

105th UP Diliman Commencement Exercises
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Commencement Speech:
A commitment to nation building

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Members of the Board of Regents, Chancellor Michael Tan and his able team, my hardworking colleagues in the UP System Administration, our dedicated faculty and staff, our students (the best and brightest in the country), esteemed alumni and guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning! With the sunflowers still abloom and the rain on hold¹ until we finish the commencement exercises, I can say that the morning has broken, together with our hopes and gladness.

Congratulations to the UP Diliman Class of 2016!

I am sure most of you woke up very early today, while others failed to catch some sleep because of excitement. Never mind, we know the trials you went through and this is your shining moment! We feel your joy and optimism. And we share your pride in your success. You are yet so young in years, but already so accomplished.

So ready you are to embrace the future. You have grown in knowledge and fortitude. You have been molded and transformed into sterner stuff. Through the challenging years, you have learned to live the life of a scholar—a joyful lover of learning—in UP Diliman, our beloved Alma Mater, surrounded by the inspiring beauty of the majestic acacia trees lining our Academic Oval in the widest expanse of verdant greenery in the whole of Metro Manila!

Indeed, dear graduates, this is your day of recognition and celebration! We honor you and your parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles and aunts, guardians, teachers, mentors, and benefactors, together with our university administrators and staff—all who collectively contributed to your Nurture and Nurture. They constitute your extended family who helped you become who you are today.

¹ Rain actually fell within less than an hour following the conclusion of the ceremonies.

As we bid you go forth, here are some thoughts—my *pabaon* for you.

***You make a living by what you get, but you make a life by what you give.*²**

This is a popular quote of unknown origin but commonly attributed to Sir Winston Churchill. To me, its message is that life is more than just working for a living, and that a life of giving and service provides meaning and purpose to our existence. From this notion of life logically flows this year's commencement theme, *Pumailanlang, paglingkuran ang bayan!*

You graduates have reached another important milestone in your life, a point at which you choose where you go next and which path to follow. The choice, for sure, is not as easy as solving for x in a Math class. Sometimes *that* is hard, too. But the problems you will face from now on demand more than just intellect. You will need a strong sense of values, a good level of maturity, and a different kind of wisdom. In comparison, your earlier decision to study in UP and take your studies seriously might appear now to be a no-brainer.

Around you, graduates, are people who have given a lot to bring you to this morning's ceremonies—your parents, your mentors, your friends. These are people you know and can thank individually. But you also have faceless supporters: the multitudes of taxpaying Filipinos who have contributed collectively to your education in UP—the very reason you are called *Iskolar ng Bayan*. How do you thank these benefactors—the Filipino people?

Making a living with excellence and honor

Making a living is something everyone needs to do, whether it is to help uplift the economic condition of your family, to pay your own bills and purchases, to prove your mettle to your elders and peers, or simply to affirm your status as a productive member of society.

That is why, by all means, make a living and earn your keep. Use everything you learned in the University to do your work well and eventually excel in your endeavor. Being the best in what you do is a great tribute you can offer to UP and to our nation and people. It does not matter whether you are a corporate employee, a professional practitioner, a striving artist, an academic, a social worker, or an entrepreneur.

² Commonly attributed to Winston Churchill, this quote has never been found in any of his communications.

As you do better in what you are doing to make a living, get the accolades, the awards, the praises. Any of these is a mark of what is conventionally called achievement, the epitome of excellence.

But in your pursuit of excellence, do not overlook honor. Honor determines the value of excellent work. Being ethical in your professional dealings, and moral in your personal interactions, is the honorable way of living that I hope you learned in the University and will live by in the real world.

I know it is hard to be honorable amidst the temptations of fast money and instant fame. But holding yourself up to high standards of behavior when you pursue excellence is what builds your integrity. This word, *integrity*, comes from the Latin word '*integer*', meaning intact or whole.

With no exception, honor is in tandem with UP's tradition of excellence. *Dangal at husay*, as we say in Filipino—they go hand in hand. Both, together, will make you whole and define your integrity. You have integrity only when your sterling façade is a true reflection of your inner core.

Staying socially connected

Perhaps you will, indeed, make a living with excellence and honor. But will you be content with just that?

