

Graduation ceremony

Courses 2019-2020 & 2020-2021

Hello everyone.

Let me start by saying that today is a day for celebration and recognition. The celebration of your certificate, your graduation, and the recognition of your success and achievement of months and years of work. This was clearly illustrated by what Montserrat said to us: the satisfaction of having reached this point.

I can sincerely say that, ever since I became president of the UOC, this graduation ceremony has been the most exciting event of the whole academic year for me. It is the most exciting because you are here, precisely because of this recognition, because of this achievement, but also because those close to you are here: your families, your loved ones, your friends, your colleagues...

In addition, this year is a special year because last year there was no graduation ceremony, and this year we're back with a format that is not the same as the one we used to have, which was a completely in-person ceremony. This year, many of you have attended from behind your computer screens, over Zoom, and I haven't been able to shake your hands. Normally, you would have got up on stage and we would have shaken hands as a way for the University to congratulate you.

But this is a hybrid event. It isn't exactly what we wanted, but I would really like to congratulate the organizers because it has gone well, and it hasn't lost any of the excitement it should have.

«The certificate, the diploma, will be the physical proof that you have achieved what you set out to achieve, but I understand that for you and for us the most important thing, apart from the certificate, which is fundamental, is the journey you have made. It is what you have gained, how you have grown as people, and many of you have expressed this; many of you have spoken of the personal growth you have achieved throughout this process.»

Recognition must also come from something that many of you have expressed, which is this drive to change, to do something new, to do something different, the challenge you have set yourselves, that you have taken on and that you have carried out. In fact, what it shows is that you are the captains, the helms people, of your own lives. As Jesús said when he spoke: at a certain point, he takes the reins, the helm of his life, and changes. Sanjay Sarma, Vice President of Open Learning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), expressed this idea by saying that the goal is for a person to end up being the CEO of their own life, to run their own life. And how? Through knowledge, which is exactly what you have done.

We have also mentioned recognition. I think we cannot forget the recognition we have to give you, but there's also the recognition that we must give to those close to you and the recognition that they give you. Those around you are fundamental. I'm sure we will talk about it a little later on, but the effort that those around you have made towards your achievement is also relevant and should also be acknowledged.

Now a future is opening up. And the question is: "What's next?" Some have answered. We heard from a person who graduated – sorry, I can't quite remember your name. Anyway, you graduated and are already working, so you have made this leap. I don't really like the concept of reinvention because it's a bit overused – everybody says they reinvent themselves – but some people do start again, some people make progress and others add to themselves. In other words, you play this role of captains of your own lives.

Let me reflect on this from a personal point of view. My father always used to say: throughout life you will be presented with opportunities and you need to be prepared. This is what my father used to say to me when I was little: you need to prepare yourself because you will have opportunities and you need to be able to take advantage of them. And being prepared to take advantage of opportunities, or to take on challenges, is precisely what you have done these past years. In other words, you have equipped yourselves with the necessary skills and knowledge, and in the end, you have achieved a qualification, which is nothing more than a toolbox that will allow you to adapt to environments, circumstances or opportunities. So, the fact that you have this toolbox is a real success.

In any case, let me go back to the idea of taking the helm, of being captains, of deciding what you want to do. This implies determination; the captain of the ship knows what course they want to take because they know where they want to go, they have a strategy, and they know how to make it happen. And that's what you did when you decided to enrol. You showed determination because you knew where you wanted to go and what you wanted to do. But this initial determination has required determination

throughout the whole process, which for some has lasted months and for others has lasted years. And we have to recognize that this is very tough and difficult.

«So, success also depends on this determination, this resilience, as it is now called, although we can also say tenacity to keep moving forward. I repeat, you now have this ability to tackle new goals using this toolbox, and this implies challenges, opportunities, decisions and, in the end, if you will, vertigo. The vertigo that we all feel when we have to make a decision. At some point, we have all been in a situation where we have asked ourselves, "Will I be able to do it? Do I have to do it? Should I go this way? Should I stop what I was doing and change?" Let me make one last reference to a personal experience. »

In 2013, I was the director of a research institute. I was director of the Institute for Bioengineering of Catalonia (IBEC), and I was happy. Things were going well for me, and the institute was doing well. And I was presented with the opportunity, the request, to become president of the UOC. This was both an opportunity and a challenge – and, of course, an honour and a privilege. It meant making a radical change and involved a high degree of vertigo. I decided to do it, and this has allowed me to do something that for me is fundamental: to learn again.

In this role, I have learned many things again and I have had the priceless opportunity to be here with you today and to experience the graduation ceremonies, which, as I have said, are the most exhilarating events of the entire academic year. But learning is still the most exhilarating activity in life. For me, it is worth being alive because you can learn.

I'll go a bit faster because I get carried away and my people are always saying that when I take the floor, I don't leave it and they criticize me a lot. But there are a few things I want to say. I also want to congratulate you because this is a special graduating class. Every year, every class renews, revitalizes and gives meaning to the UOC. This has always been the case, and it gives meaning to what we do; it demonstrates why we are doing the work we do.

But this year's class, your class, is one of the most special, one of the classes with the most fight and the most perseverance. Because you have gone through the start and the peak of the pandemic. The pandemic brought the world to a standstill. Sanjay Sarma, who I mentioned earlier, says that the 21st century begins in 2021. We've all seen it.

Digitalization and computer tools have been essential for surviving this worldwide standstill. But this standstill, which you have all experienced first-hand, didn't stop the UOC's classrooms from functioning, it didn't stop tutors and teaching staff from supporting you, and it didn't stop you from doing the continuous assessment activities. You didn't get out of a single one. So, we have kept moving forward. But under what conditions?

You each know your own situation. We've lost family members, we've had loved ones fall ill. And this brings me to a concept that for me is also fundamental, because it is the most precious asset for studying, for learning, for creating and for thinking. I'm talking about time. Time is an expensive asset to have. Time is essential when you want to create, to think, to reinvent yourself, to start again... And you don't have too much of it because you are people who have work, family obligations, and so on. The most spectacular thing of all is that you seem to be able to make this time. You don't have time to spare, but you know how to find it. You know how to find it and you know how to make the most of it. Òscar also made this clear to us: he had his second child around the time he started studying.

«So, congratulations to all of you and thank you for shaping the spirit of the UOC. For being restless, for being demanding with us and with yourselves. For your critical spirit and your ethical values. For taking an active role in your education and for your drive to learn in spite of the difficulties. For being open-minded. And, in general, for shaping this university: the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya.»

They've just said that today we're going to premiere our new rendition of *Gaudeamus igitur* – and this really is the first premiere. It makes me very happy because we've been planning this *Gaudeamus igitur* for many years, and we wanted to release it for the 25th anniversary and for this graduating class. So now you'll watch the premiere of our new take on *Gaudeamus igitur*, which is a joint effort between UOC groups: teaching staff, administrative staff, students, alumni... And with it, we do what we think we should do as a university: rethink ourselves, with new formats and new languages. So, I hope you enjoy it.

Good luck and congratulations!

Josep A. Planell

