

APIG Graduation

June 12, 2016

Speaker: Tiffany Wang-Su Tran '16

Good afternoon and welcome, I am incredibly honored to be speaking as one of your 2016 APIG student speakers.

To my fellow peers of the Class of 2016, congratulations! We made it!

For the past few years, we've been going through this exhilarating and liberating journey we call "being an undergraduate student at UCLA." Some of you maybe have been at UCLA for a few for four or five years and some may have spent 2 years at UCLA as a transfer student. Whatever it was that made you want to pursue a degree at UCLA, I ask that you always remember that.

It isn't everyday that we sit in a classroom and actually feel moved by what we are learning. My K-12 education certainly did not feature many experiences I could personally identify with. When learning about Asian American communities we were lucky if our books dedicated maybe a few paragraphs to the incarceration of Japanese Americans or a sentence or two on Chinese railroad workers and Vietnamese boat people. When we learned about the farmworkers movement we never learned about the Pilipino manongs, we didn't learn about how a series of wars in Southeast Asia displaced millions of communities as refugees, nor did we learn about colonial expansion in the Kingdom of Hawai'i, Guam, or Samoa. We did not receive the relevant education that we deserved.

Therefore I ask that you remember the reason for why you chose to pursue your higher education at UCLA. Whether it was a friend, a professor, a family member, or the dining hall food that made you want to attend UCLA, please remember that. We are part of a group of students who have been privileged enough to expand our knowledge of community, identity, and social consciousness at UCLA. As Asian Pacific Islander Desi American students we have benefited the fruits of the labor of generations who fought for our right to receiving an education at this institution before us. The APIDA community on this very campus has grown significantly since its early days and that has come as a result of great resiliency and community organizing.

I am going to stress community throughout this speech because that is exactly what we have all gained through our time at UCLA. As a transfer student, these past two years have gone by quickly. I never thought I'd write a departmental honors thesis about my family's experiences as ethnic Chinese refugees from Vietnam. Through this thesis I have gained so much more insight into why and how my family dynamics exist, and also so much more knowledge about the broader Southeast Asian community. My experiences in student organizations as the chair of APIUA and an intern then staff member of the Asian Pacific Coalition, co-chair of SEATED 2015, and member of SEACLEAR (wow, I basically read my resume to y'all) has shown me that UCLA students are about so much more than just going to class. We all have this burning desire to make initiate change and see it through.

For those of you who follow me on instagram, and if you don't well you should (this is totally not a shameless plug) y'all know that I have a quote from the revolutionary Grace Lee Boggs, "...as I've grown older, I've understood that I should change. And changing was more honorable than not changing."

We need to embrace the change that has resulted from our journey through UCLA. We are all capable of taking these changes that we have developed through our journey here, and implement them in our communities.

The welcoming yet critical setting of UCLA has provided me with a community of peers, mentors, professors, and lifelong friends. It has also taught me to question the status quo, and challenge what others have set before me. I am certain that you have all experienced the same challenge or you all would not be here before me today. Every paper, every class, and every test was a chance to learn more about ourselves and our communities. I can only imagine how rewarding this experience has been for all of you.

As we enter the "real world" and navigate post-grad life, it is important to remind ourselves that there is no right way to define success. As I'm sure many of you are used to reciting by now. Please repeat this with me probably not for the last time ever. When folks ask, "What are you going to do with your degree?" Join me in responding, "Whatever I want!" Let's try it. What are you going to do with your degree? "Whatever I want!"

Because we have received the ultimate skills of being critical yet compassionate and we can apply what we have learned into every field imaginable.

Thank you again, and congratulations class of 2016.