I must admit it was not without some trepidation that I accepted the invitation to speak to you this morning.

Traditionally, commencement addresses are composed of sentiments to inspire but as someone who prefers to sleep in, mornings have never been my strong point. At about this time every day, coffee is my only inspiration. Thankfully, we do have coffee.

I wish to begin by offering you my heartiest congratulations. Your achievement is not to be taken lightly nor underestimated. To arrive where you are today has required determination, dedication and a willingness to step out of your comfort zone to tread new paths.

You might do well to think of your life as the novel you are writing; it is a Bildungsroman, a novel of formation, of education, a coming of age story.

Not simply, of course, the education that is a part of the degree you are completing, although that education, too, is crucial to the narrative you are creating.

And that education is one that has given you many advantages. You leave SDSU with a college degree or perhaps even a second college degree; however difficult the current economy is, your degree will always give you an edge in your professional life. You have learned a second -- and in some cases a third -- language. The linguistic barriers you bridge will not only help you personally but will contribute to better understanding on a global scale. You have had an international experience as part of your degree. You have seen what it means to be the “OTHER” and that experience will inform all your future interactions.

But back to our Bildungsroman, or rather, your Bildungsroman. You are the protagonist of the tale. As you construct your narrative the question you must ask yourself is: “What do I want to learn through my experiences?” Or put another way: “Who do I want to become? “

The possibilities are unlimited but as you create your story, I urge you to think not only of yourself but of the planet on which we live and all those who inhabit it. That is the real meaning of globalization – the recognition that we do not live in isolation and that our actions can have wide-ranging effects.

SDSU has a tradition of leadership – of students who leave the university and become the forces that shape our society. How will you shape that society?
This is the moment to pause, to savor your achievements and to reflect. How will what you have learned so far lead you to make decisions informed not by personal aggrandizement but more importantly by a desire to better society? That doesn’t mean you need to impose any limits on what you can aspire to. It simply means that you cannot – must not – do it to the detriment of others. That is the most important lesson to learn as you come of age.

You are the protagonist of your Bildungsroman. It’s time to write the next chapter and see where the adventure leads you.

Again, congratulations, and thank you.