Good morning. Eminent Chancellor, Doug Stollery; President David Turpin, Board of Governors, graduands, treasured friends and colleagues – and family – my dear husband George, our four incredible children and their partners and our three amazing grand children.

Thank you so much. It’s difficult trying to find the right words to describe how grateful I am to receive this special honor – it is well above anything I would have thought possible.

To be here amongst such esteemed members of academia, business and the community is extraordinary. And, to be able to share this important, and well-earned milestone in your journey – is truly a gift. A heartfelt congratulations to you all.
I would be remiss not to also acknowledge the important leadership and support this institution – its leaders, faculty, staff and students – has provided to our efforts over the years. From the outstanding research conducted through the Community University Partnership; through the valued contributions of Dean Joseph Doucette, Jeff Bisanz and others to Mayor’s Task Force on Poverty Elimination; through your annual fundraising efforts which continue to inspire us all. The support of this University has been nothing short of stellar and of immense value to our community as a whole. And finally – a personal thank you to Dr. John Bertie, Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Science and United Way volunteer who helped me so much in my early career when I was working on the U of A campaign. Your time and guidance to me was so special.
This occasion is particularly bitter sweet for me, having grown up in a time when post-secondary education was unreachable for most and still considered somewhat of an indulgence for women. For most – marriage and family were the priority and education was at best for those who chose nursing or teaching as bridges to marriage and family. That said, I was a persuasive young woman and I convinced my father to spend the enormous sum of $400 to send his daughter to the University of Calgary. I was on my way to break new territory for our family only to find that within the first year the pressures to get on with earning a living and to start a family overtook my pursuit of higher education. And so it was, I would leave the University – and make my way into the world armed only with a high school diploma, a strong work ethic and a fierce desire to change the world.
I always promised myself I would return. However, my return didn’t quite go as planned. Instead…40 plus years later I stand here today – humbled and honored beyond anything I could have imagined for myself.

Leading up to this moment, life brought me more than my fair share of opportunity. I was most fortunate when I found United Way – first as a volunteer and then as a staff member. It allowed me to channel my passion for social justice and my skills as a communicator into an organization that would give me far more than I could ever give to it. It has afforded a life-long learning journey where I have been able to work alongside and learn from our region’s most accomplished leaders -- academics, business leaders, labour leaders, and community leaders. As important has been the opportunity to work with front line professionals, volunteers and the people we serve.
It has been an exciting journey – one which has exposed me to every field imaginable and one which has taught me, above all else, that we all have gifts and talents --and when we focus those gifts and talents for the good of everyone – we can make positive, sustainable change – we can make a difference.

This a city and a province, struggling in a time of economic down turn, change and uncertainty, but none-the-less, it remains one of the most prosperous places on the planet. We enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world. We are safe. We have access to state of the art health care and education. It is a place of immense abundance and yet still, 120,000 people struggle in poverty each and every day. 40,000 of them are children.

We take great pride, and well we should, in our spirit of volunteerism – our compassion and generosity.
Together we support a comprehensive network of
government and non-government social programs and we help
and support families in need.

But the one message I’d like to leave with you today is
this: **We can do better.**

Treating the symptoms – making people a bit more
“comfortable” in their poverty is not enough…nor is it in any
way acceptable.

We simply must turn our attention, our time, our talent
towards what I think is our world’s most wicked social issue.
Whether cause, symptom or effect – poverty is at the root of
every social challenge we face. It strips us of our dignity – it
steals our dreams and it costs us billions of dollars every year in
our health care system, our justice system and our social system
– not to mention in lost productivity and potential.
So here I am with you – graduands of the faculty of science – you may well be thinking: why are you talking to us about social issues? Because it’s you – the people in this room – that our community needs.

Who better to take up the challenge – with your analytical minds, your penchant for problem-solving, your ability to breakdown complexity… Poverty is not a natural phenomenon – it is human-made, it is a choice and it is solvable.

And so I want to encourage you – to share your hearts, hands and minds – to take your skills and channel what you have learned – at least in part -- to the business of solving poverty. How would you define the problem? What information would you seek out? What approach would you take? How would measure progress and success?
This is the discipline we need – and when combined with that spirit of caring and generosity that is in all of us – just imagine what we could accomplish together.

So as you go forward to make your mark on the world – I ask of you to consider three things.

First – I ask you to feed that inquisitiveness that led you here today and nurture your understanding of your community. Take a walk through our inner city. Stop in at the Bissell Center and talk with residents at Operation Friendship. Then drive around other neighborhoods in the city and region. Take notice of the homes, the streets, the playgrounds and the people. Absorb what you see – the differences and the similarities. Go online and discover the data – demographics, socio-economics, health data, crime statistics.
Google poverty elimination. See what’s being done and be inspired by the people and the organizations who are tackling poverty at its core.

Second – build your own hypothesis and think about how you will become part of the solution – how you will contribute to poverty elimination. Make time in your busy lives to stay involved in your community, to contribute those amazing brains you have, to share your unique talents and develop and act on your passion.

And finally – and most importantly -- share your observations and your learnings with others. In all my 30 plus year career, I have not come across anyone who didn’t care – only those who didn’t know.
Start with family and friends – encourage them to learn about the issues and about the community. Invite them to join you in being part of the solution. When we know, when we understand, when we work together – we can to tackle poverty in all its forms.

You represent some of our best minds and it is you who will set the course for a brighter, more equitable, more sustainable future. It is you – who gives me and so many others like me hope and confidence in our future– knowing you will make Edmonton, Alberta and the world a better place for everyone.

Thank you so much for listening and for allowing me to share my passion with you. A heartfelt congratulations for all you have accomplished thus far in your journey – and for all you will accomplish in the years to come.
Thank you.