You need to *connect*. Connect with your boss, workmates, peers, and clients. *More importantly, connect with our people. That is because you studied in UP not to become this nation's privileged intellectual elite—but this nation's hope.*

Making a life of giving and service

In my investiture as UP President in 2011, I proclaimed: **We in UP must succeed not because we have a reputation to keep but because we have a country to serve.** I'm sharing this imperative again today because we must keep returning to such kind of mindset—a mindset that makes your UP education extraordinary. *Placing the country above self is what makes you extraordinary.*

You are called to soar, *Pumailanlang*, because you are now equipped with what it takes to advance yourselves in any endeavor you choose to

pursue. By soaring, you place yourselves in a better position to serve our nation (*paglingkuran ang bayan*).

So I hope that as you make a living, you will also consider service as *your* investment in what this nation can be. I hope you will commit to a life of giving and service. It is a commitment to a better nation and a better world for everyone to live in.

This may not come instantly for many of you, because of the immediate need to make a living. But as you make a living, endeavor as well to better yourselves and your capabilities. Hone your skills and expertise. Build up a career and work towards financial sufficiency. So when you are ready to make a life of service someday, you will have more to give.

I am sure most of you here would describe today's ceremony as a moment of happiness. And more moments like this—such as getting your academic degrees, getting hired, winning a contest, making breakthroughs—will make you even happier. Notice though, that most of these moments of happiness are moments when you get something: your diploma, your first salary, your first car, or even your first love. It's about getting, taking, having. That's okay. After all, you deserve to get the things that you have worked hard for.

Making a life of service may not be as happy. You may become overworked, underpaid, and even unappreciated. People may, and often will, forget to thank you along the way. Yet for people who have dedicated their lives to the Filipino people, fulfillment is not in the happy prospects of money, fame, or power. More than happiness then, service is about attaining a sense of **meaning and purpose**. At the end of the day, which makes us more satisfied?

You have, in fact, already given a lot by studying well and preparing yourselves to become competent graduates of UP. My preference, though, is for you to make a longer-term plan for a life of giving and service—not just immediately after graduation but more so in the future when you are better able, more capable, and less burdened by the day-to-day concerns of making a living.

Of the thousands who aspire to enter UP year after year, less than a fifth make it. The few who make it are given a world-class education by excellent

teachers, backed by resources that are not accessible to many schools in the country. The nation is investing in UP so that it can deliver on its mandate of producing competent and responsible leaders. We take our mandate seriously. This is a responsibility we must bear as the country's lone national university—our **UP: Shaping Minds that Shape the Nation**.

Investing in human capital development

Our country is still confronted with challenges so complex that it needs the best and brightest minds we can muster. Finding solutions is our task in UP, and your challenge as UP graduates.

At this point, I would like to call on our UP graduates who are prepared to invest more time in developing their capability to be of greater service to our country and people. I encourage you to join the academe and pursue postgraduate studies here or abroad. The country needs to massively develop its human or knowledge capital, which is the key to the technological innovation needed to achieve and sustain inclusive growth that reduces inequality and poverty.

Higher level education and training will enable you to create new knowledge, innovate products and processes, and improve productivity. Technology innovation supports the manufacturing sector, which generates quality jobs. Scientific and engineering research is needed not just in manufacturing, but also in agriculture, health, transport and communications, and other services sectors which provide our people their basic needs. And because an interdisciplinary approach is important in setting the path to growth and development, the promotion of science and technology should be closely integrated with the social sciences, the arts, and the humanities to ensure the holistic development of the Filipino society.

If you become a well-trained professor in the academe, you can contribute by doing research and development to find solutions to our country's most persistent problems, and by performing public service to government, industry, and society as a whole. Most importantly, you can contribute to educating our youth, to create generations of Filipinos who will be better than we are now. You can mentor, as you have been mentored. In the academe, you will enjoy the best of both worlds: you will make a living as you make a life of giving and service.

I am not saying UP graduates have the monopoly of knowledge and ability. Still, you are the ones especially expected to take leadership in shaping the nation. Always remember, you are from the University of the *Philippines*. You carry the name of our nation in your degree wherever life takes you, however you choose to make a living or *make a life*.

