

Class of 2021 Commencement

President Wu's pre-recorded video remarks

Good morning! It is my honor to address the Class of 2021 for your virtual Commencement, and to congratulate you on your achievements.

Your final semesters as Bearcats coincided with my first year as Baruch's eighth president. These are big milestones in our lives, made all the more historic because we experienced them virtually.

The completion of your academic careers thus far—and for me, the start of my dream job—are important milestones in our lives. Experiencing them virtually will influence us in ways we cannot currently foresee.

I like to call the time we have spent inhabiting... maximizing... and personalizing the online world as a “dress rehearsal for the future.”

- Workplaces across the employment spectrum are exploring hybrid models for their employees... customers... patrons... patients, and students.
- And because of your success in navigating this new environment—in adapting to previously unimaginable changes to your lives and our world—I am confident that you have what it takes to be agents of change.

This is precisely my goal for Baruch: to build on the lessons learned from the pandemic to lead a paradigm shift in public higher education.

- Naturally, we are not alone in recognizing the value of offering more flexible course options through online and hybrid learning.
- But Baruch is unique because we can use the online world to expand our reach, experiences, and impact across New York City.

I mentioned that being president of Baruch is my dream job.

- I came here after 35 years in academia because I felt for a long time that higher education in the United States is not the best it could be.
- Certainly not for the largest and most prosperous democracy in the world.
- But Baruch occupies a niche that has the potential to change not just higher education—but through graduates such as you, we have the power to change society for the better.

Our value proposition is already outstanding.

- We are renowned for delivering rigorous academic programs that are on par with most elite universities in the United States.
- And we do so at an affordable price that opens the door for an amazing, diverse student population.
- Most universities that we compete with academically operate as closed circles. With high costs and other barriers, only the privileged few can attend.

Indeed, access is our differentiator. And It gives us an advantage that cannot be replicated elsewhere: diversity.

- The incredible diversity of our graduates injects fresh perspectives for the workplace that become the source of creativity and innovation.
- Recently *The Wall Street Journal's* corporate ranking examined diversity and inclusion among S&P 500 companies. They concluded that "Diverse and inclusive cultures are providing companies with a competitive edge over their peers."
- If this reminds you of the source of vibrancy in America, brought by immigration and social mobility, you are starting to see the bigger picture.
- And you should see yourselves as a crucial part of that picture.

And now because of the pandemic, we know how technology frees us from traditional formats. With our proven ability to learn and grow across digital platforms, the Baruch experience can go wide.

- Community-based learning can take place anywhere in the City, and be sustained for longer periods.
- Our students can spend more time in the vast collections our museums and libraries have to offer.
- And we can build more meaningful partnerships with the foundations, industries, and media giants that are based here.

In short, we can go beyond traditional service-learning models. Or the "Semester in New York" programs that other universities provide at a big price to students.

- Real-world experience throughout the City can become a core element of a Baruch education.
- New York can be our classroom, laboratory, and campus in ways we had never imagined before.

With so many of you already working to pay for college, or to help make ends meet at home, we are well on our way to achieving this.

- I personally know the life-long value of varied job experiences.

- Among my first jobs during college was making deliveries on a motorbike in the busy streets and back alleys of Taipei.
- Later, during my military service, one of my jobs was to strip paint and rust from deep in the inner hull of a World War II-era frigate.

From these and other odd jobs, I started to see systems at work everywhere.

- I came to understand the importance that each role plays in a network.
- How it contributes to the whole—and to the final outcome.
- Systems engineering would later be my calling in academia.

You will find this too: that the varied experiences you've had will blend with the education that you've pursued. And together, these influences will shape the direction of your life.

As Baruch alumni, you have what it takes to be leaders in your chosen fields:

- To ask questions,
- Take action,
- And continue to learn.

Our post-pandemic City and society will be stronger... more inclusive... and equitable with you at the helm.

I look forward to seeing you soon—in person—as members of the global Baruch College alumni network. I will be cheering you on as your future unfolds—with the great things you will accomplish.

As I congratulate each of you, please take a moment to thank and congratulate all the people who helped you get to this great day. Your parents, family members, bosses, colleagues, professors and mentors. I am sure the list is long!

I wish you the best of success!

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