

**THE FIFTY-EIGHTH COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES
OF
MASSACHUSETTS BAY COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

June 30, 2020

President Podell:

Good evening. I am David Podell, President of MassBay Community College. It is my honor to welcome you – family, friends, faculty, staff, distinguished guests, and the members of the 2020 graduating class — to our 58th Commencement Ceremony at MassBay Community College!

I have the pleasure of introducing Dinora Torres who will sing the National Anthem. Dinora is a current student at Massbay who is pursuing an Associate in Science degree in Accounting.

Dinora Torres:

Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars thru the perilous fight
O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air
Gave proof thru the night that our flag was still there
Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

President Podell:

Thank you, Dinora.

As President, I declare the 58th Commencement Exercises to be officially convened!

I want to begin by acknowledging our graduates. The “community” in MassBay Community College is more than just a word. We are a community of individuals who bring a diversity of life experiences, challenges, obstacles, talents, interests, and viewpoints to this special institution. We celebrate all 625 graduating members of the Class of 2020.

Let us also take this moment to acknowledge your parents, spouses and partners, children, and other family and friends, who supported you as you worked toward your degree. No one makes it to this moment alone. I ask our graduates to please thank your family and friends for their support.

MassBay is fortunate to have faculty who are passionately committed to educating our students in classrooms, laboratories, and in the field. Their dedication to teaching has transformed the lives of our graduates. I know you all join me in thanking the outstanding faculty of MassBay Community College.

I want to acknowledge also the dedicated staff of MassBay, who support our students in their pursuit of their degrees. Staff members, thank you so much.

In addition to our wonderful faculty and staff, MassBay is fortunate to have a strong and active Board of Trustees and Foundation Board. I thank all of them for their unwavering support of MassBay.

It is now my pleasure to introduce the Chair of MassBay Community College's Board of Trustees. Thomas E. Peisch has served as a distinguished member of the Board since his appointment in 2012 by Governor Deval Patrick, and was first appointed as Chair by Governor Charlie Baker in 2015 and reappointed in 2017. A retired lawyer and a long-time Wellesley resident, he has long been a champion of MassBay and is committed to expanding opportunity and access for our students. Please welcome the Chair of our Board of Trustees, Thomas E. Peisch.

Tom Peisch:

Thank you, President Podell. It is my honor to be here this evening to represent the Board of Trustees.

On behalf of the 11 members of the BOT, I congratulate each and every member of the graduating Class of 2020! You have completed your studies in the midst of one of the greatest crises in our nation's history, and the BOT is proud of each of you. Through your hard work, dedication and resilience, and through the support of your family and friends, you have earned this moment. I wish I could shake each of your hands, but for now I will say Congratulations on your accomplishments and the degrees and certificates that you will receive today.

And now, by the authority vested in the Board of Trustees, I do hereby charge the President of the College with full responsibility for the Commencement exercises and for the conferring of the degrees of associate in arts, associate in science, and certificates, as directed by the Board of Trustees and with the consent of the faculty of the College.

President Podell:

Thank you, Chairperson Peisch.

Now, it is my pleasure to introduce Dr. Lynn Moore, the College's Chief Diversity Officer who will offer a Salutation.

Dr. Moore:

Congratulations, MassBay Community College Class of 2020.

Graduates, this is your moment.

Hello, family and friends of MassBay Community College Class of 2020. We have heard the welcome, the National anthem, and the Charge to the College.

We are now looking forward to:

- The Student Speaker;
- The Remarks from the President;
- The Faculty Speakers;
- Presentation of degrees from the Provost.

Then, graduates, the time will finally come that you and generations of your family have waited for – to hear your name called by your Dean.

Can you recall when you walked into your first class in:

- Ashland?
- Framingham?
- Wellesley campus?

At that point you had already decided you were ready to make a change. And we are pleased that you came to MassBay. Take a moment - think about how your dreams are being realized. You have finished this important step of your journey. Take a moment to think about how you might feel when you hear your name.

In March our world changed and you survived. You actually did more than survive you seized the moment and kept moving forward.

We all are proud of you. And you should definitely be proud of yourself.

When the Dean calls your name that will

- Represent a new normal for you and your family;
- That represents that you have completed a step in your journey;
- That represents that you have what it takes to:
 - Have a goal,
 - Plan for it,
 - And then finished it.

