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Thank you, Professor Battan. Good morning! I am so grateful to be honored with the chance to speak this morning. I've had my head buried in a stack of books the last six months studying for the masters exams, as I'm sure many of my classmates have, and after I finally finished (writing 12 hours a day for 4 days in a row) I felt my brain couldn't squeeze out another complete thought for a good long time, and I know I'm not alone among my fellow graduates in my feeling of relief and exhaustion today. But we made it!

The master's experience started for me, with a theory and methods class, where, among other questions we dealt with a question that is as basic as it is big in this field--what is American Studies? I found it fitting that this was the content of one of the MA exam questions that I've been working through over the past few months—a nice bookend to my experience in American studies. The quick answer to that question is American Studies is an interdisciplinary study of American culture and history—we grapple with what it means to be an American in all kinds of contexts. But more than that, the program has given us a solid base for studying culture with an emphasis on context, diversity and respect. The program has trained our ears and eyes to recognize the nuances and contexts of cultural experiences and meanings playing out all around us, in contemporary American culture as well as historically. With these tools, I hope I can, along with my fellow graduates, continue to discover how culture works and try to get to the bottom of what it means. We have been equipped for this ambitious endeavor by our professors.

I am truly honored to be here with these amazing scholars. It has been extremely gratifying to work with these professors and learn from their own outstanding work, as they've guided and inspired us in our academic interests and pursuits. Particularly, Professor Pamela Steinle, our graduate advisor, who has teaches thought provoking courses but also works overtime to keep us on track, making the extra effort to be available to students and making sure we're been able to navigate the program successfully.

We've all dealt with and worked through academic challenges along the way but we've also fought with traffic, searched aimlessly for parking and wrestled with self doubt. Most of us have had to make time for jobs and family—but we made it. And we would not have made it without these thoughtful and generous professors here, and the support of our families and friends. Our friends and family have supported us and put up with paper writing marathons, the late evening classes, and the general stress of being a graduate student. In my own life, I've relied my father to be a sounding board for my anxieties and toughest questions. And I've relied on my mother, who has given me more pre-paper pep talks than I can count, to give me that extra push when I was sure I couldn't make it. And my soon-to-be husband Chris, who put up with me on a daily basis through this process and gently encouraged me to quit whining and finish my homework.

I've been so lucky to have such a robust support system to help me along the way. I couldn't have done it without them. And in all of the faces I see here today, our parents, partners, our friends and family, our classmates and instructors; I know I'm not the only one who couldn't have made it without a lot of help and support, encouragement and willingness to sacrifice from all of you. And I am grateful for the opportunity to stand here this morning and say, for myself and on behalf of all the master's graduates here this morning, THANK YOU.