

Penn Vet Commencement Exercises, May 18, 2020

[MUSIC PLAYING] Good afternoon. My name is Mary Bryant, Assistant Dean of Students and Admissions, and I'll be your host for today's very special event. On behalf of the entire Penn Vet community, I'd like to extend a very warm welcome to our graduates, their families and friends, and to our faculty as well as alumni as we celebrate the 135th Commencement Exercises of the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. At this time, it is my pleasure to introduce Dr. Andrew Hoffman, the Gilbert S. Kahn Dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine.

It gives me great pleasure to extend a warm welcome to the graduates and their families, partners, friends, and colleagues. The amazing, smart, resilient, competent, and good-humored class of 2020 has the distinction of finishing their veterinary training at Penn during a pandemic and now to celebrate with this virtual ceremony.

You are the mavericks in the world of veterinary graduation. So you ask, has a public in-person graduation at Penn ever been eclipsed like this one? University of Pennsylvania opened its doors in 1740 and launched the first graduation in 1758. In the years since its founding by the Benjamin Franklin, there has never been a virtual ceremony. OK, no big surprise. However, there was one year and only one year that graduation was not a public affair. Things were altered to adapt to the ever-evolving and uncertain circumstances of that time. Can you guess which year?

I would have guessed, given the current predicament we find ourselves in with the pandemic perhaps because of the existential threat posed by the coronavirus to humankind, the economy, and life as we know it that the year when there was no public graduation for Penn was during the Spanish flu, like, 1918. No, we did not cancel any commencements on account of the Spanish flu pandemic, which afflicted the world during World War I in 1918 or during World War II, nor did Penn cancel commencements during the Civil War. Clearly, canceling commencements is not something that UPenn accepts lightly.

However, there were four times when Penn didn't have a commencement since they began in 1758. There weren't enough students to graduate in 1759. This was due in part to the fact that one of the key instructors, the provost of the college, Reverend William Smith, was jailed in 1758. He was jailed by the Pennsylvania Assembly on a libel charge after he published a piece condemning them.

The college shut down because of the war between 1777 and 1779. Hint, hint. Ever since then there's always been a commencement ceremony conferring degrees. It was the year of epic significance to the independence of our nation-- 1776-- when the commencement was not public but rather a private ceremony. There were seven bachelors of arts students qualified to graduate that year, a bumper crop for the time, pumped for a public ceremony that would never come.

As written in the Trustees Report on June 10, 1776, the commencement is ordered to be a private one on account of the present unsettled state of public affairs, and the

candidates are accordingly to be excused from delivering the public exercises usual on such occasions. Academic historians have judged this lapse to be both prudent and excusable. Yes, only in the years of 2020 and in 1776 is the public graduation altered in such a radical way. In my view, that makes V'20 the coolest, baddest, grittiest, and most prepared for anything class of veterinary students in the history of the world.

So, now, let's examine why. You woke up one late winter day in January and read that the coronavirus has spread to the United States. Around March 13th, Penn Vet has canceled your externships. Come home on March 16th. Penn Vet asks you to stay home. You can't go into the hospital for your clinical rotations. You have to run and pick up your stuff, and you have no idea what is next.

Next, the mayor and governor issue stay-at-home orders for all citizens who can stay home. But you're already at home. Next, you hear that you may not graduate on time because, well, you may not have finished your competencies as required by the Council of Education.

March 24th, you've pulled yourself out of bed wherever you are. And at 8:30 in the morning, staring into the laptop at this surreal scene-- cyber clinics. And you're learning about dentistry and in subsequent weeks anesthesia, radiology, and dermatology for the real world, for example, and so on. Your professors are tiny, little people, and they're also slightly awkward on camera, but passionately discussing with you cases and clinical problems, which almost feels like the new normal and you're starting to feel maybe day one ready. All your classmates are at home, as are V'21, '22, and '23. They're all staring into their computers, experiencing a veterinary education like we've never seen before.

You take breaks. You go for a long walk around town in a daze, smiling through a mask. You're trying to stay upbeat and connected with friends and family, but the isolation takes its toll. This is simply awful, and the uncertainty is fraying your nerves. Through the virtual fog, you see people applauding out their windows and balconies for health care workers that risk their lives. And there are shout outs to our own personnel at Penn Vet who are going to work in our hospitals, diagnostic labs, field services, animal care facilities, and research labs every day to deliver the essential services to the public.

While they're not staying at home, they are at greater risk for the coronavirus. But we quickly learned to appreciate the essentialness of veterinarians as life-sustaining professionals in the eyes of the governor and society. So we keep working. The staff delivers emergency health care in the hospitals and field services 24/7. We see them entering and exiting Ryan and New Bolton Center Hospitals at all hours. For them, professional life goes on behind a mask.

