



2022 Commencement Welcome

Chancellor Al M. Panu, PhD

April 29, 2022

Greetings to the Class of 2022 and to your parents, family members, and friends, who are here to celebrate this wonderful milestone in your lives. Greetings to the University of South Carolina Beaufort faculty and staff. This day is possible because of your incredible professionalism, hard work, and dedication to students. I thank you.

To our distinguished guests: our speaker, Mr. Coleman Peterson and his wife, Mrs. Peaches Peterson; our honorary degree recipient, the Honorable William Herbkersman; the Reverend John R. Black, pastor of Campbell Chapel AME Church; Dr. C. Dorn Smith, chair of the University of South Carolina System Board of Trustees; Trustees Alex English; Richard Jones; and Rose Buyck-Newton; Dr. L. Cameron Howell, secretary of the Board of Trustees; Dr. Susan Elkins, chancellor of Palmetto College; Mr. J. Derham Cole, Vice President for System Affairs; and University of South Carolina System Interim President Dr. Harris Pastides and First Lady, Mrs. Patricia Moore-Pastides. To all of you, my dear wife Judith and I welcome you to the Lowcountry and proudly introduce you to this region's crown jewels: the amazing students of the University of South Carolina Beaufort.

As I look out at your beaming faces right now, I feel a sense of relief, a sense of hope, and a sense of gratitude – that we are “back.” After virtual commencement in 2020 and five, indoor, heavily-masked commencements in 2021, we may all have wondered when this day – this way of living – would be returned to us. Most of you, in the Class of 2022, were sophomores when a one-week spring break became a disjunctive marker in world history.

Everything changed, and you adapted brilliantly. There was no roadmap for navigating university life in the COVID era. But, over these last two years, you have mustered unparalleled ingenuity, resourcefulness, and determination to forge new pathways to success. We commend you, and we are so proud of you.

Today, you stand on the threshold – seemingly between two worlds. The hardship of finding your way here lies behind, and a brilliant new future lies ahead. I wish so much that I could tell you that there are only blue skies ahead – that the exhausting trials and heartbreaking losses of the last two years are truly over. That the pandemic itself is truly over.

The need to move forward – to break free from uncertainty, discomfort, and pain – is all too human. You have fought hard to be here, and this time of celebration is your reward. Today, we rejoice – focusing on all you have accomplished already and all you will achieve throughout lives of meaningful leadership and service.

Now... as you move forward, you may be tempted to remember only good times – to simply put trying times behind you. However, failing to remember – failing to actively apply the lessons and wisdom of history to the future – has its own perils.

Two years ago, a virus that could bring the world to its knees seemed possible only in a prior century – much like the unprovoked invasion of a sovereign country in Europe or North America. Three generations from the atrocities of Adolf Hitler, almost two generations from the fall of the Berlin Wall, and nearly one generation from 9/11 – even as fellow Americans in uniform fought bravely in the Middle East and other parts of the world – we had the luxury here to expect relative peace and prosperity – in the way that we expect the sun to rise each morning and the moon to shine each night. But, with the violence in Ukraine, we have been somewhat shocked out of our assumptions. And we bear witness not to unprecedented suffering but, more painfully, to suffering for which there are a multitude of tragic historical warnings and precursors.

In ancient Roman mythology, Janus was the god of doorways, thresholds, and transitions. He watched over beginnings and endings – the passing of one era into the next. Hence the month marking the start of each new year, January, is named for him. But what is most interesting about Janus is that he is depicted with two faces – one youthful and fresh that looks forward, the other older and bearded looking back. The Romans understood that we cannot create inspired, innovative, and secure futures if we ignore the lessons and the wisdom of the past.

We cannot simply put the past behind us – take off our masks and pretend that nothing has happened. And we cannot turn away from suffering – our own or that of people thousands of miles away. Leadership requires us to bring the wisdom of history into the future. Experience is neither a quicksand nor a mud too deep to get through. It is the richest soil upon which to till your best lives.

In these last years, you have bravely confronted untold challenges, and you stand here today triumphant, ready to cross this threshold – this stage where USCB’s faculty and staff and our distinguished guests stand proudly to welcome you to the family of bachelor’s and master’s degree holders and to the family of alumni of the University of South Carolina Beaufort.

Janus – the god with two faces, also always holds keys – to the doorways between what is and what will come. Those keys are placed in your hands today. Those keys are everything you have learned in your years of study. Those keys are knowledge, skills, resourcefulness, creativity, determination, and character certainly... but also experience and therefore wisdom. Use them, throughout your lives, to unlock doors of opportunity for yourselves and for others.

There is one more thing I hope you will consider along life’s journey: there will be times – like these last two years – when there is no roadmap. When moving forward seems impossible. When happiness seems completely out of reach. Here, I offer a quote from classic screen actor John Barrymore, who said: “Happiness often sneaks in through a door you didn’t know you left open.”

Don’t close yourself off to possibility. Don’t discount or dismiss people or opportunities out of hand. Use the keys in hand to keep doors open – recognizing that happiness is not always found in getting something you long for but in feeling gratitude for something you already have.

Don’t run from challenges and uncertainty. Don’t turn a blind eye to suffering. Don’t dread truth. Embrace them boldly and bravely because you have already proven that you have the ingenuity, confidence, and grit to cut through any tangle of circumstances – to find or design doorways that innovate based on experience. On behalf of the full faculty and staff of our beloved USCB, I tell you that our hearts are bursting with pride.

And, to your amazing parents, families, and friends... You are the hinges on each door that our graduates pass through – the strong, shiny supports that hold every door in place and without which no door would open. Your contributions are very much a part of this day. With great admiration, we celebrate you and thank you for everything you have done to make your graduate’s dream a reality.

In closing, I offer this last counsel to the Enterprising Class of 2022: You are architects of your own doorways, and you hold the keys – to a brighter future and a greater good. My dear Sand Sharks, hold your heads high! And... against any challenge... Chins Up! Fins Up! Congratulations!