

USF Health Morsani College of Medicine Commencement Address

Remarks Delivered by USF President Rhea Law

May 9, 2024

Hello everyone, and congratulations to the Morsani College of Medicine Class of 2024!

On behalf of the University of South Florida's faculty, staff, trustees, and hundreds of thousands of alumni from around the world, I applaud each of you for reaching this tremendous milestone.

Today is a momentous occasion for our graduates, and before I continue, I'd like to recognize the friends and families who are here in the audience. Will you please join me in giving a big round of applause to those who have helped you get here?

As a proud USF alumna, I know from personal experience how much of an impact this university has on the lives of our students. I credit much of my own success to the opportunities provided to me right here on campus — and I never imagined that I would one day have the privilege of leading this great university and cheering each of you on as you cross the finish line.

I have a deep admiration and respect for the work you all are doing in the medical field. When I first enrolled at USF as a student, I originally set my sights on becoming a doctor. I've always enjoyed helping people, and I found my chemistry classes to be especially fascinating.

Life circumstances, however, led me to explore other career paths, and after much soul-searching and exploration, I decided to pursue a business degree and a career in law. But I've held onto that innate curiosity all my life — in fact, I still have the microscope my mother gave to me as a child on display in the curio cabinet in my office.

Despite this change in direction, I knew I wanted to continue being of service to others — and my previous studies in science continued to serve me well, even after I became a lawyer. As medical professionals, you have all

dedicated your professional careers to being in service of others, and I applaud you for your tenacity and your commitment.

Your graduating class has not only worked diligently to reach your academic goals, but you have also shown amazing fortitude in the face of unprecedented challenges and change — and that includes starting your medical school journey at the height of a global pandemic.

Over the past four years, our society has been forced to confront many of its previous norms. We have adopted new ways of working, living, communicating, and relating to one another. The adoption of these fresh approaches has required creative problem-solving and new ways of thinking about the world around us.

Your time at the University of South Florida has provided you with the knowledge and skills needed to think critically, develop new ideas, and solve problems of the future.

And as USF graduates, you are prepared to transform lives and create a healthier future. I urge you to remember your purpose, trust in your own expertise, and hold onto your sense of compassion — for your patients and for the world around you.

What I love about the University of South Florida is that across our three campuses, you'll find pockets of knowledge where you can learn more about anything that sparks your curiosity — if you're willing to put the work in to make it happen.

Our university's history of unleashing innovation is what's fueled our upward trajectory — and it's resulted in the creation of hundreds of inventions, academic programs, student organizations, and so many other valuable contributions to our society.

As you all have experienced throughout your time as students, USF has seen transformative change over the years – a feat that is truly uncommon for a university of our size to achieve in a relatively short period of time.

Allow me to share with you just some of the reasons why you should be very proud of the university where you have earned your medical degree.

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

This is a distinction held by only 3% of all four-year universities in the country. Joining the AAU empowers us to further invest in USF's powerful research enterprise, attract even more bright minds to our region, and make an even greater impact on our society.

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.

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.

And this year, the Morsani College of Medicine celebrates its 50th Anniversary. As the newest class of medical school graduates, you can take great pride in knowing that your degree was earned at a world-class institution known for its legacy of excellence, and that you are joining a network of thousands of USF alumni who are making a global impact.

Today we recognize those who have chosen to dedicate their careers to making lives better and who have earned one of the most meaningful and rigorous credentials a healthcare professional can obtain — the Doctor of Medicine.

This ceremony is a culmination of your hard work, your persistence, and your passion for providing quality patient care to everyone in our communities. I am delighted that you chose to earn your medical degree at the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine, and I applaud each of you on your remarkable achievements.

Your graduating class is a shining example of 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.

While your time as a medical student might be over — the world is at your fingertips. It is my greatest honor to welcome you to the USF alumni family and to wish you all the best in your very bright futures.

Congratulations and as always, Go Bulls!