People need veterinarians and trust them, especially in a pandemic. Some of your house officers fall ill. But, thank goodness, they make a full recovery. You walk home. Eventually, your competencies get audited and by some miracle-- actually, through the heroic efforts of your Associate Dean of Education Kathy Michel-- let's give it up for Dean Michel-- who along with her educational team, including Jennifer Lapin-- now

referred to as "the graduator--" determine, after days of crunching numbers into the night, crediting the many rotations and clinical exercises you have completed-- they come up with a data-driven strategy that was then approved by the Council of Education that enables you to officially graduate on this day. Amazing.

You find yourself then retaining the regalia or not-- probably not-- and starting to make not travel arrangements, but plans on how to celebrate with your family, partners, and friends-- alone in your apartment? Well, undeterred wherever you may be, here you are, the coolest, baddest, grittiest, and most prepared for class of veterinary students in the history of the world.

You're graduating like COVID-19 never happen, like what really matters is the 3 and 1/2 years that preceded the pandemic, and nothing could be more true. You have done amazing things, and you have earned your degrees with honor and integrity from the University of Pennsylvania. I congratulate you, and so do your families, partners, friends, and onlookers, because, like me, they admire you, how you handled the crisis, how you pulled yourself together, supported each other and learned from each other, absorbed all that you could remotely in final preparation for your life as a veterinary medical doctor and that you fulfilled your requirements, not just in the eyes of Penn Vet or your peers, but in those of the AVMA Council on Education.

Again, we congratulate you. And I know you will do great things, because as the coolest, baddest, grittiest, and most prepared for anything class of veterinary students in the history of the world, you will strive to be the best veterinarians, if not for yourself or others, if not for sheer pleasure, for the betterment of the world. And if you're lucky, you can combine all of those things and have a most rewarding career.

Lastly, I'd like to say that we learned some valuable lessons from the pandemic. You cannot be too compassionate. You cannot over communicate key points. And you must employ good science, facts, and your education to guide everything that you are doing.

And we know that veterinarians, as keen observers and astute clinicians trained in one health at the interface between animals, humans, and the environment, can be relied upon to prevent the next pandemic. I wish you luck, that you stay safe, and if anything comes your way, remember that you are the coolest, baddest, and grittiest and most prepared for anything class of veterinary students in the history of the world.
Congratulations.

Now, I would like to introduce Dr. Elizabeth Strand, Director of Veterinary Social Work And Clinical Associate Professor at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Dr. Strand is an award-winning scientist, orator, educator, and innovator in the burgeoning field of veterinary social work. As a Clinical Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Tennessee, she founded and directs the Veterinary Social Work Program. This is the first and only program to train and certify licensed social workers in disciplines related to animals and the veterinary profession.

Dr. Strand is the 2019 recipient of the AAVMC's Billy E Hooper Award for Distinguished

Service in recognition of her significant contributions to academic veterinary medicine and the veterinary profession. She is also an ordained interfaith minister and charismatic speaker that has inspired numerous veterinary leaders, including myself, to embrace the knowledge and expertise of thought leaders and practitioners in social work.

At a time when Penn Vet prepares to launch the first joint degree in the world between veterinary medicine and social work, we are especially excited to have Dr. Strand join us for this special occasion. A warm welcome for Dr. Strand.

Hello, class of 2020. My name is Dr. Elizabeth Strand, and I am really honored to be able to share some words with you on this extremely important day. I want to express my thanks to Dr. Hoffman for inviting me. And if I was there in person, I probably wouldn't be sharing slides. But given these unusual times and my ability to share information with you by video, I did want to share with you some slides in the hopes that over the course of your career you may refer back to them.

So I want to start with a story. This is my textbook when I was a master's in social work student. And in the tiny, little words there, you'll see "A Task-centered Approach." And this was a book that basically said, if you set a goal with your clients and you agree on the goal and then you set homework and you set tasks, that the clients then complete the tasks and they come back and they get better and everybody feels good. And I thought to myself, this sounds really great. I am all over that. I can do that, for sure.

And then one day when I got into practice-- it was probably one year into practice. I was working at a residential treatment center. And the children were wards of the state. So their parents had abused them or they were delinquent. They were misbehaving. And the only way that the caregivers-- the parents or the foster parents-- were able to see the children were in family therapy with me.

Well, there was one girl, and her parents and I had agreed on a goal. And the goal was that this young girl needed to control her behavior better. And the family were sending letters to the young girl, and she was misbehaving. And so the treatment team decided you cannot have these letters. So they withheld her mail. And I'm sure there were documents that signed that that was OK for them to do as part of the treatment.

When, however, the family-- the mom and dad-- learned that their child had not received any of the mail that they had sent her-- and they had center an abundance of mail-- they were furious with me, and they yelled at me, and they told me I was unprofessional and that I had lost their trust, and they really reacted in a way that was not described in my book in my task-centered approach to helping families because we had agreed. The goal was that this young person was needing to get control of her behavior, and the mail was withheld to help her learn about controlling her behavior so that she can have rewards.

