

**Dr. Núñez's Charge to Graduates**  
**Undergraduate Commencement**  
**May 15, 2021**

Greetings and congratulations to the Class of 2021! You made it! And here we are together to celebrate. What an amazing day!

Since you were very young you have heard the stories — some real and some mythical — of men and women triumphing over great odds to emerge victorious. David slayed Goliath. Jack climbed the beanstalk. Thirteen colonies triumphed over the British Empire to form our great nation. The United States landed on the moon. And four months ago, Kamala Harris became the first woman Vice President in our history.

The Class of 2021 has made its own history, overcome its own hurdles. For more than a year, you finished your junior year and made it through your senior year as the entire world faced a pandemic of Biblical proportions.

You hid your joys and sorrows behind a facemask. You stayed home instead of going out. You read a book — maybe even a textbook! — instead of hanging out with your friends. You did all of this as we grappled with a viral disease that has taken the lives of more Americans than World War II, the Vietnam War, and the wars in the Middle East combined.

Through it all you stuck together. You learned how to get the most out of Zoom, WebEx, Go-to-Meeting, and Teams. Even so, we know remote learning cannot replace face-to-face contact with your professors and your classmates.

That is why this academic year, two-thirds of our classes were still on-ground, far more than the other state universities in Connecticut. We pride ourselves on being a residential campus, and our housing occupancy of more than 60 percent was also the highest in Connecticut.

At the same time, the rate of COVID infections on our campus was consistently lower than most other campuses in Connecticut and elsewhere. That didn't happen by chance. You took facemasks, social distancing, and other COVID safety protocols seriously. Your maturity, commitment to each other, and determination to succeed is why we were able to have a successful academic year. All the hard work by our faculty to teach safely, all the efforts made by our staff to maintain a safe campus would have been meaningless without you doing your part.

Instead of complaining, instead of “mailing it in,” or worse, giving up, you put your head down, kept your chin up, and forged ahead. Thank you!

What have you learned from this past year, apart from the education you came to Eastern for in the first place? You discovered an inner strength that will serve you well for the rest of your lives. You stretched yourself even more than you had before.

You have a courage and a determination that will mark this Class of 2021 for years to come.

In normal times, four years, 40 courses, 120 credits would be quite an accomplishment — enough cause to celebrate on days like these.

The Class of 2021, however, has climbed an even bigger mountain. You now share a resolve and a strength of heart that confirms that each of you — by yourselves or united together — can meet any challenge, stare it in the face, and stand tall in its wake.

The American author Jodi Picoult has written, *“The human capacity for burden is like bamboo — far more flexible than you'd ever believe at first glance.”*

The great British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said it more bluntly: *“When you are going through Hell, keep going.”*

Christopher Reeve, the actor who played Superman before a horse-riding accident left him paralyzed, wrote: *“A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles.”*

Use your own perseverance and strength to keep going, to overcome obstacles, to bend but not break. Use your growing resilience to make a special contribution to your profession and your community.

Our campus community will follow your successes with pride, knowing how special your time at Eastern has been. We will not forget you.

Please don't forget us. Come back and visit your home away from home. We will be here. God Speed. Go Warriors!