

Thanks, of course, to everyone for being here and for this opportunity to speak.

I will start with a couple of disclaimers.

First, anyone who knows me can testify that, for me, limiting myself to five minutes is a Herculean task. I apologize in advance for failing.

Second, as many of you know, my father was a progressive Methodist preacher. He cannot be here. I'm thankful that my mother is. Both of them taught me to speak and speak with conviction. So forgive me for stepping to the pulpit just a bit.

I want to start by addressing the family members, friends, mentors and colleagues in the room. We here who are about to graduate owe you a debt we will not get around to repaying. Whether we ever fully acknowledge it, we stand on shoulders, we are held up by those around us and those who came before. We are the sum of our influences, of the people who pushed and pulled us, often at great personal cost. To you who are in this room and to the many more who can't be here, I say thank you. Our talents, our accomplishments, our successes are your handiwork; they would not exist without you.

Now, to our professors, who have guided us for the past two years, we owe another debt. You've shared your knowledge with us, nudged us along, reined us in, challenged us and cajoled us, even when we thought you were wrong, because you do indeed care about crafting the next generation. Your willingness to invest in us, regardless of our arrogance or our ignorance, is honorable. As I said, we stand on shoulders. Thank you.

And now, to my friends, my classmates, my "cohort...."

What am I actually supposed to say?

Of course, I could recite enjoyable-yet-cliché excerpts from Maya Angelou. Or Robert Frost. Or some Indian philosopher-scholar. Or just Dr. Seuss.

For the record, I did consider throwing this away and instead giving a dramatic reading of Green Eggs and Ham.

But you don't need me to quote platitudes or aphorisms. You can do that as well as me. At a minimum, during our time here, we learned how to Google and Google with force.

Of course, we learned so much *more* together, right? We shared classrooms and lectures and readings. We debated whether we were constructivists or liberalists or realists. And then we changed our minds. We defined and redefined sustainable development.

We took naps on the Quad. We played ninja on the Quad.

We found intellectual and practical heroes, from Elinor Ostrom to James C. Scott to Wangari Maathai. We decided that Jeff Sachs is either brilliant or full of himself. A

corollary: Bill Easterly is either spot-on or just really cranky. We pulled out our hair at Foucault.

And then there was that neoclassical Solow growth model that says that Y equals A times K to the α times L to one minus α times G to the β . Of course, we learned how Herman Daly, among others, turns that upside down.

We sat next to each other, hugged each other and more than a few times wanted to strangle each other. We gained wisdom from each other and shared the gifts we each received from our ancestors (to quote Angelou), from the people who came before, from the people who are still with us now.

And now we depart. You'll go your way. You'll go yours. I'll go mine.

Some of us will be working from the high seats of power, trying to implement change from the top down. Others will be working from the bottom up. Some will try to reform the system from within. Others will be armed with sledge hammer trying to break it all down.

We'll fan out across the globe to different organizations, institutions and agencies. You'll be in San Francisco or Breckenridge or Nairobi. Some of you will stay here and land on K Street. After this, we may even work at cross-purposes. I'll be in a village in India stirring up trouble. You'll be at the Bank trying to fund new infrastructure. Some of us may leave this field behind entirely and that is certainly OK, too.

Frost is right: Roads diverge in a Yellow wood and we cannot travel them all.

But we've still shared this common waypoint on the journey. We came here with a purpose, a belief that we could make some kind of a change in the peril facing the environment. We may not have always agreed and we may not be going in the same direction. But we do have a something of a shared vision — Technicolor and multi-faceted — both of the future that our planet is headed towards and the possibility of a different path.

That's part of our social capital, what makes up our meta-level bond, what holds together our community social institution: A space- and time- specific assemblage of a better tomorrow.

It's this hope and desire that will carry us forward to decidedly different places to face similarly grave environmental crises. Here I will offer an edited quote from B. R. Ambedkar, author of the Indian constitution:

“You must have a firm belief in the sacredness of your goal... Glory to those who would keep on their struggle... in spite of heavy odds, carping humiliation, storms and dangers.”

We may go our separate ways, but we all — in one way or another — will fight the same fight. And we will surely and desperately need this shared vision, this collective imaginary built during our time here. In short, we will need each other and everyone in this room. We will need our parents, siblings, mentors and friends. We will, because there's no other way for us to keep on in the struggle that lies ahead.

And, as Suess reminds is, it is vital that we keep on. Unless you, unless we all, care a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.