So needless to say, when the family was yelling at me, I was very emotional. I had to manage my emotions to maintain a professional approach with the family. And I also

came in that day feeling just fine. But after dealing with that family, I did not feel well at all. In fact, I felt just like they did.

And here's the thing is that I as a human being and you as human beings are hard wired to feel what other people feel. We have a mirror neuron system, which helps us to connect with how people are feeling. So if you're across from somebody who is angry or sad, then your brain is lighting up the emotional areas in a very similar way, whether you're conscious of it or not.

Over time with lots of these families, I started to feel like this physician in the back of the happy face with this tongue sticking out and his eyes all wonky because I was around a lot of upset people all of the time. However, I was having to put on that professional face of calmness and consideration and patience.

I looked to my left. I looked to my right. None of my other colleagues were expressing these feelings that I was having on the inside. And what I have learned now is that they were feeling it too and that this distance between what we feel on the inside when we're around people who are in distress and what we have to show on the outside is kind of the seed of compassion fatigue.

So a lot of what I struggled with as a new family therapist were morally stressful situations. Again, I mentioned sometimes I had children whose parents were absent or had abused them or I was in situations where parents were having their own struggles, their own trauma, and it was kind of impacting the youngins who were misbehaving as a result of their parent's own suffering.

And over time, this moral stress is incredibly complex to navigate because we know what the principles that are at stake. We know what needs to happen. But there are things outside of our control to come up with the right or implement the right answer.

So this is where the rubber hits the road because these are ethically complex situations. And there is no one ethical code, unilateral, implemented every time and it's going to turn out right answer. And a woman named Elizabeth Anscombe dipped into Aristotelian ethics where virtue ethics began and sort of said, you know, these ethical models that are out there that say that there is one right answer don't cut it, and they definitely don't cut it in medical environments where things are so complex and the problems are so contextual that each situation requires a unique response.

In the virtue ethics model, there are two points that I want to bring home. One is the virtuous person or the moral exemplar, and the other one is the golden mean. Let's start with the moral exemplar.

If I was with you, I would ask you who your heroes are. A hero is a person who is admired for their courage, outstanding achievements, noble qualities. I am quite sure that you have heroes among your faculty that have touched your lives over the past years of being a veterinary student. Some of the heroes I have are Temple Grandin, Jane Addams, one of the first social workers-- started the settlement movement, first

female to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Of course, there's Gandhi-- he's kind of amazing-- and then Mother Teresa. What about Helen Keller? Wow. This guy is named William Wilberforce. If you haven't seen the movie *Amazing Grace*, check it out. William Wilberforce stopped the entire slave trade in the United Kingdom through trickery. He got all of the parliament to go to a cricket game while he added a small tax on a bill that wasn't even related that essentially shut down the slave trade. And when I watched that video, I thought, oh my gosh, this wonderful thing has happened through trickery. Is that OK?

So these are the complexities of the-- yeah, the things that are part of your role as a veterinarian are addressing these complex circumstances and situations. And of course, we have our own heroes close to home, like parents who are probably celebrating with you right now. That's my dad and my dog, King Solomon.

So another hero, a moral exemplar in veterinary medicine, is a wonderful, wonderful person named Albert Schweitzer. He founded a concept called Reverence for Life. He wrote, "Until he extends his circle of compassion to include all living things, man will not himself find peace." He wrote, "There are two means of refuge from the miseries of life-- music and cats." He always had a cat around. He hung around with this pelican all the time.

He also wrote, "Ethics are responsibility without limit towards all that lives," and, "Think occasionally of the suffering which you spare yourself the sight." He is well known for his love of animals and has been embraced by veterinarians as a moral exemplar.

Now, the thing about moral exemplars and heroes is that they are not magically made. They are cultivated through formative experiences. They're all works in progress. So some of Albert Schweitzer's formative experiences were saying prayers at night with his mom, who would not include the animals. And so he would say his own prayer after she left. "O, heavenly Father, protect and bless all things that have breath, guard them from all evil, and let them sleep in peace."

As a teenager, he also was with his friends and they were doing some slingshotting of crows in a tree. And when it was his turn to shoot a crow, a church bell went off, and it convicted his heart. And instead of shooting at the crows, he scared them all away and in that moment broke with what was socially acceptable to what his internal code told him was the right thing to do.

He was a renaissance man. He first became a theologian, and then he rose to be the dean of the theological school. He also knew how to build organs and was an organist. And then he decided he wanted to help people physically, and so he went and got his degree as a medical doctor and started a hospital in Africa to take care of the health needs of those populations.

While he was traveling up and down the river in Africa around where his hospital was-- Lambaréné-- he saw a group of hippo. And he had a moment of inspiration where he

had a constellation of his ethic, which was reverence for life. And reverence for life is-- and really probably the reason why veterinarians claim Albert Schweitzer is because it's not that you can always prevent yourself from taking life. There are times when you must. But the manner in which you take life is reflective of your moral compass, what your virtue is.

