

**Spring 2023 Commencement Remarks**  
for President Geoffrey S. Mearns  
May 6, 2023  
Fine Arts Terrace

**MEARNS:**

Thank you, Dr. Marri.

It's my honor to introduce you to our Commencement speaker, Mr.  
Randy Pond.

Mr. Pond graduated from our University in 1977. So, a few years ago,  
he sat on this Quad as our graduates do today, poised to embark on the  
pursuit of a fulfilling career and a meaningful life.

Mr. Pond began his career with a series of finance and operations  
positions at companies including David Systems, Xerox Corporation,  
Schlumberger, and Arthur Andersen.

He then accepted a role as the chief financial officer and vice president of operations at Crescendo Communications, a start-up company that was acquired by Cisco Systems in 1993.

Mr. Pond then invested the next 23 years of his career with Cisco, a technology company that makes a lot of the equipment that powers the Internet.

He advanced steadily within the ranks of the company, ending his career as the executive vice president of operations, processes, and systems. In that capacity, he managed manufacturing, information technology, global business services, human resources, corporate affairs, and legal services.

After he retired from Cisco—actually Mr. Pond didn't retire. Because he became the chief financial officer and operating officer of Pensando Systems, a start-up company in Silicon Valley.

Currently, he is the corporate vice president of finance at AMD, a California-based company that develops computer processors and related technologies for business and consumer markets.

In short, Mr. Pond has had a very successful career.

[PAUSE]

In addition to his professional accomplishments, Mr. Pond has embraced many opportunities to lead a meaningful life in service to others.

Currently, he serves on the board of Stanford Health Care Valleycare, and he is the chair of the CARE Enterprises Board.

Mr. Pond is of great service to these organizations in California—and for many years, he has also been of great service to our University.

Mr. Pond has served on the Miller College of Business Executive Advisory Board.

Mr. Pond also served on the Ball State University Foundation Board of Directors for 15 years. He was the chair of our foundation board for two of those years.

Mr. Pond currently serves as the campaign chair for our University's comprehensive fundraising campaign. And he and his wife, Cindy, have been very generous benefactors to our University, including establishing the Pond Family Scholarship and JB Black Emergency Fund.

[PAUSE]

Last night, in recognition of his professional achievements and his generous service, I bestowed upon Mr. Pond one of our University's highest honors—PAUSE —the President's Medal of Distinction.

This medal is awarded by the president to women and men who have made significant and unselfish contributions to the advancement of our institution, our community, our state, or our Nation.

And as the current president of this University, I believe Mr. Pond is a deserving recipient.

[PAUSE]

In a moment, Mr. Pond is going to share with you his story—a story that I believe is inspiring.

It is a story that will make many graduates here today believe that you, too, could one day stand on this platform to deliver your own Commencement remarks.

[PAUSE]

Whenever I speak to graduates, to our benefactors, and to our prospective students, I tell them the Ball State story.

A significant element of that story is that our graduates make the world better by serving others.

I tell them about people like Randy Pond.

And now, to tell his own story, it is my honor to introduce to you Randy Pond, Ball State Class of 1977.

[APPLAUSE; RANDY DELIVERS HIS ADDRESS, AND THEN RETURNS TO HIS SEAT. YOU RETURN TO THE PODIUM.]

**MEARNS:**

Thank you Mr. Pond for those inspiring remarks.

Dr. Marri, we are now ready to proceed with the awarding of degrees.

[DR. MARRI PRESENTS DOCTORAL CANDIDATES TO YOU]

**MEARNS:**

Upon the recommendation of the faculty and by the authority vested in me by the Board of Trustees of Ball State University, I hereby confer upon you your respective degrees with all rights, honors, privileges and obligations thereunto pertaining. The diploma of our university shall forever be the testimony recognizing the very high level of intellectual accomplishment that you have attained. I welcome you into the honorable company of scholars. Congratulations on your special accomplishments.

[LEAD APPLAUSE]

[DR. MARRI PRESENTS MASTER'S CANDIDATES TO YOU.]

**MEARNS:**

Upon the recommendation of the faculty that you have completed all the requirements for graduation and by the authority vested in me by the Board of Trustees of Ball State University, I hereby confer upon you your respective master's degrees with all rights, honors, privileges, and obligations thereunto pertaining. The diploma of our university shall forever be the testimony recognizing your completion of the first level of graduate study. Congratulations to each of you.

You may be seated.

**[STEPHANIE IS WORKING ON YOUR RECOGNITION OF THIS YEAR'S 4.0 HONOREES, WHICH WILL GO IN HERE]**

**MEARNS:**

It is now my pleasure to recognize five outstanding students who have been selected from a very accomplished pool of graduates for the awards that they have earned—and that they will now receive.



I invite Ms. Ro-Anne Royer Engle, Vice President of Student Affairs, to assist me with the presentation of these awards. [PAUSE FOR RO-ANNE.]

We begin with the Senior Distinguished Service Award for Outstanding Community Service. I am pleased to present this year's award to Sophie Oxtoby [OX-TOE-BEE]. [PAUSE]

[MS. OXTOPY ENTERS PLATFORM, STANDS BETWEEN RO-ANNE (RIGHT) AND YOU (LEFT).]

Today, Sophie is graduating with a bachelor of science degree in accounting.

