

Pambungad na Bati
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Tsanselor, UP Diliman
Ika-107 Pangkalahatang Pagtatapos
24 Hunyo 2018

Kgg. Senador Loren Legarda,
Members of the diplomatic corps,
Lupon ng mga Rehente ng UP,
Pangulo ng UP Danilo L. Concepcion at mga opisyaales ng UP System,
Mga kasama ko sa UP Diliman: mga bise-tsanselor, dekanano at director,
Mga guro,
Mga magulang, mga Lolo't Lola, mga Ate at Kuya at mga mahal ninyo sa buhay,
Mga magsisipagtapos ngayong araw,

Magandang umaga, and I mean that from my heart, as we worried about the rains, first threatening to kill off our sunflowers, then, as today approached, about whether we could push through at all with the commencement. Magandang umaga, maayong buntag, naimbag a bigat, naku kung puedeng ulitin sa lahat na mga wika ng Pilipinas, at ng mundo.

Welcome to the 107th commencement exercises.

We tend to think of university campuses in terms of history, the older the better, with many anniversaries. As chancellor, and an anthropologist, I am more interested in the stories of the present, of how our students, faculty and staff live day to day, and what needs to be done to improve those lives.

At the start of the schoolyear 2017-2018, together with all state universities and colleges and several city colleges, UP began a tuition-free policy for undergraduates. We went a step further than the other schools, biting the bullet and not collecting fees of any kind. It was a bold move, and has meant much belt-tightening.

You would think our students no longer have financial problems but I continue to get stories of students having to stop schooling because they can't afford day to day living expenses: room and board, transportation, supplies. I continue to hear of students who skip meals, and we continue to have our feeding programs for undernourished students.

Graduate students, who are not covered by the free tuition policy, send in letters appealing for a delay in payment of fees because of delays in their salaries, or because they lost a job, or missed a contract.

For today's commencement I asked our deans to share a memorable story or stories that I could use. The best one came from School of Library and Information Sciences Dean Kate Obile, who noted their school had many working students who had to live with Luli, lulubog lilitaw. She mentioned one student in particular who had first been sent to high school and college by her employer. She had never heard of UP but after she did, she was determined to get into our institution. She did this, and weathered several Luli, lulubog lilitaw. Pagbati, Ate Niezel Edianon, who is finishing today, at the age of 34, and with only one additional year from the usual 4.

We have many more stories of students overcoming adversity. We have Miggy Bautista who I first met in 2014 during an orientation for new freshmen. He was with his parents, and on a wheelchair because of muscular dystrophy. I told Miggy we would work hard to get an elevator for Palma Hall, where he was a political science major. I was able to allocate funds for the Palma elevator but it turned out there were structural and logistical problems in what should be the shaft, and without the funds, we still don't have the elevator. Miggy shifted to business administration, where they do have an elevator, but which hasn't been working.

Miggy graduates today and I salute him for his fortitude and perseverance even as I apologize to him and other PWDs or people with disabilities.

Here at UP Diliman, we are now tackling PWDs in its widest definition, to include the many students who face psychosocial problems. We worry in particular about serious problems of clinical depression, but are encouraged that many who do have depression are graduating today, some even with Latin honors. Pagbati ulit.

But we also remember today the students who didn't quite make it, despite medical attention and medication, and we are determined to continue to develop as many psychosocial support initiatives as possible for our students, faculty and staff.

I think of the night I visited at a wake in September last year for Carl Arnaiz, who despite growing up in poverty was able to get into Makati Science High School and into UP Diliman in 2014, only to drop out after a semester because of clinical depression. If he had stayed he would be graduating today. At the wake, his mother told me Carl spoke, all the time, about returning to college but only if it was UP. He was among the young people killed by police in a particularly bloody week, in the case of Carl, supposedly because he had held up a taxi driver.

The case remains unresolved, a reminder of the challenges of living in a post-truth society. Never have we faced such a wide discrepancy between what we teach – in terms of ideals and virtues – and what our students, our young people, see in the real world.

Yet we have continued with what has to be done in education and you, the students, continue to provide us with hope. I think of our varsity teams being emblematic, many having to practice in the most difficult of conditions because we are in transition toward a new sports complex. We've had to rent space or make do with whatever we have. I think of the football teams plodding through mud in the sunken garden, and having to share space with the UP Fair during a most crucial time with the football competitions in full swing during the last UAAP season. The men's team not only survived, but brought home the championship.

I worry about a world becoming more unkind and arrogant, but am comforted by many stories of kindness. Last year we once again hosted visitors from our national minority groups, at one

point some 3000 of them camped out in Diliman. There were many stories of kindness during that visit, which was a gargantuan project. Equally important though were the many smaller acts of kindness. The other night I accidentally came across a post about engineering students raising funds for the medical expenses of Mang Alex, one of the college's security guards and the other week I had stories of students rescuing cats who were being hunted down and killed in one of our informal settler communities. Students, faculty and staff have also been raising money and offering volunteer time for a larger animal welfare program that includes neutering dogs and cats so they won't multiply.

I am sure there are many more untold stories of our iskolar ng bayan's sense of pakikipagkapwa. We do our share and have found little things do count, like the Kapihan – free food and coffee and wifi and spaces for group work – organized during finals week. I thank the UP Singing Ambassadors for adding a new perk: popping in late at night to serenade the students who are reviewing and working on their term papers.

As you leave UP Diliman, we are preparing to welcome a new batch of freshmen, products of the K-12 reforms. We have burned the midnight oil, in conference rooms and coffee shops, to revise some 131 degree programs. We are working double time with our dorms, food service and other vital facilities but face many obstacles. We had to return much needed electric vehicles (e-kot) to the company because we could not buy them. . .government procurement rules were so tough it would have taken us five years, based on experiences, to get them.

Many of you have benefited as iskolar ng bayan in the full sense of the word, and you are still exempt from return service, which we will require starting this schoolyear for all who benefit from the no tuition fee policy.

But even if you are not required to render return service, I hope you will think of coming back, and giving back. Huwag munang magisip na maging balikbayan. Ang kailangan, pagbabalik bayan, at least stay and work and serve our country.

Magandang umaga sa inyong lahat.