And over the years of working in this fine profession of-- I guess I'm at 19 years now. I've heard many about a veterinarian say that if they came upon a time when they were to conduct the procedure of euthanasia without in some place in their heart feeling a sense of reverence, they would worry about themselves.

So he also had another aspect of reverence for life, which was the will to live. And it was the idea that each being has within itself a will to live. And we could even go so far as to say each being has a purpose. So the acorn has within it the potential to be an oak tree and only an oak tree, not any a type of tree or a bird or a daffodil.

A fertilized human egg similarly has the potential to be a person, not anything else. And inherent in each person is a unique set of potentials. So inside of you, inside of me, inside of all of your family and your friends, there is a unique potential that is uniquely your signature that it is your invitation and job to cultivate in the future of your career as a veterinarian.

Now, to do that, remember, moral exemplars are works in progress. The people that you admire in your family or among your faculty, they didn't get that way to be admirable without this process of formation. And the way it goes is you have a principle of some sort. Like, I had the task-centered approach to solving people's problems. That was my principle. And it guided my action, which was we've agreed on this goal to take care of your daughter. And it caused me to follow the treatment team's expectation to withhold the mail and not communicate that with the family.

And so then I took that action, and it created an experience for me-- whoo-- one that I will never forget, which then fed reflection. So why did that happen? What did I learn? That refines my values, which now my values say there is a treatment team. There are things that need to happen for maybe the animal or, in my case, for the person. And then there's also the family, and I have to find a balance between both sets of humans in that situation, which then goes through the principles again and feeds the principles again, which is that, I guess for me, never say never and always seek consent would be some examples of principles. So we all are in this process of formation and reflection.

And another thing that happens is that as we reflect, we can cultivate our golden mean. We can have these core values, and we can help cultivate the ability not to have excess of those values or deficiency in those values. So courage, for example, an excess would be foolhardiness. But a deficiency would be cowardice.

So here is y'all's word cloud. We got about 37%, maybe 42% response rate-- not bad. And I was so excited when I saw y'all's word cloud. I just thought, wow, what an awesome class. Adaptability in the middle of this extremely strange time is a wonderful,

wonderful quality. But if we apply the golden mean to all of these values, we could find excesses in them and we could also find deficiencies in them.

So if we take compassion, for instance, which is one of a big value in veterinary medicine, too much compassion can cause indulgence or over caretaking or letting people walk over you-- clients walk out over you-- or, if you have too little compassion, it can be a heartlessness. So each of these wonderful values that you have, I invite you-- as you're going through your process of reflection, of cultivating your virtue inside so that you can address the complex more moral situations that will arise in practice-- that you strive for that nice golden mean.

And in your reflection process, here are some questions you can ask yourself individually or as teams. What were the situations this week that made it hard to sleep or put aside those thoughts of work when you were at home? As a professional, that's going to happen. It's probably an indicator that you're doing a really good job because you care. What did you do well in that situation? Start with what you did right. Then, what do you wish you had done differently? And what did you learn? We are works in progress.

If you notice, I started with what did you do right in this situation? So here's a puppy at the top of the stairs. The puppy is scared. What do you say to the puppy? You don't say, stupid puppy, why are you scared? What's wrong with you? How could you not have any kind of courage at all? You're just a-- bleh. Get going. You wouldn't say that. You would say, come here, little puppy. You would do some kind of squealing. Many of you would try to go get the puppy and take the puppy down. You can't do that. The puppy has to learn.

But you would encourage the puppy. And so when we're facing these situations, we want to cultivate self-compassion, which is talking to ourselves as a good friend. Read more about self-compassion. That is my order of business for you, if you haven't already been exposed to it.

If you get to these last two questions in your reflection process-- is there anything that you're grateful for in this situation or just in general? And is there anything that was humorous about the situation or in this week that you remember? And if you can't come up with something and if you can't come up with something over two or three weeks, then it's time to take an additional step to get some support. And that is normal. All professionals are going to have times like that. That is healthy. It means you care. It means that you're working hard.

And I like to think about it as getting a checkup from the neck up. I like to think of talking to people about what's going on in your mind and in your heart, like an oil change to keep your car running well. And certainly you have family. You have friends. You have colleagues maybe that you have built trusted relationships. You may have mentors from school that you can reach out to and speak to.

And then, of course, as a mental health professional, I need to just say you can find a

good mental health professional too. If you see one and you don't like them the first time, don't give up. It's like finding a friend. You got to find somebody you actually like. You can just say, no, I don't like that person and go on to the next one. Give it a shot.

So here you are again. This is your class's word cloud of core values as of May 2020. And as far as I can see, this is a really outstanding class. And I really invite you to continue to cultivate the virtue inside of you through hitting your golden mean and reflection and practicing self-compassion and taking good care of yourselves. And I will tell you that I will haunt you if you don't. Happy graduation. Thank you for your attention. And best of wishes for the remainder of your career. Bye.

