

To the Class of 2021...

At Brescia University College, Canada's only women's university, celebrating and lifting the achievements of our students is something of immense importance to us. Since our founding in 1919, each June our community awaits with great apprehension the celebration of our graduates, at both our time-honoured Baccalaureate Ceremony and at Western University's Convocation. It is a time of joy, excitement, togetherness and promise of what is to come.

Unfortunately, due to the health restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not possible for us to physically gather together to celebrate our resilient Class of 2021. However, as always, our community has rallied together to find a safe and exciting way to celebrate our graduates: through a dynamic virtual graduation. And, while nothing can replace the in-person experience of graduation, I am confident that our ceremony will make our graduates, along with their families and friends, immensely proud.

As many in the academic community know, "graduation" derives from the Latin word "gradus" meaning "step." I often like to think of an academic pursuit as an incredible journey, composed of many steps. Not only do students take millions of steps between classes, to exams, to extra-curricular activities and perhaps to the occasional party, but also metaphorical steps between who you once were and who you have become.

While the Class of 2021 should be incredibly proud of their vast and varied steps, we all know that the best journeys are not travelled alone. Throughout your undergraduate journey, you were accompanied by your supportive families, friends, faculty and staff. You have been cheered on every step of the way and encouraged to be the best version of yourself. While you celebrate this incredible milestone, do not forget to thank those who helped you along this life-changing passage.

Finally, to address perhaps the most significant challenge of your undergraduate journey: the COVID-19 pandemic. For so many, the past year has been filled with adversity, grief, uncertainty and deep challenge. And yet, you persisted. You completed your education under the most demanding circumstances, and you have officially come out on the other side. I know it doesn't feel like it now, but this resiliency that you have demonstrated has set you up for life-long success. You should be exceptionally proud of yourself and your ability to triumph over hardships.

And, although vaccines are now being widely and rapidly dispersed, over the past year the pandemic has highlighted the fragility of our world. It has brought to the forefront areas that are in desperate need of help, including: food insecurity, homelessness, poverty, education disparity and climate change. It is my sincere hope that as graduates of the Class of 2021, deeply skilled and resilient individuals, you have the drive and courage of conviction to help solve some of these global crises.

Our planet is in desperate need of knowledgeable and passionate individuals, like you, who want to make a difference. I know that these problems may seem too large to tackle, but make no mistake: one person can make incredible change, and you can be that person.

On behalf of all of us at Brescia University College, I congratulate our Class of 2021, and all of the graduates across our country. After successfully coming to the end of one journey, you now

begin an entirely new one. Whether you have chosen to pursue further education or begin your promising career, I am confident that you are equipped with the knowledge, skills and competencies to not only succeed, but to lead. To lead with wisdom, justice and compassion.

Hats off to you, graduates! You're on your way.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cheryl Jensen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a long, sweeping tail.

Cheryl Jensen, BSc, M.Ed.
Interim Principal
Brescia University College