Vice-Chairperson Pamela May and the University Of Kentucky Board Of Trustees, distinguished Members of the Platform Party, Provost Subbaswamy, Dr. Hollie Swanson and members of the University Senate, honored guests, faculty, staff, parents, friends and family, and most especially, the graduating class of 2011 for which this Commencement Ceremony stands as the doorway to a bright future.

I am humbled by this assembly of scholars and would like to thank you for the special privilege and opportunity to join you this evening.

Before I begin, there is a special individual among us who I would like to recognize. Dr. Lois Chan, a professor of Library and Information Science, is retiring from a career spent in service to the University. For the more than four decades, Professor Chan has devoted her spirit and brilliance to the University of Kentucky, the advancement of her field, the support of her colleagues, and the preparation and education of countless students.

For those of you in the audience who have joined us for previous Commencement Ceremonies; you will recognize Dr. Chan as our University Marshal. Since 1989, she has served in this honored role as a singular representation of our core academic mission and the values of our storied institution.

Please join me in thanking this renowned researcher, professor and mentor, who has served with distinction in so many important roles at the University of Kentucky.

-- APPLAUSE --

Dr. Chan is a telling example of the devotion demonstrated by the UK Family to their University – a special feeling of pride for our rich legacy and the defining character of this institution. It is the Soul of the University of Kentucky.

And you, the students who we celebrate, carry that spirit – that soul – in ways that inspire me and countless others across this University. Your achievements lend bright hope in precarious times. You are the leaders of tomorrow who have left an indelible mark on your University.

While you were here – UK was a top producer of Fulbright Scholars.

While you were here – Our institution provided the highest number of teachers to the Teach For America Program.
While you were here – You took first place in an International Interior Design Competition.

While you were here – You participated in the world’s largest balloon fight.

While you were here - You raised millions for pediatric oncology research and other worthy causes, you spent thousands of hours working in our communities, you built a Habitat for Humanity home, and played alongside the Boston Pops.

While you were here – Our Biochemistry department was named among the Top-20 in the nation.

While you were here – We beat the University of Tennessee for the first time in 26 years.

While you were here – Our debate team took home the varsity championship.

While you were here – through your Study-Abroad – you made our presence known in China, India, and around the world.

Our goal is to graduate the best and brightest – and we know we have.

As you can see, Commencement marks an auspicious occasion for this graduating class – in one sense it closes a chapter of astounding accomplishment. But, in a separate and more impactful sense, you begin a new chapter in the cause for learning and service as you embark on lives of meaning and purpose.

Tonight you are joining a special part of the UK Family – generations of graduates – some 200,000 strong, who return to their communities as leaders – as doctors, lawyers, poets, pharmacists, educators and entrepreneurs. You are among the bastions of hope for our Commonwealth and our world.

You are part of our most precious legacy – the newest members of a collection of Kentucky citizens deeply committed to fulfilling the promise of the University of Kentucky: To create ever brighter days.

The creation of the land grant university in 1862 established the idea that a higher education should be available to all people. And it would eventually create a vast network of over 100 universities that would uplift the communities they serve.

It was an uncommon approach to a common, but daunting, challenge – the education of a nation...the preparation of a new generation that will lead the world through unforeseen obstacles so that we may emerge stronger.
The founding fathers and mothers of land grant universities could not imagine the changes our society would face as we evolved. But they laid the foundation with a single idea that these universities would be our best hope for meeting those challenges.

And today, we fulfill that promise by speeding progress on the issues of our day. Such as: The security of our food, energy, environment, and health.

The world is calling for innovative thinkers and creators... Leaders who challenge us to think anew about old ideas and dream of solutions that were never conceived. You hold the answers we seek ... The solutions to the complex challenges we must rise above.

Tonight, you will walk away with a credential from the University of Kentucky. Your diploma is a tangible reminder of your accomplishments at UK. It is a symbol of your intellect, persistence and perseverance.

With it, comes special responsibility. Your degree is a ticket to the greatest show on earth where those who chose to enter will shape the destiny of the globe.

Knowledge transmitted to you by an incredible faculty and staff is now yours to apply in service to your family, community, state, and nation. You hold responsibility to grow this knowledge and gift it to those who will follow you so that the tradition of excellence marked by nearly 150 years of UK Commencement Ceremonies remain as a touchstone of marvel and hope.

I know the force of the talent and goodness you now possess.

Use it, as more than 200,000 graduates that preceded you, to create a marketplace of ideas and commerce.

Use it, to stir and rest the souls of your families and fellow citizens.

Use it, as weavers of the fabric that builds and holds together those brotherhoods and sisterhoods that steady communities in their darkest hour.

Use it, as a light unto the nations that illuminate our path to a better tomorrow.

Use it, in honor and gratitude to this University, your family and friends who hold you dear and believe that through you any unfinished work shall be done.

In this spirit, I want to share a special story of one of our graduates who, today, completes his unfinished work. A true example of the unending cause of learning...

In 1962, one of our Kentucky students placed his academic career on hold and answered the call to military duty. He served a cause greater than himself to fulfill his nation’s promise of a secure world.
He recently returned to the University to complete his formal education and he will walk across the stage in tonight’s Commencement Ceremonies. It’s a remarkable story and emblematic of the important role of the University of Kentucky and the immense value of lifelong learning.

I’d like to recognize T.L. Hughes, a Donovan Fellow who is a proud member of the class of 2011.

APPLAUSE

Going forward, all of you, as a University of Kentucky alumni, are part of a unique association, one which provides exceptional benefits and camaraderie with fellow Wildcats.

I urge you to stay connected to your University – through the Alumni Association, arts, and athletic events. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and whatever comes next – help us share the good work of our Institution and share with us your good work.

As you receive your diploma and leave the Coliseum this evening, remember to thank those in the audience for their support and devotion to your success. No man or woman is an island and we are bettered by those who surround us.

Congratulations on this remarkable milestone – one of many that you will experience in your years ahead. Thank you for the imprint you leave on this institution and the effort you bring in honoring the University’s promise to Kentucky.