Thank you, Dr. Strand. Now for the event we've all been waiting for-- the awarding of the VMD degree. The names of our graduates will be read by our Associate Dean for One Health, Dr. Jenny Punt.

Good afternoon, everyone. I am delighted and honored to be here to read the names of our graduating veterinarians today. Dr. Alea Devi Agrawal. Dr. Robyn Suzanne Allen. Dr. Gillian Sophia Anderson. Dr. Jessica Taylor Austin. Dr. Jonathan William David Ball. Dr. Kelsi Brianna Baxter. Dr. Alison Rose Billas. Dr. Victoria Lee Blake.

It is our tradition, when a graduate has a University of Pennsylvania faculty member or a veterinarian in his or her family, to afford that person the honor of awarding the diploma. As we are unable to present the actual diploma, our next graduate's name will be read by his mother, Dr. Linda Zhao, Professor of Statistics at the Wharton School.

Dr. Franklin Louis Brown.

Dr. Taylor Janelle Bryant. Dr. Megan Nicole Caiazzo. Dr. John Coston Cain. Dr. Fionnuala Maura Callahan. Dr. Amanda Annalice Carmellini. Dr. Michelle Patrice Cesarano. Dr. Cathy Chun.

Dr. Rachel Catherine Clarkin-Breslin. Dr. Mariel Sarah Covo. Dr. Grant Logan Crandall. Dr. Rose Helen Dicovitsky. Dr. Dillon Shervin Didehvar. Dr. Kristen Marie DiSiena. Dr. Mary Jane Drake.

Dr. James Bernard Duffy. Dr. Emily Barbey du Pont. Dr. Rachel Frances Durrwachter. Dr. Abigail Katherine Earle. Dr. Rachel Eisen. Dr. Jordan Rae Fairman. Dr. Gabrielle Faragasso.

Dr. Allison Kathleen Faust. Dr. Rose Gabrielle Feldman. Dr. Jennifer Leigh Fennelly. Dr. James Francis Ferrara. Dr. Lauren Will Fisher. Dr. Lisa Ann Foose. Dr. Summer Scout Elizabeth Ford.

Dr. Alycia Krystine Frampton. Dr. Rachel Anne Friedberger. Dr. Alexa Grace Frink. Dr. Stefan Hemmann Gallini. Dr. Emily Anne Gardner. Dr. Jennifer Laurie Glenn. Dr. Krista Jenna Golia.

Dr. Samantha Joan Goodridge. Dr. Taylor Kay Goucher. Dr. Amy Rifkin Greenebaum. Our next graduate's name will be read by her father, Dr. David Griswold, a 1979 graduate of our school.

Dr. Emily Hanlon Griswold.

Dr. Maria Macarena Guerrero-Reyes. Dr. Lisa Michele Hagan. Dr. Colin Gregory Hansen. Dr. Elisa Lauren Heacock. Our next graduate's name will be read by her father, Dr. John Heidgerd, a 1978 graduate of our school.

Dr. Kathryn Marie Heidgerd.

Dr. Shannon Marie Heintz. Dr. Caitlin Taylor Hering. Dr. John Christopher Hurst. Dr. Hailey HeyRi Hwang. Dr. John Jacob Jaekle. Dr. Kaitlyn Anne Johnson. Dr. Jenna Rae Kahn.

Dr. Brianne Jennifer Karten. Dr. Rachel Lauren Katz. Dr. Rory Edward Keefer. Dr. Hayley Lynne Keller. Dr. Elizabeth Sughrue Kemp. Dr. Stephanie Nicole Kilkucki. Dr. Bennett Elizabeth King.

Dr. Lauren Jamie Lew. Dr. Joseph Chao-Yu Liu. Dr. Adriana Karina Lopez Nieves. Dr. Souci Jeanne Louis. Dr. Benjamin David Luksic. Dr. Courtney Marie Lunger. Dr. Alexandra Nuria MacLeod.

Dr. Renata Marie Mammone. Dr. Laura Katherine Massey. Dr. Rebecca Rachael Mayne. Dr. Sarah Elizabeth Meeteer. Dr. Maria Teresa Mick. Dr. Danni Jay Mitchell. Dr. Colleen Nichole Moore.

Dr. Gabriella Elyse Motta. Dr. Robert Russell Muir Jr. Dr. Katherine Lynn Murphy. Dr. Ian Edward Murray. Dr. Justyna Karolina Ozog. Dr. Emily Rose Palmieri. Our next graduate's name will be read by her parents, Dr. Bakul Patel and Dr. Sangita Patel, 1987 graduates of Gujarat College of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Husbandry in Anand, Gujarat.

Dr. Pooja Bakul Patel.

Dr. Patrick Stephen Pilon. Dr. Emily Polur Pittman. Dr. Anthony Frank Pizzelanti III. Dr. Clare Talcott Randt. Dr. Daria Ann Rebbecchi. Dr. Katherine Dolores Reilly. Dr. Mackenzie Anna Roach.

