

UP Diliman Commencement Exercises

Opening Remarks

Michael L. Tan

June 30, 2019

Our guest speaker, National Artist and Professor Emerita Amelia Lapena Bonifacio;

Members of the UP Board of Regents;

Former Presidents Noel Soriano and Francisco Nemenzo;

President Danilo Concepcion and officials of the UP System;

My vice chancellors, deans and directors, fellow faculty,

Parents, grandparents, spouses and partners, children and all other significant others of our more than 5000 graduates of 2019,

Isang magandang at maulan na umaga sa inyong lahat.

The sunflowers bloomed somewhat early, and held out, even while battered by the rains, to make it today. We made it as well despite the weather forecasts, and the symbolism of strength amid adversity could not have been more appropriate, this batch graduating as we mark the 70th anniversary of UP Diliman. It was a move that met with strong opposition from faculty and students from the time it was proposed in the 1930s, all the way up to that momentous day when we transferred the Oblation to what seemed to be a wilderness.

It was the foresight and tenacity of UP President Bienvenido Gonzales and others that allowed a UP Diliman to come into existence, and it is that boldness of vision and spirit, this Diwa ng Diliman, that must permeate our commencement exercises today.

This bold spirit is what I want to describe in my opening remarks, with the help of stories sent in by our deans, the many occasions of victory and jubilation, as well as the trials and tribulations.

We take pride today in the 54 summa cum laudes, the highest in UP's history and which I know will again elicit accusations of grades inflation. But, can we help it that we keep getting the brightest of students (with bright mothers of course, intelligence being largely maternally inherited, but thank you as well to fathers who helped genetically as well as in nurturance)? Can we help it too that UP has become more enabling, so visible in the current frenzy of building, and

I must thank UP President Concepcion here for making this possible, unprecedented since the 1950s in the early days of UP Diliman.

Together with the buildings, we continue to expand many services and to introduce new ones for the mind, the body and the spirit to bring out the full potential of our iskos and iskas, from financial support (even with free tuition, there are many other expenses students and their families face), nutrition, housing, opportunities for out of classroom learning including participation in seminars, international exchanges, psychosocial support all the way up to emotional support dogs. You may have seen two of those dogs in Quezon Hall with their maroon collars, which means they can be approached whether you're stressed or not.

We see the fruits of this labor in the changing landscape of honors.

As in the past, many of the summa cum laudes today come from science and technology colleges, but today, we take extra pride in the four summas from the College of Fine Arts and three from the College of Human Kinetics, all in sports science.

What strikes me about our summa cum laudes is that so many of them were able to combine academics with serving in student councils, student organizations, serving others

Let us not limit ourselves to the summas. At the College of Music, Alexa Torte is graduating magna cum laude, the first ever for a Bachelor of Music in dance. I attended her college recognition rites where she delivered the valedictory speech, projecting dance as a metaphor for isko and iska lives with long hours of study and practice, of repeated stumbling and rising again with determination.

Beyond the Latin honors, we celebrate the dare-to-dream, dare to win attitude of our students, so dramatically epitomized by the now famous slogan, "Atin Ito" – victory will be our's -- coined by Paul Desidero, captain of the men's basketball team that catapulted UP into 2nd place in the 2018-2019 UAAP basketball tournament, our entry into the Final 4 breaking a 22-year old drought. Several of the team's members are graduating today, but they leave their spirit of daring for future generations of players.

Determination too is the word to describe Norman Rueda, who is the first visually challenged student to finish a Bachelor of Music in UP. His major is composition.

(UP Diliman's efforts toward inclusion are reflected as well in today's commencement exercises where we have, for the first time, someone to sign for the hearing impaired. We thank the College of Education's faculty for this service.)

Then too there's the determination of Mark Querubin who completed his academic requirements at the School of Economics in 1989 but did not pick up his degree, choosing instead to start working immediately in film and making his mark. He returned last year to inquire about getting his degree, only to find out the records for one subject had gone missing. He retook that one subject and is finally graduating today.

I must share, too, an account from the dean of the School of Library and Information Science, Kate Obille, about their oldest undergraduate Christina Guevarra, who struggled for 20 years to finish her degree, combining work with study. Today, she invited the parents of two UP students, Karen Empeno and Sherlyn Cadapan, who were abducted by the military in 2006 while serving communities. Christina felt that she should share her joys of graduating today with the parents of Karen and Sherlyn, who would have graduated so many years ago.

We salute the many other graduates who were working students. I want to mention my own family driver, Melchor Ayon-ayon, who is today getting a postgraduate Diploma in Exercise and Sports Science.

The College of Science's summa of summa cum laudes this year is Jamie Lim, GWA 1.073, no mean achievement considering she is from the Institute of Mathematics.

The dean of science, Dr. Laura David, sent as her pride story this information: Jamie is also a karate champion, winning medals in international competitions.

I actually knew about Jamie's karate championships from a most unexpected source. I sign hundreds of faculty appointment papers each year, a task that would be boring if I did not look at the CVs of the people being appointed. One time I was signing appointment papers for a certain lecturer in the College of Law, whose name I recognized right away. I looked at her impressive CV, including her stint as the head of Pag-IBIG. What caught my eye though was, on the last page, a paragraph where she mentioned her daughter, Jamie, being a karate champion. Truly a UP biodata, I thought, that speaks of what we love and stand for: not just the academic life, not just lofty declarations of patriotism, but also a love of family.

I am told Jamie will join the math faculty and I feel we are truly privileged in UP Diliman to have Jamie, and her mother, Darlene Berberabe in our faculty.

Both are with us here today. Her father, Samboy Lim, originally planned to be here, and we had made plans for his wheelchair access but the family then decided the rains might pose risks for him. Mother and daughter have cared for Samboy these past few years.

I would like to point out too that Darlene's pre-law degree was in philosophy. Today's valedictory will be made by Joshua Emmanuel T. Ramos, also a philosophy graduate.

How I wish I could share more of our pride, and love, stories but, on the advice of UP Diliman meteorologists, we have "abbreviated" our ceremonies to try to fit into a short window of opportunity where we are assured there will be no rains.

That's Diwa ng Diliman for you, standing up to meet challenges, grace under stress. Buhay isko, buhay iska, mabuhay tayong lahat!