

Dear Graduates,

Extraordinary.

This one word sums up so much.

You have earned your degree! Sixty-five percent of Americans do not have what you have: a bachelor's degree.

This makes you extraordinary.

You have worked very hard to accomplish so much in your time as a Gamecock and a member of the Arnold School family. You have put in the hours at Thomas Cooper, you have lost sleep, you have met deadlines, you have helped each other and the community, and you have cheered on the Gamecocks.

It has all paid off in an extraordinary way.

You are graduating in May 2020 – the spring of the most unimaginable public health crisis in recent history: the coronavirus pandemic. We will never forget the impact it had and continues to have on us all. We missed participating in Commencement, cheering on spring sports – including the amazing Women's Basketball Team sure to repeat their 2017 National Championship win, seeing friends one last time, purchasing our caps and gowns in the Russell House Bookstore, grabbing one last Chick-fil-A or Starbucks in the Grand Marketplace and taking one last walk on the beautiful Horseshoe.

This is an extraordinary time.

You are starting an exciting chapter in your life in a world that is vastly different from what it was when you arrived here. Believe it or not, you are well trained and prepared to improve the health and well-being of populations and individuals while embracing diversity, inclusion and social justice. Each and everyone of you – more now than ever before – will advance the field of public health in your own way.

You have extraordinary knowledge, skills and determination.

No matter where you go or what you do, you will always be a Gamecock and alumni of the Arnold School. We may see you in August at a delayed Commencement Ceremony or at the Homecoming football game in the fall. If we do not reconnect then, we will see each other when "social distancing" is no longer required. Remember to thank our first responders, teachers, health care professionals, researchers, scientists and everyone on the front lines supporting our communities and working tirelessly.

Together we are extraordinary.

Congratulations graduating class of 2020! You did it!

Here's a health, Carolina, forever to thee!