Dr. Patrick James Robbins. Dr. Shira Tziporah Rosenblum. Dr. Faith C. Roser. Dr. Rhiannon Leigh Ross. Dr. Amanda Nichole Samuels. Dr. Daniel Marco Sandoval. Dr. Alexandra Jillian Sanz.

Dr. Trinity Michael Scanlon. Dr. Áine Inger Schanche. Dr. Allison Catherine Schreffler. Dr. Seth Martin Schwartz. Dr. Nicole H. Sereda. Dr. Erica Ann Snihur. Dr. Kristin Snyder. Dr. Caroline Marie Solomon.

Dr. Jamie Francis Spratford. Dr. Tabitha Nicole Stillo. Dr. Melanie Marie Tramontina. Dr. Elana Michelle Vloday. Dr. Elinor Elise Willis. Dr. Briana Francesca Wilson. Dr. Leanne Kimberley Wooley.

Congratulations to our graduates. It is now my distinct honor to introduce the 2020 class president, Dr. Patrick Pilon, or Pi, who will share his remarks with his class. One of the great pleasures of my job is to work with our student leaders. Their dedication to their class and to Penn Vet inspires me each and every day. Pi has led V'20 with a quiet yet steadfast style. His ability to provide leadership to his class has been an absolute joy to witness. I would like to personally thank him for the service he has given to his class and to our school. Dr. Pilon.

Hello, doctors, faculty, family, and friends. Thank you for being here in my bedroom. This isn't exactly how I envisioned graduating from med school, but I'm glad that we're gathered. Unprecedented, uncertain, unexpected-- call the COVID-19 crisis what you will. But one thing I'm certain of is we're going to get through it together, and we're going to come away in even more of a united community of veterinarians. How do I know? Because we survived four unprecedented years at Penn Vet, and they were filled with unexpected experiences.

Year one, day one, it started great with an inspiring exciting welcome by Dr. Lok. And it ended with Dev Bio. What had we gotten ourselves into? Much to our ultimate delight, that first day of lecture was a teaser of the whole course. OK, so we never fell in love with Developmental Biology, but we survived it and we learned a lot.

Year two, we arrived at the infamous B101 classroom, the one that we'd heard so much about from upperclassmen and our alumni mentors. They warned us of all the memories we'd make in this room. Memories specific to us were the leak in the front right corner, voting on names for our class pet in our before pharmacology exam, and that one light that would flicker randomly when lecturers had the lights in presenter mode, or maybe you remember the screams from a particular professor during an anesthesia lecture as they claimed how terrifying a humble Philadelphia cockroach can be.

If you're like me, year two really challenged you and tested your resolve. It was hard for me to remember happy or fun times during those 12 months. But we persevered, and we made it to year three when anatomy came to life and we performed anesthesia and aseptically prepared for our first dog spay. While not being exactly what we expected, we were all happy to have our best buddies scrub in and place down rock, paper, scissors to decide who was going to reform the ligature on the interim body. We also learned that year that Dr. Sertich, the legendary Penn Vet theriogenologist, not only holds an unlimited knowledge of reproduction, but also has some pretty killer dance moves.

Next was the year we all had been waiting for-- clinics. So much to remember about this last year. From Food Fridays on our favorite rotations to the discontinuation of the

Greenline cart bag to curator, an application that provided us with a ringtone to use as a wake-up alarm for the rest of our lives.

During year four, we also helped curtail the outbreak of carbapenem-resistant E. coli, collecting hundreds of rectal swabs on our patients in the process. There is nothing like the bond that's formed over two students collecting that discharge sample on a fractious cat. Again, we persisted. And then, as we celebrated the end of the E. coli outbreak, COVID-19 arrived and with it a strange end to our Penn Vet days.

Over the years, there were other moments of great joy, like participating and hosting the first-ever [INAUDIBLE] Symposium at Penn Vet. There were also great sorrow, like spending spring break the second year hosting the first-ever [INAUDIBLE] Symposium at Penn Vet. Through it all, we never lost sight of our goals and purpose as future veterinarians. We celebrated successes, and we mourned losses together. We learned so much from our clients and the amazing animals we've taken an oath to protect.

I will be a small animal veterinarian. But a moment of great clarity about our chosen career path was with Mocha, a 20-year-old fistulated Brown Swiss cow. She's a familiar patient to most of you and very well known at New Bolton Center and a hero to hundreds of ruminant patients. While in large animal medicine, I excitingly offered to take Mocha as a patient. After a few days of struggling to help her stand in her stall and difficult walks from the pasture and back, I realized that she was in great pain.

I was with Dr. Sweeney when he euthanized her. He had worked with Mocha almost his whole Penn Vet tenure, and I was blown away by the love he had for the sweet animal. I saw the tears running down Dr. Sweeney's face, and I couldn't help keep it together either. This is a really special experience that will always stay with me as an illustration of the complexities and responsibilities of our field. I know all of you have had moments like I did with Mocha. We helped each other through.

