2015 Commencement Address
May 16, 2015

I know most of you will want to document this event in meticulous detail. In fact, I’m sure “hashtag-documenting my Bryn Mawr graduation in meticulous detail” is trending on Twitter right now. But I hope that you will take a break from documenting at some point to simply experience this moment, be present in this ceremony and enjoy it. You’ve earned it.

We have a few special items to recognize at this year’s graduation. The Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research is celebrating its 100th birthday this year. We are proud of the 4,480 alumnae/i, soon to be joined by 102 more who have improved the health and well-being of individuals, families, communities, and organizations throughout the greater Philadelphia region, across the nation, and around the world. I also would like to acknowledge that this year we will offer the last set of degrees to graduates of our distinguished Masters in Law and Social Policy Program, and I want to thank Professor Raymond Albert for his many years of leadership.

So here’s the part where I leave you with one piece of advice. Now, as the mother of a college student and of a high school freshman who is embracing the role of teenager with gusto, I am used to having my advice ignored, but I can’t resist. In a few minutes Professor Cast will call each of your names, one by one, and you’ll walk across this stage, receive your diploma, and shake my hand. And you might be thinking to yourself, “OH MY GOSH!” – or some other, more colorful phrase – now I’m really in trouble!” You see, there’s a certain comfort in being a student: Your learning, your preparing as a student lets you say, “I’m not quite ready yet.” But guess what? You are done and you are ready.

You see you have something that most people don’t have: A degree from Bryn Mawr. At Bryn Mawr you have learned how to analyze problems, consider solutions, and determine a course of action. You’ve broadened and deepened your intellectual capacities, developing expertise through study and research. In this richly diverse community, you have questioned assumptions, reconsidered your own perspective, and helped others forge their own paths. You’ve grown because you chose to engage in this community both inside and outside the classroom. You pushed boundaries, testing yourself in close living quarters in your dorms, on the playing fields, on the Goodhart stage, in the Rockefeller architecture studio, in the Park labs, in the archives of Bryn Mawr and in museums around the world, and in field work and clinical practice beyond the campus.

Taking this degree has not been easy, but you did it with hard work, with grit, with determination, and with enthusiasm and passion. You did it, and that will make what comes next easier. But it is also true that life can sometimes be harsh and the world beyond this campus will not always be nurturing, supportive or even fair. So my advice to you is this: Don’t let that world ever make you doubt what you can do.

You are Bryn Mawr graduates and that means you are strong, you have the capacity for excellence and you can do whatever it is that you are passionate about and that gives you
joy. Don’t let anyone take that away from you. And know that if despite my great advice you begin to doubt yourself, or others doubt you, the College and the people here are always present to be your touchstone. You carry us with you. And we will be here to remind you of what you are capable of and why it is important.

You have my very best wishes, and my heartfelt congratulations.