Good morning! I am so proud this morning to welcome you, the graduates of SUNY Potsdam’s Class of 2017.

Today we celebrate you. Whether you are the first person in your family to graduate from college, or come from a long line of family members with college degrees. Whether you are a North Country native or you come from New York City. Whether you hail from Alaska—and there are two of you graduating here today—or Hawaii. Whether you are an international student, coming to us from China or Germany, or just next door from Canada. Whether you are going to be hooded for your master’s degree, or walk across the stage to receive your bachelor’s degree, this is your day. Today, we honor the class of 2017 and all you have attained.

This was a year of many firsts. All of you can proudly claim to be the first class to graduate in Potsdam’s third century. But many of you participated in other firsts for SUNY Potsdam students.
- the first class to perform in the Performing Arts Center
- the first classes to travel to Cuba
- the first to perform in Carnegie Hall
- the first to backpack through the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico

Some of you are the first to graduate from our new programs in exercise science, graphic design & new media, international studies. Some of you are the first cadets to graduate from our Law Enforcement Training Institute.

We are proud of all of you: all who tried something new, who said “yes” to opportunity. Who are leaving Potsdam changed, a different person from the one who entered us just a few years ago.

As college students, you have had to forge ahead, to find your own path. Maybe you ended up studying a subject you never thought you would have during that first day of orientation. Maybe you had to juggle your studies with your passion for athletics, the arts, student government, or activism. Maybe you took an internship, conducted research with a professor or studied abroad. One thing is certain: you did it while learning to survive the North Country winters. Despite the hurdles, you made it. You persisted. And we are so proud of you.

As excited as I am to see what the future holds for Potsdam in our third century, I am even more excited to see what the future holds for you, our graduates. I can confidently make a few predictions:

First, you are well poised to make a difference in your communities. Almost a fourth of you are graduating with degrees in education, destined to make a difference in the lives of countless students in the years ahead.

Nearly 40 percent of you are graduating with a degree in science, social science or math. You, too, have the potential to bring that Potsdam creativity to your careers in STEM, the human services, or wherever your career takes you.
Another quarter are majoring in the arts. When the world seems a difficult place, we know we can look to you to be creating the music, the theatre, the dance, the art that makes our world a much richer, more joyful and vibrant place.

Our society needs all the gifts that you, as Potsdam alumni, will be bringing to the world.

As you embark on your next journey, remember your time here. You have all taken away lessons, friendships and memories to last a lifetime. You have already had an indelible impact on SUNY Potsdam. And we are eager to see the changes that you, the class of 2017, will make in the world.