

Resilience defines the Class of 2021



UC San Diego hosts hybrid commencement ceremonies for graduates, highlighting the perseverance graduating students maintained amid great uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic

Resilience and perseverance aren't uncommon characteristics applauded during graduations, but those themes were especially prevalent - and relevant - at the 2021 UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) commencement ceremony held June 13.

The socially-distanced event was the first time the bulk of the 178-person graduating class had gathered in 15 months, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"From this moment forward, you will say, 'I was there. I was finishing college when the COVID-19 pandemic struck,'" said Pradeep Khosla, chancellor of UC San Diego. "I hope you will say more than, 'I survived.' I hope you will say, 'My

time at UC San Diego changed me forever.’”

[This year’s GPS graduation](#) was held both in person – with a number of safety protocols in place – as well as [livestreamed](#) to a virtual audience. Graduating students who were not able to attend the in-person event were also honored during the ceremony.

In pre-recorded messages, both Khosla and all-university speaker [Alicia Garza](#), a UC San Diego alumna, principal at the Black Futures Lab and co-founder of the Black Lives Matter Global Network, acknowledged that our world is beginning to emerge from the pandemic – and how the collective experience has shaped us all forever.

“Graduates, we too are emerging, and we have the opportunity – and more than that, the responsibility – to reshape this world in a way that makes room for all of us,” Garza said.



GPS Commencement 2021

GPS Dean Peter Cowhey spoke in person at the ceremony, noting this will be his last commencement as the dean of the school before his retirement.

“This pandemic and all the dramatic social and racial upheavals in our societies

have posed the question of what it will take to have a just, peaceful and sustainably prosperous society in our world,” Cowhey said. “If recent years have had one lesson for me, it is this: we should be humble about our accomplishments and be open to questioning our assumptions. True humility and self-examination may be ignited by anguish, but their pursuit requires both knowledge and careful thinking.”

Cowhey encouraged graduates to look to the future with hope.

“I hope your studies at GPS and your shared experiences with your classmates serve you well on your journeys of reflection, discovery and action,” Cowhey said.

Master of Public Policy student Joe Bettles was voted by the graduating class to speak during the ceremony. He told his fellow graduates that he had wanted to write the “silver linings” speech - but realized that would be impossible in the face of the upheaval he and his fellow students had experienced over the past two years.

“A giant mirror has been held up, and it turns out that we are a mess,” Bettles said. “It took the deaths of hundreds of thousands and the death of one man for many to see it. Shame, guilt and sadness is not a solution, but it can be a humbling experience that shifts our perspective.”

Despite the shared pain, Bettles said that in the midst of the turmoil, GPS students were able to make true connections with each other.

“Helping each other is what gives richness to our collective experience,” Bettles said. “We all saw this play out during the pandemic. We find that the virtual world is not enough. I wouldn’t be here today without other people’s help.”

Bettles compared the ongoing issues in the world to the Netflix show “Tidying Up” with Marie Kondo, in which Kondo helps people with overly cluttered homes get rid of items they no longer need and organize their spaces in a useful way.

“As we move on to take a seat at the table of global governance, I hope we will remember the problems we face - the mess in our global closet - are simply too big for one person or one group of people to solve,” Bettles said. “I look forward to working alongside all of you. Thank you for confronting that messy closet with me.”

