December Commencement Address
President Eli Capilouto
December 14, 2012

Members of the Board of Trustees; faculty and staff of the University of Kentucky; alumni, friends, family and honored guests; and most especially, the December 2012 graduating class.

This assembly of student scholars -- gathered in a chorus of support with your family and friends -- humbles me. Our university is grateful for the privilege of sharing a journey that today is marked and celebrated … Your passage through a doorway that leads to a future of possibility and adventure.

As students, and now as graduates, you are part of an enduring legacy. This legacy – annually cast in parchment – is brought to life by hundreds of thousands of individuals who have contributed greatly to our Kentucky Promise - a three-fold mission to advance our state and region through learning, research and service.

I continue to be dazzled by you. Your diploma recognizes the mastery of the latest knowledge and desire to advance it through your hard work, curiosity and discovery.

You have reached this point because of your fortitude - your commitment to learning, discovery and service. That tenacity fueled your academic career, it will continue fueling and focusing your lives of meaning and purpose. Use it well.

Throughout the course of human history, the greatest triumphs, global achievements, scientific breakthroughs and technological advancements, have come at the hands of those with deep commitment and determination to advancing a unifying cause or goal.

Our country's birth was the result of our founding fathers' and mothers' perseverance in the face of a towering empire. It was their strength and persistence that heralded revolutionary change.

Our Commonwealth was settled by pioneers who set out to explore an unknown wilderness beyond the Appalachian Mountains.

And our institution's foundation was built by the will and focus of steadfast supporters. It was shaped -- through decades of trial and triumph -- by their determination to create a University that best served a noble cause … the idea that higher education should blend the liberal and practical arts, and the sciences to secure a brighter future for the people of our state.

Ours is an enduring story of progress … marked not by edifices or buildings, but by people who have persevered and helped light our path forward today.

Courage and resolve were in the actions of an African American school teacher from Louisville who broke barriers as the first black student admitted to graduate study at the University of Kentucky.

It was alive in a pioneering female journalist - among the very first in the south - Marguerite McLaughlin who was a leader in the newspaper business and first woman teacher of journalism in the United States.
That strength and will to succeed is alive in each of our students, remembered by us over the passage of time ... strongly heard and felt in the stirring echoes of history ... and passed forward to you as descendants of a Promise that has guided this institution for nearly 150 years.

Many of you are beginning a new chapter in your life - a book whose final chapter is yet to be written. You have overcome challenge as you moved toward this moment - this day.

Among you is a graduate who traveled from Asia to earn his Master’s degree in Public Policy. After two years of rigorous coursework, he’s preparing to return to his native country and apply the skills he’s gained to enhance regional communications and relations. [Graduate Ceremony Only]

One graduate is completing a higher education journey that began in 1986. Having served many years as a Kentucky State Police Officer, she returned to UK this past year to complete her studies in Community Communications and Leadership Development.

Another graduate - whose personal life was dramatically impacted as last spring’s storms ripped through West Liberty, Kentucky - will graduate with her degree in Medical Laboratory Science. Traditionally a four-year program, she completed it in 18 months and is preparing to return to the region for a job at St. Claire hospital. She is going back to help those still in need. [Undergraduate Ceremony Only]

Still, another graduate, from Pendleton County, Kentucky, helped establish a small-scale farm that now provides 100 percent of the produce for the Owsley County School District. As a student, he served as the United States’ delegate to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in Hyderbad, India. Today he is graduating with a degree in natural resources and environmental sciences.

Our institution remains deeply committed to innovation and entrepreneurism. Across campus, faculty and staff show indelible strength in the face of uncertain times. Students continue working tirelessly, excelling at their interests and addressing local and global issues through outreach.

In ways big and small, we are a university - a family - that perseveres ... forged in the fires of trials and obstacle ... committed to bringing hope to people and communities at home and abroad.

As you begin your next chapter, remember that great accomplishment takes unrelenting strength of self and personal will to succeed. Through it - and through you as one Big Blue Nation United - we are able to fulfill our Kentucky Promise and continue this cycle of progress from generation to generation.

Congratulations to all of you as you set forth on a new beginning. Thank you for the indelible imprint you've left on your university and remember to always see blue.