



President Peter Goodwin's Charge to 2021 Graduates

This afternoon we have heard compelling remarks from Governor Hogan, Regent Gossett, Chancellor Perman, and Vice Chancellor Boughman. And this was capped by the Honorable Senator Cardin. We would like to thank Senator Cardin for his Team Maryland approach to environmental issues... and of course for being a decades-long friend of UMCES.

Senator Cardin stated that the TIME IS NOW... and this is YOUR TIME. You are only too aware of the formidable challenges we face as a society.

Globally, all the 10 warmest years on record have occurred since 2005. The number of extreme one day rainfall events was relatively constant until 1980 but has been rising steadily since then. Nine of the top 10 years for extreme one-day precipitation has occurred in your lifetimes. Nine of the top ten years for extreme one-day heat have occurred in your lifetimes. And the list goes on.

The consequences to society and our environment are staggering. NOAA tracks the number of billion-dollar climate-induced disasters in the U.S. There has been an exponential growth since 1980 with 2020 setting the new record of 22 events in one year.

These factors combine so that there is not a facet of the UMCES research portfolio of genes to ecosystems and mountains to oceans that is untouched.

This is the new reality of the world. The systems we work in are more dynamic, the challenges are more complex and more interdisciplinary, and the consequences to society are more widespread with less chance of damage being reversed. We need innovations in energy, medicines, and environmental management. And we are acutely aware that the most vulnerable communities are often those place-bound by culture and poverty.

But this is a time for optimism and HOPE because of your generation of scientists and particularly the leadership roles you will rapidly assume. C.S. Lewis said, "Hardships often prepare ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny."

You have overcome hardship. COVID has required many of you to pivot, adapt your research, change how you interact with peers, your major professor and your committees. And many of you have had the additional worries of helping families, friends and your communities during this pandemic.

Firstly, you are not ordinary. You are graduating from a highly selective program and have had the opportunity to work with some of the very best researchers in your field. Those who have gone before you, have emerged as leaders in universities, agencies, NGOs and the private sector. Simply put you are part of the smartest and best educated generation the world has known.

Secondly, you are graduating with a highly unique toolbox. The new MEES curriculum is interdisciplinary and crosses the discipline boundaries imposed by departments, colleges, and administrative walls of traditional institutions. You have also developed the skills to communicate your complicated science in a way that members of the public and policy-makers understand. You are the generation that will find innovative ways to ensure the principles of environmental justice are the foundation for setting future research and management priorities.

Thirdly, you are not alone. You are now an important part of a small but highly influential club of UMCES. The friendships you developed with peers, faculty and staff will last a lifetime...so please stay connected.

These are extraordinary times requiring extraordinary responses informed by the best-available science. So to CS Lewis, I say: YES, you have endured hardship. NO, you are not ordinary. But YES, you are poised for extraordinary destiny. As you close this chapter of your life, Commencement begins the next step in your career.

Think big, think bold, and inspire the changes we need to better the environment for future generations.