Cherishing your UP heritage—your UP “DNA”

I advise you to always think back to what you cherished most about your UP education—your UP heritage, your UP “DNA”. Aside from your specialized education (your major), it was general education or GE which shaped your character. From GE, you developed self-confidence and learned to be less silent and shy. You learned to use language to express yourselves and communicate better. From GE, you learned to think on the “high ground” — philosophically, independently, integratively, creatively, “out of the box”. You so learned by imbibing many of the greatest works of all time in the arts, music, literature, and the humanities, in social and political thought and philosophy; works of artists and writers both from the West and the East, including those of our own national hero Jose Rizal. You experienced a broadening, heightening and deepening of your life’s perceptions, and a quickening of your life’s decisions and actions.

I am sure GE created in you what we call an enriched interior life of the mind and of the heart—your interior being, your valued, treasured internal space and time. Continue to ponder the unsolved mysteries, the unanswered questions, of your existence, such as “Who is responsible for the suffering of the innocents?” or “Who is responsible for the earth?” Continue to spend quiet time alone, for yourself, by yourself, to reflect on the meaning and purpose of your life. So that your decisions—the choices you make—are drawn from within you, and driven by inner conviction and commitment.

We know that every UP student, kindled by idealism, has at one time or another joined activist discourses on burning issues concerning the University and the country. Today, I exhort you to reassess the kind of activism you will pursue going forward, now that you have gained skills in logical and evidence-based argumentation, now that you possess greater analytical and integrative capabilities. Do engage in what I call constructive activism, the highest form being progressive volunteerism. Beyond pointing out and complaining about

our problems, volunteer to propose creative, innovative solutions, and take the initiative to implement them. Be a builder of this nation.

Drawing inspiration from Jose Rizal

More than a hundred years ago, Jose Rizal wrote in *El Filibusterismo*, through the character of Padre Florentino, a question that I hope we can confidently answer today: “Where are the youth who will consecrate their golden hours, their illusions, and their enthusiasm to the welfare of their native land?”

Bring to mind the image of our greatest role model, our national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal, who is our quintessential philosophical GE or generalist man, but who was also a specialist—a social treatise writer, a novelist, poet, and polyglot (master of many languages), a sculptor and painter, an ophthalmologist and a self-taught engineer. Thus, our model of an interdisciplinary person.

Rizal was a learned Filipino who championed education as the single, most important transformer of society. But most of all, Rizal was a man of honor. He was an unconventional, gentle, subtle, soft-spoken leader whose lasting legacy originated from his scholarly life and works, the power of his mind and the power of his pen. He was a hero who devoted his short life to the greater, higher, longer-term good of his country, until the very moment of his death.

How do we live and give like Rizal? We may not each be a genius like Rizal—then again maybe you are but just don’t know it yet—but by working together, we may collectively become a composite Rizal.

Deciding on the path to follow

In the crossroad you are now, any number of you may decide to follow any of the following paths:

Number 1. Be an academic; continue on to your PhD studies; aim to be a faculty member of UP or another higher education institution; contribute new knowledge through innovation and creativity; be a teacher, a mentor, a nonbiological parent of limitless number of children, to generation after generation of students, semester-in and semester-out; instill in them honor

and excellence in the service of the Filipino people; create that ripple or multiplier effect in higher education that our country direly needs.

Number 2: Join industry and business as an employee, as an entrepreneur, as a professional; contribute to private good, contribute to job creation and inclusive growth; develop high-value knowledge-based Filipino products and services; continue to improve your competencies and skills; pursue a professional masters degree, take regular training courses; and be the UP-trained social conscience and transformer of the corporate world, leading it to commit to social engagement and responsibility.

Number 3: Be an NGO advocate; use knowledge-based interventions and communications to improve the quality and span of human life; hold as paramount the conservation and sustainability of our environment side by side with human progress.

And Number 4: Join the rank-and-file of government; rise up through the echelons of public governance; and uphold in government the standards we have set for UP. Implement development programs at every level in cooperation with the academe, the private sector, and the civil society. Empower government offices with knowledge and systems. And, of course, keep in mind that to do even better in these endeavors you also need to pursue postgraduate studies.

A commitment to nation building

I fervently believe, ladies and gentlemen, that if our UP graduates pursue any of these or other noble paths and if our youth live their lives with integrity and with a sense of social responsibility, we will succeed in building our nation.

Tinatawagan ko kayo, mga Iskolar ng Bayan: may Rizal's call be your commitment to the nation.

No, let Rizal's call be our joint commitment to the nation as **One UP**.

Maraming salamat po.

Padayon, UP!