

**Commencement Remarks**  
**Purificación Martínez, Chair of the Faculty**  
**December 2020**

Greetings, Graduating Class of Fall 2020, I am Purificación Martínez and as Chair of the ECU's Faculty it is my distinct privilege to congratulate you on this big accomplishment, the first in your adult life. But not the last I am certain. ECU has prepared you for a life of achievements in sciences, politics, business, translation, teaching, nursing, ... whatever you want! That is what a college degree means, you are in control of your future.

Fall Commencement has always been my favorite in the life on this campus. With the holiday season already in the air, and the possibility of rejuvenation that a new year brings, a smiley face is the constant expression in my face. All these young lives, I always think, ready to begin their life's journey just when this tired old world is about to renew itself. What marvelous omen of prosperity and success!

I always feel proud of the graduates, but this Fall of 2020 I am practically in owe of all of you. The past 9 months have transformed this country in ways we could never have even imagined in January of this year. At the national stage, we have dealt with a deadly infectious disease, we have raised our voices asking to put an end to systemic racism, we went to vote in a historical election. Here on campus, your lives have been drastically altered as well. You have seen your social interactions with friends reduced. You have attended lectures or office hours in virtual environments, you have studied in a speed up block system. Not only have you overcome these once in a lifetime challenges, you have flourished. Well done, I did not expect less of a true Pirate.

Family and friends, but particularly parents, take a moment to feel and express the pride that I know is choking your throat. Cheer for your graduate, hug them tight. They deserve it.

I would not lie to you, it would have been great to be in Mingos seeing from the stage the purple wave of your regalia, hearing the loud cheers of the nursing students. The energy in that stadium during commencement is electric. I miss it. I miss all of you. I asked your parents to hug you. I am jealous because I can't. When I attend the smaller graduation ceremony in my department, there is a lot

of hugging and kissing. I meet the parents; I hear of future plans. I would describe those more intimate ceremonies as a ritual of mutual thanksgiving.

Family and parents thank the professors for helping their graduates to achieve their intellectual potential and for offering the tools that will make them successful professionals. Graduates remember the difficulties they had with a particular assignment and the academic and emotional support that a certain professor offered them. We the professors, although often not said, are thankful for a job like no other, society has trusted us with creating its future leaders. Here at ECU our motto is “servire”, to serve. We produce servant leaders. Parents, we instill in your graduates the need to focus on the well-being of the communities to which they belong. We produce leaders who share power and help others develop. I have seen the maps, and I know the Pirate nation is spread wide all over the United States, but the majority of graduates decide to stay in the state, close to families that are usually tight knit. What blessing that is for Eastern North Carolina. We, in this region, still have much work to do in terms of development. I am confident that you, graduates, will be an engine of change for this area that is your home.

But before you roll up your sleeves, take a moment to celebrate this day. Tomorrow start thinking of your journey. Don't be afraid, you are ready. And go about living your life with confidence in your abilities, but also with empathy for others less fortunate and with enough awareness to realize that a lifepath should not be straight and narrow, but winding, and surprising. Oh, what excitement to have so much ahead of you. Go Pirates, go get them.