

Texas A&M International University
Commencement Address
May 9, 2024

Members of the Board of Regents, President Arenaz, Faculty, Distinguished Guests,
Parents & Graduating Students of the Texas A&M International University Class of 2024:

I. CONGRATULATIONS!

Graduates, congratulations on your graduation today! The University has prepared you well for the opportunities and challenges ahead of you as you embark on your career. TAMIU is well known around the Country and your degree will change the trajectory of your life. The A&M brand will open doors for you around the State, around the Country and literally around the world. The Texas A&M system of schools is known and respected worldwide and has become synonymous with great students who love to learn, excel and give back to their communities.

II. WHAT LIFE PRINCIPLES DO YOU CARRY WITH YOU FROM HERE?

The qualities that make TAMIU such a great school are reflective of the qualities of Laredo and the people that live here. As you leave here today, I encourage you to think about the life principles you have learned here and how they will influence your life. There are four principles I learned in my youth in Laredo that shaped who I became as a person, influencing every decision I have ever made and I challenge you today to allow these principles to shape you as well: (1) never forget where you came from; (2) be grateful; (3) believe in, inspire and help others; and (4) embrace the future.

A. Principle No. 1: Never Forget Where You Came From.

I encourage you to never forget your roots and where you came from. Who or what has inspired you? Who provided the pathway for your achievement? What adversity or challenges did you overcome to get here? How did you grow from these experiences?

My grandfather has been a huge inspiration to me in my life . . . porque todo no es como parece . . . porque todo no es como parece. Yo simplemente soy un americano de segunda

generación. Mi familia tiene raíces muy humildes en México. Mi abuelo, Matías de Llano, creció en Monterrey, y mi abuela en Lampasos, Nuevo León. El padre de mi abuelo murió cuando mi abuelo tenía sólo 11 años de edad. A los 11 años, su mamá lo mandó a vivir con parientes en Laredo porque no tenían dinero. Para ganar dinero, mi abuelo empezó a repartir el periódico Tiempo de Laredo en su bicicleta y a lustrar zapatos. Mi abuelo trabajó duro toda su vida y, desde orígenes muy humildes, y contando con el apoyo y el aliento de muchas personas, tuvo la oportunidad de crear una empresa aquí en Laredo. Comenzó literalmente sin nada y dejó un tremendo legado para su familia y su comunidad adoptiva del sur de Texas.

Because of the hard work, courage and determination of my grandfather, and my parents, I have been given an education and other life-changing opportunities, and I never want to forget where I came from. I have had the opportunity to live out a dream. It is not my dream though . . . It is my grandfather's dream. He had the hope and dream of a better life in the United States. He died very young and *I* am living out *his* dream.

B. Principle No. 2: Be Grateful.

As you look back at your life, what are you grateful for? I am grateful for all the people that believed in me and invested in me here in Laredo, including (1) my family; (2) Father Charles McNaboe and the nuns at Blessed Sacrament and Mary Help of Christians who helped shape my beliefs, my values and my views of social justice; and (3) the administrators, teachers and coaches at United and other schools around the city who provided leadership opportunities for me.

Who invested in you? Who helped shape your beliefs and values? Who gave you leadership opportunities? Be grateful. If you are grateful for someone, let them know with a text or a note. It will mean so much to them to hear from you.

C. Principle No. 3: Inspire, Believe In and Help Others.

Our dreams do not stop with us. Recognizing the opportunities we have been given, we have a responsibility to pass on those opportunities to others and help them realize their dreams.

One of my greatest opportunities to serve came when I was asked to chair the Board of AVANCE North Texas, a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to helping predominantly Latino immigrant families from Mexico through parent-child programming that ensures school readiness for young children. AVANCE became a passion for me because it provided a pathway for me to help others. Through AVANCE, we created Latino Street Fest to provide an opportunity for junior and senior high kids to sing, dance and perform music on one of the most prominent and visible stages in the United States. I tell the kids that perform in the Mariachi bands at Latino Street Fest, “You are not just performing for your families today. Univision is carrying this live, and there are thousands of people here today texting videos of you around the Country. Today, you are performing for America.”

Graduates, today, you are receiving much more than a college degree. Your life now serves as an inspiration to someone else. You are a living testament to the value of an education. Your life and achievement sends a message to others – especially those that are struggling -- that they can accomplish what you have accomplished. You now have the opportunity *to inspire and believe in and help the people behind you*. How will you exercise that opportunity? How will you help and inspire those that follow you? Where will you serve? What will be your passion?

D. Principle No. 4: Embrace the Future.

The eyes of the world are on Texas right now – all of Texas. Laredo is the center of international trade for Texas and is expected to experience tremendous growth in the coming years, along with the rest of Texas. The University is helping prepare the future workforce that will bring more companies to the region. All of this means great jobs for you and a great place to raise your families. Embrace and take advantage of the enormous opportunities before you.

III. CONCLUSION

Comencé este discurso contándoos cómo me inspiró mi abuelo. Voy a terminar contándoos cómo me inspiró mi abuela, Lola de Llano. A mi abuela le encantaban los dichos de

México. Uno de sus dichos favoritos era este: *Como el árbol, salen las astillas*. Mi abuela, a quien yo estaba muy unido, era un árbol grande y fuerte, profundamente arraigada en su fe. Su fe y amor por la familia, y su hermosa visión de la vida, han tenido mucha influencia en mi vida. Ella creyó en mí y las personas que creen en nosotros en nuestra juventud son muy influyentes en lo que llegamos a ser más adelante en la vida. Mis palabras de hoy reflejan mucho de lo que ella me enseñó. Su mejor consejo era vivir una vida ejemplar, tener una mente sana, un corazón puro, alejado de la vanidad y del orgullo. Ella plantó las semillas de mi amor y mi pasión por la cultura Mexicana.

Graduates, as you leave here, consider that one day one of your grandchildren might have the opportunity to stand up here and reflect back on you. How do you want to define your legacy for them? ¿Cuál será el árbol que plantes? As you begin your performance today for America, I challenge you to never forget where you came from, be grateful, inspire, believe in and help others, and embrace your future.