

Dear Sigma Tau Delta Inductees, Award Winners, and Graduates,

The first thing I will say is that I miss seeing you all, and will miss very much the opportunity to recognize in person and through ceremony your accomplishments. I want you to know how very proud we are of you—to finish your education, to achieve beyond your peers, under the circumstances we all face now is exceptional.

My usual comments at this point would focus on those achievements, but as we all know, this year is different from all others. All others. Whatever your individual experiences of this awful pandemic have been, we have collectively endured—are enduring—an historic moment rife with sadness and uncertainty, and in which we are apart from each other. I believe in community, and the strength of ours is its persistence in the absence of physical presence, but we forged those bonds in person, and must look to when we may be together again. Graduates, we want you to know you are permanent members of our Monmouth English Department. We expect you to be among us when we can be together again.

In these weeks, now months, we have been asked to sacrifice, to serve, by staying home. For a while, that made me feel rather useless, as I watched health care workers, first responders, custodial staff, sanitation workers, grocery and pharmacy workers out in the world of risk. But we must never forget the need for education, that what we all do as students and faculty in the liberal arts is one of the most significant determinants for our world. Education matters.

And then there was that word: “essential.” I wrote to faculty about it, and I wrote to students about it, about establishing what that meant in the context of this semester. Now the semester is over, and it is time to think (as best we can) forward. Education is essential. Courage is essential. That does not mean not being afraid; we all have been afraid. It does mean carrying on in the face of fear, of reaching beyond self in whatever way your life leads you to serve your communities. Service to others matters, whatever field you enter, wherever you decide to live. Each of us, each of you, is essential, if you decide to matter.

I ask that in the days, months, and years going forward, you save some time of reflection, of silence, to remember those who have died and those who have suffered during this time, and that you use that reflection as a source of profound inspiration.

Congratulations to you all. I wish for you lives filled with health, meaning, and the spirit of community.

Sincerely,

Susan Goulding, PhD
Chair, Department of English