Now, here we are, our final gathering as Penn Vet students. I want to thank you all for being extraordinary people, wonderful classmates, and friends. Most of you were inspired to be veterinarians at an early age by dogs, cats, horses, and hamsters. As you all know, I am here because of raccoons. The smart, cute, interesting creatures captured my heart and set me on my journey to Penn Vet.

When I arrived, you embraced me and my interest in these mass mischievous mammals. I'm also a non-traditional age student with a CV that includes carpentry and managing Wawa and you elected me your class president. I might not have fit the mold as an idealistic representative of a class of 100 women and a small handful of men. But I have always taken this position seriously and with the utmost respect. Through creating Google Forms to capture our class's input to helping many of you troubleshoot life and computer problems, it has been my honor to serve you.

We didn't pick this field because it's easy, brings fame or glory. We did it to be of service to others. And we do not serve alone. Penn Vet has prepared us for almost anything, including global pandemics and paper product shortages. The school also provided us

with a fantastic network of support for the rest of our lives.

As your class president, my final ask of you is to keep this network strong and keep this network active. We've had an amazing four years, and we know how to support each other through the best of times, the worst of times, and the unprecedented times. I cannot imagine another group of people I would have spent vet school with. Be well. Be good. And be in touch always.

Thank you, Pi-- I mean, Dr. Pi-- for your remarks. It is now my special honor to introduce our Associate Dean for Education, Dr. Kathy Michel, who will recite the Veterinarian's Oath with the Class of 2020.

Greetings, doctors. I'm so excited and grateful to be here today and be able to participate in this very special event by leading you in the Veterinarian's Oath. So if you're ready, please repeat after me.

Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine--

Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine--

--I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills--

--I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills--

--for the benefit of society--

--for the benefit of society--

--through the protection of animal health and welfare--

--through the protection of animal health and welfare--

--through the protection of animal health and welfare--

--the prevention and relief of animal suffering--

--the prevention and relief of animal suffering--

--the conservation of animal resources--

--conservation of animal resources--

--the promotion of public health--

--the promotion of public health--

--the advancement of medical knowledge.

--the advancement of medical knowledge.

I will practice my profession conscientiously--

I will practice my profession conscientiously--

--with dignity--

--with dignity--

--and with dignity--

--and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics.

--and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics.

I accept as a lifelong obligation--

I accept as a lifelong obligation--

--continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.

--continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.

Congratulations, doctors.

Thank you, Dr. Michel and our newly-minted veterinarians. Please extend a warm welcome to Penn Vet alumna Dr. Elizabeth Bales V2000 who will briefly address the class to present the class flag to the class of 2020.

Congratulations, doctors. You did it. Remember the last time I saw you? You were first-year students at orientation four years ago, excited for all that lay before you. And since then, you have studied and worked and sacrificed in a way that only other Penn Vet grads understand. And you made it here today. And you did it in one of the most difficult times in history.

You deserve to celebrate. You have earned a tremendous gift. This education gives you world-class tools to understand and engage in any medical or scientific problem that we face and contribute to it in a meaningful way to solve it.

So how does it feel to be needed? Because the world needs you now more than ever. And we veterinarians need you too. So reach out to us. We're here for you. We are all anxious and excited for the unprecedented challenges that lie before us. And if anyone can figure this out and make a difference, it's us. So raise a glass. Catch your breath. And then let's get to work. Welcome, doctors. You're one of us now.

Thank you, Dr. Bales. And now please enjoy the following well wishes from V2020's beloved faculty.

Congratulations, Class of 2020. The last several weeks have been a challenging time for all of us. And although I am quite confident you did not expect your last few weeks on clinics to be virtual, rest assured that you have chosen an amazing profession that will most certainly carry you successfully into the future from an institution that has prepared you in the absolute best way possible.

V'20 demonstrated its strength of character and determination to succeed throughout the first three years of your educational journey. But your resilience and flexibility has really shown through in the way you have adapted to make the most of your experiences in the last several weeks.

In the future that we are all collectively creating post COVID-19, the role of the veterinarian could not be more important. We will be playing an essential role as the world considers the impact of zoonotic diseases, how veterinarians advance health care for human and for animals, securing food safety in the most challenging conditions, and valuing the importance of the animal-human bond for our social well-being.

You will all go out into the world and be impactful in these areas, and your training, integrity, passion, and collective experiences gained in a very unique moment in history will surely lead to your immense success. Thank you for all that you have done for Penn Vet so far, and thank you for all that you will do in the future to make us proud that you are part of the Penn Vet family. Congratulations, Class of 2020. And to Jen and Daria, we will still have to do a congratulatory dinner at some point, I promise. Thank you very much.