I want you to listen for your name. Listen because this is your time. After you hear your name called and when the ceremony is complete – share this moment:

- Take turns putting your robe on your children and call their name;
- Put your robe on your partner and call their name;
- If your Grandparents are with you put the robe on them and call their name;
- Put your robe on your mother and call her name;
- Put your robe on your father and call his name;
- Put your robe on others that you love and call their name.

Take pictures, make videos to document your historic accomplishment! And then – go out and make changes to our world Congratulations, Graduates, we all hear your name.

President Podell:

Thank you, Dr. Moore

It is now my honor to introduce this year's Student Speaker, Amber Khan. Amber will graduate tonight with a 3.68 GPA and an Associate's Degree in General Studies. Amber plans to attend University of Massachusetts at Amherst in the fall where she will be studying Biochemistry.

Please welcome this year's Student Commencement Speaker, Amber Khan.

Amber Khan:

Thank you very much, President Podell! It is an honor today to address the students, parents, and faculty of MassBay, at a very different commencement ceremony than I'm sure we had all imagined.

There is a standard set for commencement speeches; parabolic lessons that usually tie back to cliché graduation quotes. Commencement is a time-honored tradition for college graduates. It is distinguished by academic regalia and a chance to get on stage, and receive the acknowledgement that is so greatly deserved after all of our hard work. It is proud traditions like this that provide people with a sense of normalcy and unity, which I'm sure we're all craving during these tumultuous times.

Our graduating class today, however, has had to sacrifice these conventions. This year, the world that we are stepping into is different than the one that we had anticipated. It has been brought to a halt, and with it, immense losses have been suffered. People have lost loved ones, their jobs, and their sense of security. In this time of mourning and wariness, college graduates have had to bury the dismay they feel at the loss of their graduation ceremonies. At MassBay,-- we value justice, and equality. Diversity is a pillar in the foundation of our student body, and many of our graduates are non-traditional students. This may be their first, and last, graduation ceremony. While we can't be together in person, my fellow graduates no longer have to swallow their longing for a live commencement, because today is about us.

The class of 2020 will go down in history for the sacrifices we have had to make. We have spent these past few months in uncertainty, and the questions being asked kept changing. We wondered if school would reopen after spring break, then we were left to wonder how the shift to remote learning would work. For some of our graduates, the technological disparities may have hindered their efforts, but nothing was enough to keep them down.

The opportunities that seemed like a given, such as jobs that we had lined up after graduation, or moving into a dorm at a four year university in the fall, have been placed on hold or taken from us in what feels like the blink of an eye. But despite having to move forward through these tribulations, and the transitions we have had to adjust to, our pursuits never faltered. When we could have given up, we kept going.

To focus on online lectures in a house that your entire family is stuck in for an indefinite period of time is challenging, to say the least. But we did it. We powered through our new routines, taking notes over video chat lectures and performing labs through virtual simulations. When all we wanted to do was give up, watch Netflix, and play Animal Crossing, we finished our work anyways. We missed our friends, our study groups, our advisors, and our professors. It has been easy to feel lonely during these times. But we remained resilient.

Today, we graduate, and we will continue to face uncertainties in this new world. In the face of adversity, unpredictability and change are inevitable.

So today is the day where we can commend ourselves for our diligence and hard work during our time at MassBay. We can look back on the long hours that we have had to put in, writing papers and completing hefty amounts of coursework, while simultaneously balancing our jobs and our families.--When we would prepare for finals, the afternoon after our last one was the light at the end of the tunnel that we looked towards for solace. In these strange circumstances, we need to keep that optimism alive. We need to seek comfort in each other, and care for others as much as we care for ourselves.

We need to continue to look forward, but also give ourselves a pat on the back. Our sacrifices have been for the greater good, and we have jumped incredible hurdles to get to this point. Our parents and professors know this, and they are proud of us. The unity that a commencement ceremony brings us is something that we have already been able to achieve through this brush with history that we are living through, together. We don't know what the future holds for us, but today, class of 2020, we deserve to celebrate. After the extensive efforts we have put in to our academics in order to be here today, we deserve to shine a light on our own difficulties during our time at MassBay, and how we have been able to overcome them.

It is not selfish to congratulate ourselves, because despite not being together in person, and despite everything that we have faced these past few months, we didn't give up, and we never will. We can look back on our

journey here and know that we have proved that we are more than ready for whatever lies ahead of us.

Congratulations class of 2020, thank you and good luck.

President Podell:

Thank you, Amber, for sharing those words of inspiration with us.

