

Dr. Brazaitis Graduation Remarks

To Our 2020 MA Graduates in Social-Organizational Psychology –

It's been a minute. I miss you. Still.

You are the future. You are our future and now, as you graduate, you are our present. You are the change experts our organizations and our world needs desperately during these very difficult times. These times have been exceedingly painful for many, including those who've lost loved ones and livelihoods, and the essential comfort of togetherness during stress and grief. I know some of our graduates and their families have experienced tremendous loss. We grieve with you.

And, we look to you with hope. You are our present – in both meanings of the word.

You are the systems thinkers who understand that our team, organizational and societal problems are never created by one person, and that their answers demand multiple perspectives and collective action. You are scientist-practitioners who know to look to science to help you craft the most practical solutions to destructive conflict, stereotype threat, scapegoating, poor team performance, employee disengagement, resistance to needed change, and toxic leadership.

You lead the way on understanding covert processes at work, the essentialness of evidence-based practice and using a robust organizational psychology toolkit, best practices in executive coaching and data analytics, how to demonstrate your business acumen to the MBAs in the room, and how to navigate virtual teams and to design an organizational change intervention that is relevant and rigorous.

I know the job market is very challenging right now, but I also know you are uniquely well-positioned to seize every silver lining and every opportunity that comes from this crisis now and in the years to come. You 2020 graduates – are who we need in every organization in the world.

You came to TC one or two or three or four years ago. You trusted us with your graduate education in organizational psychology. You trusted us with the precious resource that is you – your time, your energy, your money, your brain, and your heart. Some of you perhaps came to Columbia thinking you would get an MA degree to advance in your career, or to start a new career, or to land an internship or job that was more interesting than the one you left, or to influence your workplace for the better, or simply to help others at work. These are all good reasons to earn your Masters with us. And, yet, I hope many of you are graduating with more than just a transaction satisfied. Ivy League graduate degree – check! Yet, perhaps you also gained a different, richer, transformative and far more useful way of understanding the world, organizations, teams, and yourself. The reason I think this is not only that you have told me, but because I, too, feel transformed – by you, by us, and by what we do together in the learning community we have built together, every year, and this one, in particular.

When Teachers College moved to on-line learning, in what felt like a millisecond, on March 9, I felt our Organizational Psychology learning community rise up. Just rise up. We jumped right into the middle of the change curve, and together we figured out how to work and learn (sometimes imperfectly) in Zoom classes, Zoom break out groups, Zoom office hours, using new class working

agreements and team charters, holding virtual OHDCC happy hours and even a virtual case competition.

We had class check-ins where we shared many rounds of – is everyone okay; I'm so sorry you are struggling; I'm so sorry you are ill, you are worried, you are mourning; I'm so glad you are feeling a little better; and it's so fun to see your dog; you cut your own hair; hey, you're Zooming from a different room; nice pajamas; and thank you, and thank you and thank you.

This pandemic did not make us different people than who we were before. I think it revealed who we are. Who you are is a whip smart, resilient, caring community of learners and leaders who rise up to the highest standards of academic excellence with grace and compassion.

I could not be prouder of who you are, of all you have accomplished, of your grit and resilience, not just this Spring, but in all your time here at TC, of how you brought your best selves to the classroom in person and via Zoom, to OHDCC, to the community, to me and to each other and how your example and your trust in us at TC helped me try to bring my best self too. We create the Social-Organizational Psychology program together. We are a better program because of your presence and our world is a better place because of the work you will do going forward.

Congratulations Class of 2020 Masters of Arts graduates in Social-Organizational Psychology at Teachers College. Columbia University. Rise up. Rise up.