

Suresh V. Garimella, President of the University of Vermont and Professor of Mechanical Engineering
Commencement Remarks (as prepared) – Sunday, May 21, 2023

Good morning! And what a glorious morning it is!

I am very pleased to extend a warm welcome to our trustees, distinguished guests, our faculty and staff colleagues, family and friends, our honorary degree recipients, and most especially, the amazing Class of 2023 and all those graduating with advanced degrees today.

It is my great honor to preside over the University of Vermont's 222nd Commencement celebration.

And we are proud to recognize the years of commitment, perseverance, and hard work invested by those of you graduating today to reach this milestone.

Just a few days ago, I had the experience of watching our son graduate from college. I know very well the feeling of pride that parents, families, mentors and friends share at these occasions.

And so, before I proceed, let me take a moment to recognize those here with us who supported you throughout your UVM journey. Would all of the parents, grandparents, siblings, spouses, families and loved ones please stand so we may express our sincere thanks? ... Thank you, on behalf of the UVM community and on behalf of everyone graduating today—our students couldn't have done this without YOU. Well done, families and friends!

I hope the pride all of us gathered to celebrate today feel in you only begins to reflect the pride you feel in yourselves. Every bit of applause, every congratulatory word and embrace, every moment of recognition is truly yours. Soak it in and enjoy it. You've certainly earned it.

Today is a culmination, not a conclusion. It is also not really a beginning, even if that is the most common definition of the word commencement. In reality, the journey of learning and discovery neither begins nor ends here. These are lifelong pursuits for all of us.

We carry into each new stage of that journey the experiences we've accrued and the perspectives we've gained, ... and we build upon them. This university is made great not only by the growth that occurs here, but also the wealth of character and potential that is brought here with each new class. The Class of 2023 is a wonderful example of that.

This is not the end of the story, but rather the turning of a page to an exciting next chapter not yet written. The page is empty to the eye but overflowing with potential. As author Vladimir Nabokov wrote, “The pages are still blank, but there is a miraculous feeling of the words all being there, written in invisible ink and clamoring to become visible.” There is so much ahead for you to make visible.

This chapter drawing to a close here today is one we have written together – because like many of you, I came to UVM four years ago. On my own path of learning and discovery, I turned the page of my story to a thrilling new chapter that held great possibility.

The growth that I have experienced over these past four years here as your president has forever changed me for the better, as a professional and a person. In many ways, I have your class to thank for that.

I’ve asked questions, conducted research, overcome obstacles and celebrated discovery and success right alongside you. Like you, I’ve made so many of the invaluable connections that make higher education vital to growth – in classrooms and laboratories and libraries, in campus encounters and virtual meetings, in words and action, here at UVM, in the surrounding community and the state beyond.

Representing the flagship university of such a special state is a privilege we have shared, and in return UVM has fulfilled its responsibility – in the words of today’s keynote speaker, Sethuraman Panchanathan – to provide an environment that empowers us to exercise our creativity and our innovative spirit.

Along the way, we have also shared the kind of adversity that brings out true character and forges unbreakable bonds like nothing else. We weathered together the upheaval caused by a global pandemic, relying on each other for support and strength. In moments of uncertainty and doubt, we found ways to move forward in unity.

Galvanized by Our Common Ground values, we strived together to embody what is best in all of us, our campus community and our world. I look out over this gathering and I see just that: the best of what is possible, brought to life in all of you.

Of course, your story did not begin at this university. Some of your early pages were written in small towns in Vermont, and some on mountains in Colorado or on subway cars in New York City. Some, like mine, in special places as different and as far from Vermont as one can imagine. But the pages we write here together are essential to the growth and discovery that will fuel this class’s success. And these pages hold the plans to solutions that will change our world for the better.

All that you have learned and accomplished at UVM has propelled you to this point and will carry you beyond it. Whether continuing academic excellence in graduate studies or embarking on the first steps in a successful professional career, each of you has a compelling story ahead – and the skills and tools to live it with confidence.

And so I say to you, UVM Class of 2023: Go forth and write your next chapter in bold strokes. Bring those invisible words to life on the page and dauntlessly go wherever your stories take you.

UVM will always be a part of your story upon which you can look back for guidance, inspiration, and fond memories. You are a credit to this university, and you have your alma mater's very best wishes throughout your respective journeys.

Congratulations, Class of 2023.