The occasion of a Commencement ceremony invites us to reflect on matters that, on ordinary days, we may overlook, matters such as our goals, our path forward, our gratitude to those who helped us succeed. This particular Commencement ceremony occurs at a time when our society is examining itself more critically than in the recent past.

Our society seems to be finally realizing: *Maybe we are not as wonderful as we thought we were. Maybe ours is not a just society, a society where everyone has an equal chance at success and happiness. Maybe the way we have constructed society has benefitted some but has oppressed, terrorized, and denied access to others.*

Out of setbacks comes determination. Out of adversity comes invention. Let's make sure that out of the tragedy of George Floyd's death comes a better society, one that is more fair and more just – a society of which we are more proud.

You are graduating at a pivot point in our history, at a time when our society could either keep doing the same thing we've been doing, or it

could start to change. I urge you to think about how you can be part of the change. How can you use your talent, your intelligence, your energy, and your time to make the world better for others? Let your achievement of your degree be the *commencement* of your commitment to help others, as others have helped you.

It is now my pleasure to introduce two of our esteemed faculty members who we have asked to share their answer to the question “What matters?”

First, we will have the opportunity to hear from Dr. Ruma Mishra. Dr. Mishra is a Professor of Psychology in the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Chair of the Social Sciences Department. She received her M.A. and her Ph.D. from Kanpur University in India.

Please welcome Professor Ruma Mishra.

Dr. Mishra

Hi everyone,

Congratulations to the Massbay graduating class of 2020 and to your family, friends and loved ones. Even with a tough semester, you made it and all of us here at Massbay could not be prouder of you.

When the spring semester started, many of you were probably busy planning for graduation, meeting with your advisors, sharing your excitement with family & friends, and thinking about what the future holds. I am sure at that time, none of us envisioned a virtual commencement. But it goes without saying, that being virtual has its advantages. No more, do you

need to struggle with the heat and humidity of being under a tent or getting lost in the crowd looking for your loved ones. Instead, you are sitting in the comfort of your own homes, surrounded by people who love you. I encourage you to turn to them and give them a big warm hug and thank them for all their love and support. Cherish this moment.

These past few months have taught us how to work through struggles and move forward in moments of adversity and uncertainty.

Life doesn't always turn out the way we plan. Sometimes the future we envision, doesn't hold true. But that shouldn't deter us from moving forward.

I remember when I was offered my first teaching course at Massbay. I was excited but super nervous at the same time. Having come from India, it was my first time teaching a class in America. Now as many of you may know, I plan everything. A week before the class started, I visited the campus, checked the classroom, and made sure that the computer and projector were working.

And of course, on the first day of class, as I tried to insert the floppy disk with my slides, (chuckle) yes, that's what we used in those days, I was horrified to see that all of the slides were upside down. I became so flustered and embarrassed. Even with all of my planning, things were falling apart.

I could have decided to get upset, end class early, or honestly leave. But the choices we make in the face of adverse situations and uncertain challenges reveal our true character. Instead I decided to face to be honest, to open up to my students. I shared with them my nervousness and uneasiness, and of course they were all very kind and understanding. Together we made it through that first day.

When nothing seems to be under our control, remember that the choice we make matters. We can either choose to give up or rise to the occasion, we can choose an easy path or a difficult but right one.

This time of crisis has brought much adversity, hardship, and struggle, but it has also given you an opportunity to choose.

A choice to be more introspective and to gain a better insight into who you are, what values you would like to hold on to and what matters most to you. It has pushed you out of your comfort zone and empowered you to listen and empathize with others. It has allowed you to harness true collaboration and teamwork. And it has made us all come together as a community and unite in ways we never imagined.

So, class of 2020, as you prepare for the journey ahead, remember that it is the choices that you make that matters the most. Accept any and all challenges, be strong, be resilient, make a difference and above all be compassionate.

As Michelle Obama once said, “You should never view your challenges as a disadvantage. Instead, it's important for you to understand that your experience facing and overcoming adversity is actually one of your biggest advantages.”

Congratulations and I am so proud of each one of you.

President Podell:

Thank you Professor Mishra. You have given us much to consider. And now, I would like to introduce Professor Perry Beardsley, who also has a few words to share with us. Dr. Beardsley is an Associate Professor of History in the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences and co-coordinates the College's Honors Program. He received his M.A. and Ph.D from State University of New York at Buffalo.

Please welcome Professor Perry Beardsley.

Dr. Beardsley

Thank you President Podell. Congratulations to the Massbay Class of 2020 and to all those people who helped you get to this day. Today is truly special. Although circumstances keep us apart, we're all happy to share this occasion with you.

