

## **USF Fall 2024 Commencement**

*Remarks Delivered by USF President Rhea Law*

*December 13-14, 2024*

Welcome everyone, and congratulations to the Fall Class of 2024!

Today is a momentous occasion for our graduates, and before we get started, I'd like to recognize the friends and families who are here in the audience or who may be watching the live stream from home. Will you please join me in giving a big round of applause to those who have helped you get here?

I am honored to be here with you today. On behalf of the University of South Florida's faculty, staff, trustees, and hundreds of thousands of alumni from around the world, we are so excited to celebrate your tremendous accomplishments. This is your moment!

As a proud alumna of our great university, I know from personal experience how much of an impact USF has on the lives of our students. When I was sitting where you are right now, I never imagined that one day I would have the privilege of leading my alma mater and cheering each of you on as you cross the finish line.

As you enter this next chapter of your life, I urge you to remember your why — and never lose sight of how far you have come to get to where you are today.

Each of you came to this university for a reason. To pursue your interests, to prepare for your future careers, and to create a better life for yourselves and your loved ones. The path you have taken over the past several years is characterized by continuous improvement but also by unwavering resilience in the face of significant challenges and change.

Commencement is a cause for celebration, and I encourage you to take a moment amidst the festivities to reflect on all that you have accomplished to reach this milestone. For many of you, today's ceremonies may be especially meaningful because this marks your first — and perhaps only — in-person Commencement since the onset of the global pandemic.

Throughout your studies, you have overcome obstacles college students often face, but you have also navigated unprecedented ways of doing things as our world adjusted to “a new normal.”

And in your final months at USF, you weathered back-to-back major hurricanes that caused severe impacts to our Tampa Bay region. For many of us, the recovery efforts continue.

Challenging times have the power to define who we are as individuals, and they can also reveal the shared resolve that makes a community truly great. Each of you serves as a shining example of the profound strength that defines our university community and as a reminder that together, we persevere.

Hold onto that strength — that fortitude — and don't be afraid to embrace the unknown. There are many uncertainties facing us in the future, but it's when you take that courageous first step toward your goals that you begin to pave a bold path forward.

As USF graduates, the world is at your fingertips — and I cannot wait to see what you will achieve on the road ahead.

Although your time as a student may be over — at least for now — I also encourage you to be a lifelong learner and to cherish your connection to your alma mater for the rest of your lives.

Today you join a network of nearly 400,000 living USF alumni who are making an impact worldwide. Each of you will venture in different directions

— whether that’s starting your career, continuing your education, serving in the military, or pursuing other life goals — but you are all united through your alma mater. You are all USF Bulls.

The University of South Florida is on a bold trajectory, and our future has never been brighter. Allow me to share with you a few reasons why you should be so proud of the university where you have earned your degree.

One of the most significant milestones in USF’s history was our recent invitation to join the Association of American Universities, the most prestigious group of 71 research universities in the United States and Canada.

This is a distinction held by only 3% of all four-year research universities in the country. Joining the AAU empowers our university to further invest in our powerful research enterprise, to attract even more bright minds to our region, and to make an even greater impact on our society. You can take great pride in knowing that the value of your USF degree continues to grow — because it was earned at one of America’s leading research universities.

Our university is proud to receive ongoing national recognition for our commitment to providing a quality educational experience. For the sixth consecutive year, U.S. News & World Report has ranked USF among the top 50 public universities in America — and for the second year in a row, we have been named the “best value” among all public and private universities in Florida. We have also been recognized this year by other national entities, including Forbes, Washington Monthly, and Princeton Review.

Our Bulls community possesses a strong spirit of innovation, and our researchers are turning their bold ideas into both action *and* impact. With 88 new patents secured in 2023, USF is ranked 14th among American public research universities and 34th among all universities *worldwide* in generating new U.S. utility patents.

And as home to one of the largest populations of student veterans within the State University System of Florida, we are proud to support our veterans, military-connected students, and first responders. USF is among the first to be designated as a Florida Collegiate Purple Star Campus, a recognition reserved for institutions that are making a significant commitment to supporting military-connected students and their families.

In closing, I'd like to take a moment to share some points of pride that make YOU, our Fall Class of 2024, so special.

This weekend, our university will award nearly 4,000 degrees to a graduating class representing 42 states and 93 countries.

Our newest class of graduates includes 107 student veterans, who collectively possess a combined grade point average of 3.46! We also have 11 graduates who, through USF's ROTC program, will be commissioned into the U.S. armed forces as an officer.

Our youngest graduate, who is earning a bachelor's degree in biology, is just 16 years old. And our most experienced graduate, who is earning a Master of Liberal Arts, is 70 years young!

Your graduating class exemplifies the qualities that define our incredible Bulls community. Each of you is bold, ambitious, and determined to build a better world. And by graduating from the University of South Florida, you've proven that you can accomplish anything you set your mind to. I wish you all the best in your very bright futures.

It is my greatest honor to be among the first to welcome you to the USF alumni family. Congratulations, go make us proud, and as always — Go Bulls!