



## **Ms Danelle Plaatjies LLB Class of 2020**

### *Address to the Class of 2020 at Faculty of Law's Graduation celebration*

To the Dean, Faculty and Staff thank you for the honour of spending this time with you. To the graduating class of 2020, congratulations. Celebrating such a momentous occasion online feels strange, in fact I am not all that sure that everyone is excited about today. You might be feeling a little tired, rattled by the events of the past week or simply overwhelmed about what lies ahead. However, nothing can detract from the

fact that every person in this graduating class has worked hard to be here. You have been shining leaders in the faculty transforming and establishing clubs and societies, working multiple jobs; smiling through somewhat painful vac work opportunities; writing an examination in a boiling tent with a LLM candidate running up and down the isles with a jug of ice water; made friends that will last you a lifetime and of course years of enduring the frosty forecast of LT1. It has been an honour to share a class with peers far smarter, academically-savvy and inspiring than myself however, whether any of you are funnier is up for debate. For the next few minutes you are stuck with me and all the unfortunate cliches that come with that.

I know what you're thinking, how did an episode of 'Suits' trick me into signing up for years of law school in what has arguably been one of the most tumultuous periods at UCT Law, only to graduate online. After the final year we all endured, a grand jubilee on the upper campus steps would have been the well-deserved closing to our time at law school. However the world had other ideas and evidentially the challenges of 2020 did not disappear overnight and have somehow crept their way in to slowly defining 2021 as well. The last three to four years have encouraged us to never fear away from a challenge and by encourage I am definitely referring to the coercive force of not wanting to be left behind. It has been said that without challenge we set ourselves with an inability to become a better version of ourselves. Many of you have realised the personal lessons which 2020 had to offer. Whether it was realising that a certain area of law is where you are destined to innovate; learning that a personal relationship would drain any ability you'd have of achieving your dreams; or realising a career path you had been chasing since your first year at university is not quite the path you envision for yourself anymore. These are all changes, arguably for the better.

However, it is also possible that you feel that 2020 may not have changed you for the better or that it made you realise your worse fears. So, you find yourself at a road block where positivity feels like an impossible emotion and frustration clouds you every day. The truth is, it's easy to feel that way now and at many a times you'll find yourself

asking “what’s the point”. The simple answer is you. You quite literally are the master of your own destiny. You decide what the point is, a very powerful decision to make when you have an LLB. This degree is vested upon future judges, leading academics, policy writers, corporate giants, entrepreneurs and community leaders. Terrifying, I know. People will listen to you, whether you should be listened to or not. That’s the power of an LLB. That is also the responsibility of having an LLB and it was led up to surviving 2020 that truly deserves praise.

Last year, this class displayed exceptional leadership, innovation, resilience and resolve when for many the circumstances seemed hopeless. I trust that the experience of last year will push you towards becoming the change you would like to see in the world. As cliché as it sounds, the power and responsibility that the LLB has bestowed upon you is desperate to be fostered in this way. The greatest skill the LLB aspires to impart is the ability to truly think critically. Not critical-thinking lite but actual critical thinking backed up with evidence and sound reasoning. How you choose to utilise this is up to you but if I may, I would like to offer some advice. Yes I know, many of you should be offering me some advice instead but hear me out. **Don’t play dirty.** It’s not worth the personal or human cost. Make sure that you are respected and not feared & never infamous but revered. This community is smaller than you may think.

That’s all for unsolicited career advice from my part. All that’s left now is for you to celebrate. Celebrate what you have overcome! Knowing the inhumane obstacles that so many of you have had to defeat makes the recognition of today’s achievement all the more significant. And most importantly, thank those that assisted you along the way. Whether it’s a legal writing tutor that gave you advice that changed the trajectory of your legal writing forever; a library staff member that gave you words of encouragement when you really needed it; or a lecturer that fundamentally shifted your word view, for the better. It does not cost anything to show this gratitude. Debunk every stereotype about the legal community because the class of 2020 is anything but an ordinary group of graduates. On that note, thank you to all the support staff, administrative staff, lecturers and fellow students that supported this class throughout their degree – your efforts have been felt.

Thank you once again for this great honour. I hope we are able to gather as a class in the future. May you all grow to be successful as measured by standards that only you have set for yourself.

Thank you to the LLB class of 2020.

