

Graduates have much to contribute to this post-pandemic world

Eileen Mercier, Chancellor, Wilfrid Laurier University

Convocation is a special time to show just how proud our university community is of its graduates. It is an opportunity for graduates to celebrate with family and friends their successes and their hopes for the future. As Chancellor of Wilfrid Laurier University, I love to share with graduates and their loved ones the joys of this memorable day.

While we are not able to celebrate together in person this spring due to public health restrictions, this is still a special time as we recognize our university graduates across Canada who have demonstrated significant resiliency in the face of great uncertainty and upheaval. Our Class of 2021 will be remembered for the ways that they have risen to these challenges. I, for one, cannot wait to see what this exceptional generation has in store for us in the coming years given the determination they've demonstrated in their final year of study.

Indeed, the pandemic has been a challenging time for all of us and has touched us all, some in more deeply personal ways than others. It has taught us what is really important in life, including the love and support of family and friends, and the importance of having compassion for your fellow citizens. It has also shown us the value of resiliency and flexibility, qualities which graduates have learned during their time at university.

As we are coming out of this period, I am confident this will be a time of innovation and change for our society. University graduates are poised to be an important part of this new chapter in our world's history as they enter the world of full-time work, or perhaps graduate school, with fresh perspectives at a time of almost unprecedented exuberance and economic growth. This is a generation not content with the status quo. We have heard their calls for justice and accountability at all levels of society and their desire to right the wrongs of the world holds much promise in building a more equitable future for all.

The pandemic has accelerated changes that were already happening in the way we work, study, and communicate. Technology is now inextricably linked to parts of our lives in ways it wasn't 18 months ago. There is no question that this technological acceleration will be part of graduates' futures. Artificial intelligence will be a factor in all of our lives. Graduates will be part of that revolution from many angles, from the technical to the ethical. Embracing change and being resilient in the face of ambiguity will be the hallmarks of success in the coming years. Those who were able to do that during the pandemic have learned valuable lessons, not only about their work, but about themselves.

Graduates who are scientists will have seen that scientific research is not always a smooth path, and just how essential their skills are for the health and safety of this country – finding breakthroughs and communicating them to the world. Those who are artists will have observed how badly we need them for our mental and emotional health. Graduates in business will understand how much needs to be done to get the country back on its feet, to get people out of their basements and into business communities where ideas can flourish around the boardroom table.

The next chapter after graduation is about finding one's place and making a mark. To the Class of 2021, go out into the world and make us all proud. Better yet, make yourself proud! Ask yourself what you have to offer that can help the world in this moment. I cannot think of anything more important right now than doing things for others that will come back to reward you when you least expect it. I believe

that the Class of 2021 will use the degrees they have worked so hard to earn to build a future that right now is only a dream.