



Valedictory Address
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It has often been said that we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. What is not often mentioned, however, is the reason why we are able to stand in the first place. We stand because despite multiple moments that led us astray, someone guided us. We continue because despite being on the brink of giving up, someone believed in us. We get up because despite our failures, someone lent us a hand.

As we all come together to commemorate our years in the College of Law, I would first like to take this opportunity to honor the people whose contributions have helped us get to where we are today. To our dearest Dean Fides Cordero-Tan, the UP College of Law administrators and staff, our beloved professors, mentors, family, friends, and countless others: you have not only helped us stand up, but have also stood by us through our most grueling days. We owe you what we have achieved and we extend our deepest gratitude to you.

Today, I stand to speak to you about hope amidst our suffering, and its role in our duty as future lawyers.

The first virtual university graduation held last July 26 evinces the challenges we are facing today. Celebrating within the confines of our homes, deprived of our last goodbyes to the people with whom we've shared the best and worst of the past few years did not feel like the appropriate end to a journey such as ours. More than just that, however, is the news we see everyday that highlight the suffering experienced by our nation.

We are in the midst of a global pandemic that has not only strained our economy, challenged our educational institutions, and uncovered the limitations of our current healthcare system, but on a larger scale has shaken the very foundation of our society, highlighted the shortcomings of the current administration, and exposed various social, economic, and global inequalities.

To make matters worse, we are confronted with the perpetuation of extrajudicial killings, the proliferation of online misinformation and gaslighting, and the abuse of the very positions intended for public service. All this while rates of unemployment, online sexual exploitation of children, and domestic violence continue to rise. The "new normal" we encounter today is not only the enforcement of physical distancing, but the seeming normalization of corruption, fake news, and blatant disregard of our fundamental human rights to life, liberty, and freedom of expression — the bypassing of the very legal institution we have been entrusted to uphold.



As UP Law graduates, however, we know in our hearts that this is something we can overcome. Why? Because we ourselves know what it is like to suffer, and how to rise above adversity, through hope.

Our past few years in the College of Law can be easily characterized by suffering and adversity. I am positive that many of us can relate to that feeling of dread that came with having fifty cases to be recited in one session; the nerve-wracking panic minutes before classes with a clean-desk policy; shedding tears after our first, second, third or *nth singko*; and feeling agitated twenty-four hours a day so much so that in the little amount of time we had left to rest, we could not manage to fall asleep. We all have experienced having midterm exams that coincide with our ordinary classes, or having three or more consecutive final exams without a day to study in between. We know what it is like to be called out by our professors on the inadequacy of our work or recitation, even in moments where we felt like we gave it our all.

Despite suffering, however, we, the UP Law Class of 2020, find ourselves united by one thing. Our journey throughout law school has enabled us to discover our incredible capacity and potential to have hope. I would like to note that this hope is not just optimism, neither is it mere passivity. Rather, it is active and grounded on a firm belief that our work, passion, and principles will prove to be worthwhile. Because we know we can overcome suffering, we continue to move forward. It is this very hope that has helped us, with palpitating hearts after downing more than the recommended dose of caffeine, to continue pushing forward nonetheless.

We exemplify this in our own ways and through our personal stories. In fact, among us now is a batchmate who previously failed two civil law classes, yet graduated on time while obtaining the highest grade in civil law review; a batchmate who previously failed the law aptitude exam but decided to try again and now, is graduating with honors; and a batchmate who had to drive to and from Batangas and Diliman for his twelve-hour work each day, and pursued his dream to become a lawyer despite the challenging circumstances.

Needless to say, all of us have experienced what it means to have hope amidst adversity. And when we do so, we unconsciously inspire others to do the same.

With us now is a batchmate who found hope in his professors, orgmates, and friends who stayed with him, even when those who he once called his “family” could not. The former, who believed in him, offered him a home for the holidays, and assisted him with scholarships, stood as his family and gave him the strength to continue.

Being part of the pioneer batch who attended classes in BGC, my blockmates and I found hope in each other when, despite being confronted with empty halls in a then newly-opened building deprived of student life, with neither shelves nor a photocopying machine, neither a drinking fountain nor a canteen, we took it upon ourselves to build a community of support.



Genuine hope manifests itself whenever we remain steadfast in our principles of integrity, justice and honor. It is in knowing that a just and free world is possible, that we continue to act towards that goal. Thus, it is evident when we question every system of abuse, resist injustice and reject dishonesty. It is apparent when we renounce violence, deceit, and corruption. It is also present whenever we reject misogyny, sexism and prejudice against all genders.

I have, many times, seen how our batch has stood up against dishonesty, called out those who abuse their affiliation, and chastised perpetrators of sexual harassment. I am inspired by one of our batchmates who sought for the accountability of members of a fraternity for fostering toxic masculinity, misogyny, and rape culture, despite attempts at gaslighting her. Women like her motivate others to do the same and give us hope that a culture of respect and equality may eventually be the norm.

All of these illustrate a specific kind of hope — one that does not involve merely waiting for change. Rather, it is in knowing that because our efforts will ultimately matter, we should take it upon ourselves to remain steadfast in our beliefs and continuously strive for something better. It is in knowing that because we can, we should and we will.

As we leave this college and part ways, may we imbue what has been entrenched within us as products of the College of Law and never forget what it truly means to have hope against suffering and amidst despair. Because ultimately, hope defeats despair. While despair submits that there is nothing in reality worthy of our suffering, hope rejects the finality of the present and fuels us to keep moving. We are a testament to that. Graduating from the college is in itself a champion of hope against despair; instead of admitting defeat, here we are, exhausted yet triumphant with the two letters we have long wished to achieve — J.D.

More than just that, however, is our duty, as an *iskolar ng bayan*, to continue this kind of hope — one that overcomes the sufferings of reality; remains unwavering in the face of abuse, dishonesty, and injustice; and does not falter even against naysayers that will tell us that we cannot. It is our duty to continuously put forward the principles that have been deeply ingrained in us and embody the spirit of honor and excellence. And in doing so, may we, like those who gave us hope, pave the path for others to do the same. So that eventually, the rule of law may be a rule that liberates, serves the ends that are just, and contributes to the best society for every Filipino.

Padayon, UP Law Class of 2020. Maraming Salamat po.