this afternoon, your Baseball team plays for the CAA championship in North Carolina. We wish them the best of luck!

In your class, there are more awards, scholarships and other successes than we can possibly enumerate here today.

Some of you created your own businesses to bring innovative products and services to the world. You started nonprofit organizations to help families, veterans, the homeless and more.

I'm proud of the way you expressed different opinions and translated your passions into ideas to build a better world. You helped the University of Delaware continue to be a place where freedom of speech is still the norm, not the exception.

I'm also proud of how you served others ... from Indonesia to the Philippines to Nicaragua ... in communities from Georgia to Maine and right here in Delaware. You built homes, taught children, cared for people with chronic illnesses and — through UDance — raised \$1.9 million to help end childhood cancer!

A Commencement ceremony is a celebration of everything you've accomplished. But more importantly, it's an opportunity to consider what lies ahead.

Now, this is the part of the speech where I'm supposed to give you a "charge" ... some words of wisdom and inspiration to guide you as you leave the beautiful UD campus and embark on the rest of your lives.

So, here's my charge: I want you ... to change the world.

But how should you change the world? As Blue Hens, this is your opportunity to make the world look more like ... the University of Delaware.

You can make it a place of constant learning and exploration and discovery.

It can be a place that celebrates open dialogue and the free exchange of ideas ... a place where we can be respectful and civil, even when we disagree with each other.

It can be a place where knowledge finds its highest purpose when it enriches lives and strengthens our society for the benefit of all.

I want you to keep striving for inclusive excellence.

Keep reaching out to people of different cultures, different perspectives, different physical and mental abilities. Talk to each other — and more importantly, listen to each other.

Never forget that you are citizens of the world.

So many of you studied abroad during your time at UD. You traveled to every continent, crossed every ocean, visited cities both ancient and modern. You heard a plurality of languages, danced to beautiful music and ate exotic foods you won't find in any campus dining hall.

And here in Newark, many of you brought the world to UD, creating a global family of Blue Hens.

You'll need to work together as a community — one that brings together a wide range of expertise and perspective. Only through cooperation and collaboration will you be able to address the complex challenges you'll face in your careers and in society.

The world desperately needs teams of engineers and artists ... of teachers and scientists ... of people who understand business and history and languages and medicine and so much more.

Working together, we can go far!

This is your opportunity to be innovators and entrepreneurs. I want you to see obstacles as opportunities ... to think of answers instead of excuses ... to imagine the possibilities instead of the limitations.

I want you to ask yourself — every day — how can I use my talents, my skills, my relationships, my creativity to help solve a problem. Find those answers — in whatever field you pursue — and you will be an innovator and an entrepreneur.

Finally, never stop investing in the future, because investing in people and new opportunities is the only way we can build a new reality.

We are all here today because someone invested in us. Our families and friends believed that we could achieve our dreams and gave us the support and resources to do so.

This university invested in you — in your potential and your vision for a better world.

And you invested so much of yourselves ... your early mornings and your late nights ... your energy, both mental and physical ... your sweat and sometimes even your tears. You invested all of this because you knew tomorrow would come and you wanted to be ready.

Keep investing ... in your communities, through service and volunteer work ... in society, as an engaged and informed citizen ... in yourselves, through constant learning and personal growth.

And invest in this University — your University of Delaware — so that others may experience the joy and the excitement and the boundless optimism that you're feeling right now.

The world can be a better place. You can make it better. You can make the world more like the University of Delaware.

I am extremely optimistic about the future knowing that our Class of 2017 will be out there changing the world!

Congratulations, Blue Hens!

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