We celebrate your great accomplishment in an altogether strange and uncertain time. If you've studied the past or taken a history course, you've probably noticed that our attention inevitably drifts to crisis and conflict. It's

not true that the focus is always on crisis, but it sure can feel that way. So, while I, as a historian, study the past, I've never had much desire to time travel to the 10th century, for example. Although Vikings may have had awesome beards, they weren't very friendly. And living in this moment has only reinforced in me this long-standing desire to avoid living in what later generations will think are historically significant moments. Given that we are living and working---and graduating----in the very midst of an historically remarkable global crisis, let's contemplate "what matters"

Crises present society's problems in high definition and force us to prioritize what's important. The pandemic pulled back the curtain to reveal the economic inequality, racial problems, and political polarization, which intensify the fragility of everyday life in America. The health crisis will recede, however, the problems it has revealed and those yet made clear, will challenge us for years to come.

But don't be afraid. There is a kind of beauty that exists in troubled times. Take the Great Depression for example. Millions of young people deferred adulthood in order to care for older folks, whom the Depression hit especially hard. In some cases, hardship drove four generations of family members to live under the same roof. Imagine that for a minute! Privacy, convention, short-term goals, individual needs mattered less. How you treated people mattered. I remember talking to my grandmother, the daughter of Italian immigrants who came of age at the depression's height, about her experience during those difficult years. She said something that surprised me. Even though times were tough, she lamented the loss of

community she had felt then, the feeling that, in her words, “we were all in it together.” It took me a long time and a lot of study to understand how she could miss a period marked in history textbooks as tumultuous and uncertain. But I’ve come to see as life grew difficult many Americans grew more compassionate and less selfish. People rediscovered a sense of community that had been lost over the preceding decades. Amid all the privation and pain grew a spirit of cooperation. When a neighbor found themselves out of work and down, their loss of social status wasn’t taken as a personal moral failing. Likewise, a neighbor’s success wasn’t taken as a sign of status, but rather of good fortune; it bestowed upon those lucky few a duty and responsibility to help those people in need. And that’s what many people did. They helped one another find work. They raised their children together. They gave what they could to family and friends in need. What could be more wonderful, more beautiful, than that?

As Dr, Mishra suggests, something similar is taking place today. Strive to treat people with kindness and compassion. Pain touches everyone, especially during times like these. But pain is not distributed in equal shares.

Be empathetic. Seeing the world through someone else’s eyes, whether its insight gained from reading, or listening to a friend, provides much needed perspective and helps us to imagine how others experience life.

Be compassionate. Take the knowledge you’ve gained and help when you can. That’s what mattered during the depression. Compassion, kindness and empathy helped people overcome the excruciating uncertainty of those

years. I think exercising compassion, treating one another with kindness and practicing empathy matters now, too.

As you can see, difficult times can inspire some of the purest, best expressions of humanity; they can also compel great and positive change. People pushed government to be more responsive to their needs because of the suffering produced by the Great Depression and government responded by creating a social safety net that has benefited millions of Americans. Workers fought for and gained important benefits. And African Americans, who had been among the hardest hit by the depression, formed grassroots political organizations to end discriminatory hiring practices and taught important lessons to a generation of activists, activists who would pursue racial justice and eventually dismantle American apartheid, while leaving much work unfinished.

What you do in this life matters. What you do moving forward matters. During the depression, people shaped the country in ways that brought us closer to our nation's expressed ideals. These times offer you the same opportunity. Indeed, I challenge you as an educated person to think about responsibility not in narrow, self-interested terms, rather in broad terms, as owing a duty to oneself and society. But, these things that I have told you matter—kindness, empathy, compassion, and civic engagement—are not mutually exclusive. Couple your passion with kindness, compassion and empathy.

So, speak out and speak up, but also shut up and listen. Both speaking and listening are ways of doing something. Whatever you want to change, it cannot happen without civic engagement. Make this moment a turning point—in our politics, our social relations, our culture.

Don't just tweet, post, and share. If you're interested in politics, volunteer.

If you're interested in social causes, embrace activism.

If you're interested in government service, serve. If you're not interested in any of these, find something you're passionate about and make this moment count.

And read! Reading is not just a school thing; we taught you to be lifelong learners.

Reject the casual cynicism so common in our discourse. Vote in every election that you're allowed even if you think your vote doesn't make a difference. Choose optimism and cultivate civic action: people make a difference.

