

Good Evening Class of 2020! And greetings to all the loved ones, mentors, and friends here with us or watching from around the world. I am thrilled to FINALLY celebrate our commencement together. This moment has been a long time coming—a lot longer than we expected.

I suppose it makes sense to start with the obvious. We have *technically* already graduated from Seton Hall, we have already sat for the bar exam, and we have already started our legal careers. We did all of that amid a global pandemic that seems to never end. The fact that we are here today is a testament to our grit and determination to reach and celebrate milestones even in the most uncertain times. We truly did that!

Like some of you, I was not always sure I would be standing here today. I almost didn't apply to law school because I was already engulfed in difficult and meaningful work as a community organizer. I didn't know a single lawyer personally, and the most insight I had into law school back then was Legally Blonde and Shonda Rhimes' How to Get Away With Murder.

If you ask my parents, they will tell you that I have wanted to be an attorney since I was a child. And they are mostly correct. I have always been fascinated by the law and particularly how movement lawyers have overcome the odds to win cases that challenged the status quo and forced our society to progress. But I also came of age in a time that complicated my view of the law. There have been many moments of collective pain and unrest in the last decade that challenged my faith in the same legal system that I had known as a vehicle of change. So, although I had the passion and the drive, I became unsure whether there was a place for me in this profession at all.

But luckily for me, I chose Seton Hall Law School. While many will look back at law school and remember the ruthlessness and competition, I will remember the collectivism we fostered as a class early on. Within a week, I was able to put together a study group of strangers by blindly posting about it on our Class of 2020 Facebook group. I was initially nervous about how we would get along or whether our conversations would even help us understand *Twombly & Iqbal*. But that original group became my law school family and remained a solid source of personal and academic support through school, studying for the bar exam and even today as we navigate our new careers. My study group members know who they are—but they are just a small piece of what worked for me.

As Seton Hall Lawyers, when we look back, we can remember how happily we shared outlines and study tips and how passionately we advocated for equal opportunities for all students regardless of rank. We will remember that it never hurt to give a helping hand to a struggling classmate or ask for a boost from someone who understood the rule against perpetuities better than you ever could.

And we will also remember having the difficult conversations about power and oppression rather than turning a blind eye to the plight of those less privileged than us. We forcefully but respectfully challenged classmates, our professors, and even ourselves to think critically about the law and how it impacted ordinary people every day. And because of our commitment to doing better each day--We will look back and admire the fact that even if we could not change the whole world in three years, we started by making a change right here in our community.

We grew together because we recognized that there was something each of us had to offer. We learned that it wasn't about fitting in—but standing out! Our unique backgrounds allowed us to contribute meaningfully to legal arguments even while skillfully relying on ancient precedent. I left law school feeling like I could excel as a lawyer, not because of unwavering faith in legal institutions—but because of my faith in us.

All of the milestones in legal history began with lawyers who were courageous enough to argue for something new and persistent enough to see it through. Throughout my time in law school, you have shown me that we already have what it takes to create the world we deserve. And Seton Hall has trained us to up not only to fight for what's right, but to win.

It is my hope that none of you ever forget the spot you have earned in this profession. May none of us forget where we have come from and the lessons we learned together in law school. If we remember this journey as we move up in our careers, I have no doubt that we will continue to make an impact for the better in every courtroom, law firm, or board room that we find ourselves in.

I know that I am not alone in saying that I have already leaned on my Seton Hall family since we graduated--for everything from talking through complex issues I have encountered in the workplace or for helping to find a vaccine appointment. I have no doubt that as you all become judges and partners and movers and shakers in the world, that I will lean on you all the same. And I hope you lean right back on me because we will always be part of this Seton Hall Family.

Congratulations again Class of 2020! We have already overcome and achieved so much, and I for one am beaming with pride as I await to see what we do next.

ADDRESS BY MEMBER OF THE CLASS OF 2020

Tatiana Laing, J.D. '20

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