
Each time I say one of them in any tense I want you to make the gesture.

Capture this moment! Most people say that graduates don't remember their speaker... I'm going to make sure you remember yours! If you don't, I ask that you give me a moment so that I can have evidence that the homeless pregnant youth that barely finished high school after being expelled is here today.

I'm here with the next leaders who are ready to CHANGE SOCIETY!

I asked myself: why me? What qualifies me to be a keynote speaker? I even thought there was an error. There must be another Mrs. Price! Then I reflected on the Diversity Competency: 4.4) Student views themself as a learner and engages those with whom they work as informants. This reminded me that as an informant I am qualified to speak to you, the UMSSW Class of 2017.

What were you thinking when you submitted your application to the #1 School of Social Work in the nation?

Parents and supporters, show me with your facial expressions, what you thought when they told you they were coming to the UMSSW???

Did you think that you would be a part of the Bicentennial Summer Commencement? Did you think about what that meant to be a part of a 200 year legacy??

Do I have any Power fans?

"I never took a straight path nowhere" in the words of 50cent!

We all may have taken different paths: some of us have BSW degrees, some of us have art degrees, some of us come from a lineage of UM alum and some of us are the first in our family to complete a graduate program... but we are all here because we are committed to Changing Society. You will continue this journey after today on many different paths.

Some people say that you don't know where you are going unless you know where you've been...
82 years ago, in 1935, graduate level social work education began at U-M. Only sixteen students completed the program at that time.

Over the next 15 years, a total of 348 MSWs were awarded all the while being in Detroit. The students and faculty were intentional about reaching out to the community and being involved at all levels of service.

Be proud, because all of this occurred

BEFORE:

In 1952 the Council on Social Work Education was formed, and the National Association of Social Workers was formed in 1955

This is your legacy! The graduates of this fine school reach out and become: policy makers, clinicians, researchers, administrators, evaluators, and community organizers.

What are some of the systems and social justice issues have you been learning about and practicing in?

I've been involved in and impacted by almost every system and social justice issue you've spent the last year focusing on including: criminal justice, mental health, child welfare, domestic violence, substance use, homelessness, you name it!

And the reason why I stand here today is due to the work of the professional social workers that you are preparing to join in the workforce. Two graduates from this program. I'm their legacy. They utilized creative engagement strategies to reach out, they utilized intervention strategies, they met me where I was and raised hope... and they advocated for and developed policies that supported equality and equal access to services that allowed me to advance against the odds so that they could change society.

I vowed to myself that if I could reach out to one person and support them in raising hope to reach their goals, then my decision to pursue social work would not be in vain. Two years ago as I sat with faculty and watched one of my former clients who when I met them did not have a post high school education, was not working, and lived with a mental and physical illness accept their MSW, I knew I had achieved that goal. It was the referrals to request adequate housing, the cleaning side by side when CPS was called, the development of a parent support group that included a socialization group for children, the advocacy for policies that included support for child care for participation in mental health treatment.
As I stand before you, I realize that you all have changed my life in various ways: seeing some of you transition to graduate school, smiles in the hall, hearing about your successes in field, sharing your professional and personal experiences in the classroom.

Who will be a part of your legacy? How will you reach out, raise hope and change society? Remember that you may not see it yourself... my social workers aren’t in the room to hear this story. You have to trust that every policy analyzed, every case managed, every program evaluated, every referral given, every intervention utilizes, each research project completed, impacts social justice on macro, mezzo, and micro levels.

Family and supporters, they will need your help. This work takes the ongoing support of our loved ones. It takes partners that will load things in their truck, children that are willing to share their parents, parents who will listen to venting, people who are willing to support policies they believe in. If you are amazing like my mom, you will use your skills to volunteer at their agencies.

So I charge EACH of you today to Reach Out. Raise Hope. Change Society