What you do matters. And when you decide what matters to you, go at it with the determination and tenacity with which you pursued your degree. Getting your degree wasn't easy. Long commutes, long papers, some of you a long way from "home"—some of you "long shots"—it didn't matter, you did it!

Let me leave you with a quote from Franklin Roosevelt, who almost 90 years ago, stood before a group of graduates, in that other difficult time:

“Yours is not the task of making your way in the world, but the task of remaking the world which you will find before you. May every one of us be granted the courage, the faith and the vision to give the best that is in us to that remaking!”

President Podell:

Thank you Professor Beardsley.

I appreciate the wisdom of your words.

Every year the state of Massachusetts honors one student from each of its 29 public colleges with the 29 Who Shine Award.

I want to take a moment to recognize a special member of the Class of 2020, Vincent Briselli. Vincent is MassBay’s 29 Who Shine award recipient.

This award recognizes a graduate of the Class of 2020 who shows exceptional promise as a *future leader*. Recipients of this award have a strong record of civic engagement and have made a demonstrable contribution to his community and/or the state.

Tonight Vincent will graduate with a 4.0 GPA and receive an Associate degree in General Studies. Next year Vincent plans to attend Boston College, where he will be studying chemistry.

Congratulations, Vincent.

Now, please welcome Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost Lynn Hunter to present our All-College Awards.

Provost Hunter:

Thank you President Podell. The All-College Academic Excellence Award is the most prestigious academic award at MassBay, presented annually to Associate Degree graduates who have earned the highest grade point average of the graduating class. The students who achieve this honor will receive an honorarium from the MassBay Foundation.

This year we have six graduates who each earned a 4.0 GPA. Please join me in congratulating each of these students:

- Clayton Charles Ward
- Tyler Farr
- Michael Maiocchi
- Kerry Christina Paraskevoudis
- Vincent Paul Briselli
- Anna Leigh Mattox

President Podell, it is now my pleasure to present to you the graduating Class of 2020. The graduates presented here have met the requirements for degrees and certificates as prescribed by their programs and the faculty of the College, and have been approved by the Board of Trustees.

President Podell:

Thank you, Provost Hunter. I am honored to commence the conferring of degrees and certificates to tonight's graduates. Students who earned the highest grade point average in their associate degree program will also receive an honorarium from the MassBay Foundation.

Joining Provost Hunter in recognizing the graduates is the Dean of each respective Division.

Provost Hunter:

Now, Robert Lilley will introduce the graduates from the Division of Automotive Technology.

Dean Lilley:

Thank you Provost Hunter: From the **Division of Automotive Technology...**

{Dean Lilley Reads Graduates Names}

Provost Hunter:

Thank you Dean Lilley. Now, Dean Susan Maggioni will introduce the graduates from the Division of Business and Professional Studies.

Dean Maggioni:

Thank You Provost Hunter. From the **Division of Business & Professional Studies...**

{Dean Maggioni Reads Graduates Names}

Provost Hunter:

Thank you Dean Maggioni. Now, Dean Lynne Davis will introduce the graduates from this Division of Health Sciences.

Dean Davis:

Thank you Provost Hunter. From the **Division of Health Sciences...**

{Dean Davis Reads Graduates Names}

Provost Hunter:

Thank you Dean Davis. Now, Dean Nina Keery will introduce the graduates from the Division of Humanities & Social Sciences.

Dean Keery:

Thank you Provost Hunter. From the **Division of Humanities & Social Sciences...**

{Dean Keery Reads Graduates Names}

Provost Hunter:

Thank you Dean Keery. Now, Dean Chitra Javdekar will introduce the graduates from the Division from the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Dean Javdekar:

Thank you Provost Hunter. From the **Division of Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics...**

{Dean Javdekar Reads Graduates Names}

President Podell:

Members of the Class of 2020, wherever you may be, I ask you to please stand if you are able.

By the authority vested in me by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I hereby confer upon you the degree of associate in arts, the degree of associate in science, or the academic certificate in your appropriate discipline, with all the rights, honors, and privileges thereto pertaining.

You may now move your tassels from the right side to the left side of your commencement caps.

Members of the Class of 2020, I want to remind you that tonight, not only have you earned your diplomas, but you have also earned your entry into MassBay's Alumni Association. MassBay will always be a part of your

personal, educational, and professional journey. We are counting on you to stay in touch, to give back, and to provide mentorship to future students who follow in your path.

Viewers and Listeners please join me in applauding the MassBay graduates of 2020.