

**PRESIDENT PAPAZIAN:**

**Now I would like to offer my remarks to our December 2019 graduates.**

[PAUSE]

In just a few of days, we will witness the annual Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the calendar year.

And because the Winter Solstice brings with it the year's shortest period of daylight, the Winter Solstice also signifies the **darkest** day of the year.

“Darkness” seems to be a theme throughout our nation—and indeed throughout our world—in recent months.

Our political landscape sometimes seems to grow darker by the day, with differences magnified daily.

The news media regularly report on the dark side of

technology, such as privacy and data concerns and the isolating use of social media.

The reality of climate change and its impacts casts a shadow over and darkens our future.

Even Hollywood and the entertainment industry embraces these themes – has anyone seen the new Arnold Schwarzenegger movie, the one called **Terminator—Dark Fate?**

So we have been experiencing more than our fair share of darkness.

Maybe it is dark outside, but there is a bright light in the near distance, a ray of optimism and hope. And you know what, graduates?

I am looking at it!

Today, right now, in this moment, **you** are the bright shining lights from San Jose State!

**(Pause and lead applause)**

The great American essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote the following:

“To the dull mind, all nature is leaden. To the illumined mind, the whole world ... sparkles with light.”

So by earning your college or graduate degree, you now sparkle with light!

You are now well-equipped to brighten our future: your own futures, the futures of your families, and the futures of all of society.

We look to YOU, graduates, to help us to make our way out of the darkness. And I know you will do just that.

So today truly is a day of celebration.

You all have worked so hard and with purpose to earn your degrees.

I know it has not always been easy.

In fact, for some of you, there may have been difficult barriers and significant obstacles you had to overcome.

But you persevered. You kept at it! You never gave up.

That should make this all the more satisfying.

(LEAD APPLAUSE)

But stepping out into the real world and taking on new responsibilities will not be a walk in the park.

As new college graduates stepping into the next phase of your lives, there are challenges ahead.

As you help brighten the future of our world, you are now charged with helping us to address the important social, political, and economic issues of our time.

Along the way, you will face tests of varying degrees, only these tests will come not inside a classroom but out in your workplace, your communities and neighborhoods.

But I know you will pass those tests with flying colors, just as you aced your final academic exams (well, okay, maybe some of you didn't exactly "ace" those exams, but hey, you passed them!).

You are not alone as you step out into this new phase of your journey. Remember: **San José State will always be here for you!**

You may be leaving us today, but at the same time you can – and should! - remain connected. Once a Spartan, always a Spartan!

You will forever remain a member of the San José State community.

You have forged relationships here that can last a lifetime. You have classmates, professors, mentors, lecturers, advisors, and many others here who care about you and are excited about the possibilities that lay ahead.

These people and others here at San José State are not abandoning you. They all have helped prepare you for the road ahead, and they are invested in your success. They know, as I do, that you will become positive agents for change, wherever you go and however you choose to brighten our society.

So today also is a time for thanks and appreciation to all of those individuals who helped you during your college journey.

The instructors. The advisors. The tutors and mentors. Your fellow classmates. The staff here on campus.

But perhaps most of all, we want to acknowledge and thank your families. I have three brothers, and along with my mother and father, I know that I would not have been where I am today without the support of my family.

So how about it, graduates. Let's make some noise for the family members of yours who are with us today! **(LEAD APPLAUSE)**

I know you all must be getting anxious! In just moments, you will hear your name called to cross the stage.

But first, before you take that important step, I would like to say a few words about the degree you are about to receive.

**You have earned** your college or graduate degree. But this is no ordinary piece of paper.

This is an indication of incredible achievement.

It is a symbol of hard work, dedication, many hours in the library and study hall, and maybe a few sleepless nights thrown in!

(PAUSE)

This degree from San José State will do many things for you in the years ahead. It will open up doors. It will offer opportunities that you may have not had before.

(PAUSE)

A degree from San José State demonstrates your ability to create a vision for yourselves, to set a course, and to follow it through to completion.

Trust me on this: earning your college or graduate degree is no small achievement.

When you secure your next, maybe your first, professional job, just know this: **you have earned it.**

When you decide to join a civic organization and play a leading role in your community, just know this:

**You have earned it.**

Or when you decide to start your own business, know this:

**You! Have! Earned It!**

(PAUSE and LEAD APPLAUSE)

It might surprise some of you to know that roughly one out of four San José State students are the very first in their families to attend college.

If that describes any of you here today—and I suspect it does—let me just say that what you have achieved also sends a powerful message to your entire family. To your brothers and sisters ... to your cousins, nieces and nephews ...to your children ... and to your parents.

Your degree says, “I earned this degree — and *you* can earn one, too.”

But a San José State degree is not merely symbolic.

It reflects something very tangible and real. It represents the knowledge and learning you have absorbed in your years of study here. You *know* things now that you did not know before.

Our faculty members do not build curricula by accident. They design them with a distinct purpose:

...to make sure our graduates intellectually are as well-equipped as possible to enter into — and to engage with — a fast-changing world.

How you do this will be up to each of you. If I may offer one last bit of advice, I would again quote Ralph Waldo Emerson:

“Do not go where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path, and leave a trail.” And I know that is exactly what you will do.

Congratulations to *all* of you.

(PAUSE)

To the graduates.

(PAUSE)

To their friends and family.

(PAUSE)

To the faculty and staff members who helped make it happen.

(PAUSE)

Congratulations to you all.

(PAUSE)

Job well done. Go forth and light a bright, shining path  
toward a great future!

Go Spartans!