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2025 Master's in Applied Economics and Social Policy Program Graduation Speech

Good afternoon everyone—graduates, families, friends, and colleagues.

Every year I stand here feeling proud, but this year feels a little different. This is my fourth graduating class. Four cohorts. Four groups of students who walked in with questions, doubts, and big ambitions—and are now leaving with a clearer sense of who you are and the kind of impact you want to make.

After four cohorts, I've learned something important: I never actually get used to this moment.

Every year, I think I know what to expect, and every year, you surprise me, with the risks you take, the honesty in your conversations, the way you show up for one another, and how much you manage to hold and accomplish in just a short year.

You entered this program during a time when the ground seemed to shift constantly. AI was evolving faster than policy could keep up. Global labor markets were changing. And many of you were going through personal transitions at the same time. But instead of pulling back, you leaned in. You asked hard questions. You adapted. You took chances. And most importantly, you supported each other.

I watched you build something more important than a résumé: you built community, courage, and curiosity.

Over these four years of doing this, I've realized that graduation speeches aren't really about celebrating accomplishments; they're about acknowledging **transitions**. Those messy, meaningful, in-between moments when things don't feel settled yet, but you know you're becoming someone new.

And transitions need reminders.

So the first reminder I want to leave you with is this:

“Everything will be fine in the end. If it's not fine, it's not the end.”

I've kept this quote close through grant cycles, evaluations, unexpected pivots, and moments where nothing felt clear. And I know many of you held onto it too this year.

But there's a second reminder I think fits your class especially well:

“Sometimes when things are falling apart, they may actually be falling into place.”

Not every disappointment is a stop sign. Not every uncertainty is a warning. Sometimes the hard moments are just making room for the right next step.

Class of 2025, as you head into new cities, new jobs, new goals, and new unknowns, I hope you hold onto three things:

- Be brave enough to keep rewriting your story.
- Be generous enough to let others be part of it.
- And be patient enough to let the things that are “not fine yet” unfold.

Four years of giving these speeches have taught me this: students don’t just learn from faculty —**faculty learn from students, too**. You’ve shaped how we lead, how we teach, and how we think about possibility.

Thank you for trusting this program.

Thank you for trusting each other.

And thank you for teaching us as well.

Congratulations, Class of 2025. I cannot wait to see where your story goes from here.

Dinner reception opening:

Good evening everyone, and welcome to our graduation dinner!

I am genuinely so happy to see all of you here—in person, dressed up, smiling, relaxed. This is the moment in the year when I look around the room and think: *Ah yes... this is what everyone looks like when they're not running on three hours of sleep and cappuccino.*

Tonight is special. Not just because we're celebrating your graduation, but because this is the one evening of the year where:

- No one is asking me for an extension,
- No one is asking for the grading rubric, and
- No one is emailing me at 2 AM saying, "Hi Professor, just a quick question..."

Now, I know you've had a demanding year.

You balanced coursework, internships, job searches, presentations, and relationships, some with other humans, some with Python, Stata, or ChatGPT.

Tonight, I want you to do something radical: **Relax. Eat. Laugh. Breathe.**

And please, enjoy food you did not microwave at midnight while completing a homework.

If this is your first graduation dinner with us, let me explain the format:

It's very simple. You eat. You celebrate. You take photos. You meet the people who supported you through this program and smiled politely while pretending to understand your econometrics jokes.

One more time to our graduates:

Look around the room. These are your people.

The ones you wrote late-night messages with, the ones who shared notes, the ones who helped you survive the moments when you weren't sure you'd make it.

Tonight is as much about celebrating those friendships as it is about the degree.

So please—enjoy every minute. Take photos. Take videos. Take the dessert.

This is the fun part, the warm part, the "we made it" part.

Let's start with joy, good food, and the simple fact that you are here, together, celebrating something you've truly earned. Welcome again to our graduation dinner. Let's make it a wonderful night.

1. Excellence in Teaching Award

Our first award is the **Excellence in Teaching Award**, which recognizes faculty instructors who have enriched the educational experience of students.

This award goes to someone who consistently shows up with clarity, passion, and a genuine commitment to helping students succeed. Someone who not only explains the material well, but makes students feel supported—even when the subject matter gets complicated, or when half the class is pretending to understand matrix algebra.

This faculty member has been repeatedly praised by students for their patience, their clarity, and their ability to turn difficult concepts into meaningful learning experiences.

It is my great pleasure to present the 2025 Excellence in Teaching Award to: ofer Malamud

2. Innovation in Teaching Award

Our next award is the **Innovation in Teaching Award**, which honors a faculty member who re-envisions traditional models and pushes the boundaries of how we teach and learn.

This award goes to someone who inspires creativity, experiments with new approaches, and is brave enough to ask the question, “What if we taught this in a different way?” And then they actually *do* it—successfully.

This faculty member brings fresh ideas into the classroom, embraces new tools and technologies, and creates experiences that spark curiosity in ways students don’t forget. In a year when we talk so much about innovation, this person truly embodies it.

Please join me in congratulating our 2025 Innovation in Teaching Award recipient:

3. Applied Learning Award

Our final award is the **Applied Learning Award**, which recognizes a faculty member who helps students take what they learn in the classroom and bring it into the real world—where it matters most.

This award goes to someone who equips students not just with theories and models, but with practical skills. Someone who encourages students to engage with real data, real problems, and real communities. And someone who helps students discover that their work can—and does—make an impact outside the classroom.

Many of you have shared stories of how this faculty member encouraged you, challenged you, pushed you, and helped you see your own potential in a new way.