On Sunday, June 14* we held our first-ever virtual graduation celebration with our graduates, faculty, family and friends. While we missed celebrating all our graduates in person, it was lovely to see all their smiling faces on Zoom. Our celebration included many firsts: our first virtual hoodings of our PhD graduates, our first group undergraduate address, and our first student open mic allowing any student to reflect on their time in the department and address all those in attendance. Congratulations to the sixty-nine Bachelor of Arts graduates, two Masters of Arts graduates and four Doctorate of Philosophy graduates of the class of 2020!

The pride and hope we have for our graduates during these difficult and unprecedented times was best reflected by our chair, Andrea Woody, in her address to the graduates:

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*Note: The date June 14 is marked with an asterisk, indicating it may have been unexpected or unusual.
I hope that graduates of our program see in Philosophy both a deep respect for the history of human thought and a constant desire to think more deeply, to ask questions, and to be skeptical of first impressions. We value tradition even as we aim to challenge it. We still ask our students to read Aristotle because his ethical writings hold such insight into the nature of human flourishing and the development of personal virtue and character. We read Descartes' meditations to strip ourselves of the security of believing the world is exactly as it appears to us, and because it offers deep lessons on the nature of mind, embodiment, and personal perspective.

But we also grapple with the conditions of contemporary culture. Our students think about the ethical challenges raised by climate change and neural engineering; they dissect the nature of evidence for life on other planets; they ponder whether public funds should support artwork that some citizens find offensive; they ask what would constitute a just policy regarding immigration. Through it all, they struggle to make sense of concepts that ground all human thought: truth, fact, friendship, beauty, and justice.

I believe the skills and habits that our students cultivate in their classes will serve them well no matter what they choose do after they leave this university. Philosophy teaches us to think logically, to write well, and to argue persuasively. It builds expectations that asking for reasons is a sign of respect, and that engaging with other viewpoints, even ones so different from our own that they make us uncomfortable, will enrich our understanding.

When we recognize the substantial challenges faced by our local, national, and global communities, the need for these skills and habits could not be more evident. To our graduates: I urge you to nurture the skills you take from your time here with us, and to look for ways, both large and small, to use your training and your knowledge for the greater good. Our world needs exactly what you have to offer.

One of the most persistent challenges philosophy majors face is a cultural belief that our work and the questions we ponder are detached from the concerns of everyday life... that we pursue a life of the mind that isolates us from the world we inhabit. Today's graduates are well aware of myriad ways in which this is inaccurate, and that their training has been steeped in consideration of the biggest social challenges of our day.

Dr. Woody ended with a reflection of hope for what our graduates will bring to society and themselves:

We are not in an easy place, to be sure, but we are here surrounded by hope. This is important to recognize. The isolation wrought by social distancing has been guided by scientific research and public health policies (much of it developed right here at UW) that have saved countless lives, by recognizing the communal obligation we have to those who are vulnerable. The social pact is tenuous, to be sure–we're all itching to sit elbow to elbow in a good restaurant–but fifty years ago, many more would have died.

Protesters return to the streets day after day, out of exasperation for how little progress has been made, and how often they must witness history repeat itself. But they do so because they see the people around them, people willing to take the risk of a virus to stand up for change, to bear witness to systemic racism, to build communal gardens... these are the acts of people who in their exhaustion harbor hope that things can be better, that enough people will care to make an impact.

Members of the Class of 2020, do not lose sight of this hope. Combine it with the knowledge you have gained in your time at UW, combine it with your humanity, and decide how you will make the world better. I will say it again: our world needs exactly what you have to offer.

And even though we could not provide the champagne to toast our graduates, our tradition of a faculty toast to the graduates continued virtually, led by Ian Schnee, who reflected on all the auspicious events that have happened on June 14 in years past, and how our students now have the skills to also create notable moments in history and to accomplish anything they set their minds to. Congratulations to all our graduates. We could not be more proud of you!

*The graduation was postponed in support of the Black Lives Matter statewide strike and protest held on...