Hey, Pi. Hey, Daria. Hey, Grant. Hey, Brianne. Hey, Seth. Hey, all of you 2020's. Boy, you've come such a long way. I remember when you guys first walked in the front door of the vet school and you hardly knew where the restrooms were. You didn't know what a Wawa was good for. You didn't know nothing. You didn't know one end of the dog from another. And we took you through it, and we had some pretty good times doing it. We took you to the zoo. We even took you down to the med school to see what people look like inside-- not so very different from our animals.

But you've come such a long way, and I'm very proud of you. I'm really sorry that we have to do it this way. I love graduation. It's such a great and happy occasion when you guys show up at Franklin Field and raise your rectal examination sleeves. Everybody has a huge hoot and a great get together at Annenberg. It's not happening this year, and I'm very sorry that that's the case. But, dang, I'm proud of you and I'm with you in spirit. And good luck in your beautiful careers.

Greetings, Class of 2020. I'm sorry that I can't be with you in person. But you must know that our difficult circumstances detract not one bit from the wonderful accomplishments of yours that we're celebrating today. It was a privilege to have you as students in parasitology in second year. That was a very challenging semester, and you came

through it with tremendous grace and style and, above all, with unqualified success.

Today, my thoughts go back especially to the day that we met at your orientation now four years ago. Perhaps you remember that I asked you then to look to your right and look to your left, and I told you that the faculty and staff of Penn Vet were looking forward to seeing each and every one of you on the stage in the Annenberg Center at your graduation four years hence.

Well, that day is here. And while we're not at the Annenberg Center, I do hope that you're sitting side by side with people you love and who love you. So let's relive that moment four years ago. Please look to your left and to your right and see the faces of those who have cheered you on and supported you during this great quest and know that they and I are bursting with pride in you today. Congratulations, Class of 2020.

Congratulations, V'20. You made it. Today is a celebration of your accomplishments, and we are all exceptionally proud of you. I wanted to take this opportunity to welcome you to our extraordinary profession. And as you practice the art of veterinary medicine, consider every time that you treat an apprehensive patient and counsel an anxious client as your main performance. You are always on stage, and you are the headliner. Don't save your best efforts for another day. Always give it 100%, even 110%.

2020 will be memorable to all of us. But in this time of social distancing and self-isolation, remember that your class will always be connected, connected to one another and connected to Penn Vet. Ryan Hospital will always be there for you, and I look forward to seeing where y'all will land.

Life is really not about where you end up. It's all the things you learn along the way. Every high and every low you experience will make you a stronger and a better doctor. So enjoy the ride. It's been an honor and a privilege to work amongst you. Congratulations. Penn Vet strong. See you next time.

First, I would like to just do this. Wow. Congratulations, Class of 2020. Today is a wonderful day. I'm honored to be here with you and to chat with you on such a great day, your day. We all know these are odd times and tough times to get out there tomorrow and to get started working as a veterinarian. But someone once said a lack of opportunities will clear you a path for new ideas. Use these challenging times to be creative, develop new ideas, or to change things.

Now, you know me, and you know I'm all about a good acronym. Over the years that you've known me, I have shared a few acronyms with you, such as [INAUDIBLE]. This acronym would help you to sort out gram-positive from gram-negative bacteria. I also would have shared with you PVT TIM HALL. This acronym would be to help you to remember the 10 essential amino acids needed in your diet to keep you healthy, to keep you alive.

And there's a new acronym, APRIL, that maybe I haven't shared with you. But this acronym is to help you to remember important values to live by. Now, APRIL are values

established by the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, New Bolton Center specifically. They were established to help to create a very positive working environment. Now, you have been living with these values for the past four years, maybe unknowingly, but you have been.

So as you leave the University of Pennsylvania and enter the real world, I'd suggest that you take these values with you-- APRIL. A is for accountability. Be responsible for what you do. Passion is for P. Have boundless enthusiasm for what you do. As a veterinarian out there, this is your day. I can't imagine you being more enthusiastic about what will happen with you. But just keep that enthusiasm for the rest of your career as a veterinarian.

Respect is for the R. Show admiration for others. You will encounter so many people-- colleagues, clients, just people. Just show admiration. I is for integrity. Be honest. Make an honest living. Just respect and be honest with yourself as a veterinarian.

And last, L is for leadership. Influence others to accomplish something good. The University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine really cherishes these values. And, for sure, leadership is something they would have liked to have you learn and do.

Personally, I would like to leave you with a quote to live by. It was said to me by my mother during tough times of going through vet school, even before vet school, trying to get to vet school. It was tough. And my mother once told me, "Put your head down and work and good things will come to you." So I encourage you, the Class of 2020, to put your head down and work, and I know good things will come to you. Congratulations, the Class of 2020, and good luck out there, and enjoy.

At this time, I will turn over the ceremonies to Dean Andrew Hoffman for his closing remarks.

The awesome thing is that you have officially graduated. So now I invite you to the post-commencement celebration.

[MUSIC PLAYING]