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Commencement Greeting (as prepared) – Sunday, May 21, 2023

Most of you applied to UVM without ever knowing the word “coronavirus.” When people tell us what research degrees will require, they often tell us that we will spend a lot of time in isolation, but ‘isolation’ took on a whole new meaning when the pandemic hit. Many of us are learning how to be social humans once more, and we are all going to help define what the new normal is. In fact, I am proud that my fellow students – both graduate and undergraduate – are taking such an active role in making that new normal.

In a course here at UVM, I learned about how generational differences show up in the workplace. Major historical events and trends shape the ways that certain generations approach work. Understanding these generational differences can help leaders to lead their teams effectively.

There is a generational difference between most graduate students and undergraduate students. I had the privilege of living almost 31 years of my life before COVID-19 changed the world forever. I was 31 years old when I watched the video of the murder of George Floyd, the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests, and the toppling of Christopher Columbus statues.

People who were still teenagers when these events occurred are now graduating from college.

These events will be taught in future versions of the same course that I took here at UVM. Your generation will be defined by how you respond to these events. You get to decide how to define your generation.

Many of us who are just a few years older than you recognize that there is something special about you, but we may struggle to understand how to work with you. I hear this from many graduate students. We all have a part to play in bridging the generational gap. When we succeed at bridging this gap, we can build a brighter future that has only been a dream.

At one time or another, most of us face an intense feeling of what is called “imposter syndrome,” and some of you may wonder where or if you will belong in the workplace. Let me assure you, the UVM

degrees we have earned and the skills each of us have developed here mean we will succeed – and we know that *everyone* belongs.

We have all learned many things here at UVM, and we aspire to be lifelong learners. When we leave this campus and go out into the world, let us continue learning to work across all our differences to create a future where we all prosper.

Congratulations to the Class of 2023!