Sophie is currently the president of Student Voluntary Services, a student organization on campus that, each year, sends thousands of Ball State students into the community to serve other people.

Sophie has shared that leading SVS has helped her connect with new people both in the community and here on our campus.

Sophie, today we recognize you for your commitment to serving our neighbors. On behalf of Ball State University, thank you and congratulations. [LEAD APPLAUSE]

[RO-ANNE PRESENTS MS. OXTOBY WITH AWARD. YOU BOTH SHAKE HANDS WITH HER; POSE FOR PHOTO. MS. OXTOBY EXITS PLATFORM.]

It is now my pleasure to present The Provost's Prize for Outstanding Scholarly Work to Delaney Fritch. [PAUSE]

[MX. FRITCH ENTERS PLATFORM, STANDS BETWEEN RO-ANNE (RIGHT) AND YOU (LEFT).]

Delaney is an exceptional student who is graduating summa cum laude with academic honors in writing and a bachelor of arts degree with dual majors in political science and history.

As an Honors Fellow, Delaney conducted a largely self-directed research project on the history of Chicana feminism.

Delaney also participated as an interviewer on behalf of the Muncie LGBTQ+ Oral History Project and served as a member of the University's Task Force on Remote Education, helping create a guide for collegiate educators during the pandemic.

In addition to this research work, Delaney found numerous opportunities to become immersed in the community, starting with the decision to live off in Muncie's Old West End neighborhood.

Delaney became involved in the neighborhood association, interned for the city, and is currently helping relocate Ukrainian refugees to the community as well as assist with clean-up efforts of a local brownfield site.

Closer to campus, Delaney has been an active student leader, serving as a member of the College Democrats, as a peer mentor for the Honors College, and as a member of the Global Studies Association.

Delaney, on behalf of Ball State University, congratulations on your exceptional academic record.

[RO-ANNE PRESENTS MX. FRITCH WITH AWARD. YOU BOTH SHAKE HANDS WITH THEM; POSE FOR PHOTO. MX. FRITCH EXITS PLATFORM.]

Our next award is the Jessie Nixon Award. This award is given annually in recognition of a graduating student of color or an international student who has been involved in student life and who has

made a positive impact on our campus community. The award is bestowed in honor and in memory of Jessie Nixon, who was the first African American student to graduate from Ball State University.

I am pleased to present the Jessie Nixon Award to Simone Corey.

[PAUSE]

[MS. COREY ENTERS PLATFORM, STANDS BETWEEN RO-  
ANNE (RIGHT) AND YOU (LEFT).]

Simone is graduating today with a bachelor of science degree in psychology.

Simone is the first member of her family to graduate from college. And like Jesse Nixon, she has overcome barriers as a first-generation student who has done her best to make the most of her Ball State experience.

Simone has demonstrated a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion on our campus. She successfully created, and continues to operate, Let's Talk About It, the University's first mental health organization dedicated to serving students of color.

In addition to serving the campus community, Simone has completed more than 300 hours of community service in her four years as a student.

She is a member of multiple student organizations dedicated to community service, including Caring Cardinals, the Delta Xi chapter of Alpha Phi Omega Co-Ed Service Fraternity, and the Delta Phi chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

After she graduates, Simone plans to earn a master's degree in counseling psychology and open her own practice as a licensed therapist so she can serve minority and low-income communities in need of mental health counseling.

Simone, on behalf of Ball State University, congratulations on your efforts to promote inclusion and a sense of belonging both on our campus and in the community. [LEAD APPLAUSE]

[RO-ANNE PRESENTS MS. COREY WITH AWARD. YOU BOTH SHAKE HANDS WITH HER; POSE FOR PHOTO. MS. COREY EXITS PLATFORM.]

Next, it is my privilege to present the John R. Emens Outstanding Senior Award to two exceptional graduates.

This award is named in honor of the sixth president of Ball State University. The award recognizes a senior's cumulative co-curricular achievement, leadership, and contributions to our University.

The first recipient is Logan Arnold. [PAUSE]

[MR. ARNOLD ENTERS PLATFORM, STANDS BETWEEN RO-  
ANNE (RIGHT) AND YOU (LEFT)]

Today, Logan is graduating summa cum laude with a bachelor of science degree in exercise science.

During his four years at Ball State, Logan has been an active member of his church community as well as multiple campus organizations.

These organizations include his leadership role on behalf of the Student Honors Council and his involvement as a copy editor for Stance, an international undergraduate philosophy journal.

Logan has also been of service to the College of Health as a teaching assistant. He has served as a personal trainer for Ball State Disability Services. He has led exercise science training courses designed to improve the wellness of our faculty. And as a member of the Exercise Science Professional Connection Committee, Logan has led meetings



and contributed ideas that will foster greater connection between current students and graduates of our exercise science program.

Logan, on behalf of Ball State University, thank you for your dedication and congratulations. [LEAD APPLAUSE]

[RO-ANNE PRESENTS MR. ARNOLD WITH AWARD. YOU BOTH SHAKE HANDS WITH HIM; POSE FOR PHOTO. MR. ARNOLD EXITS PLATFORM.]

The second recipient of this year's Emens Outstanding Senior Award is Chiara Biddle. Chiara is graduating magna cum laude with departmental honors, having earned her bachelor of arts degree in fashion merchandising.

As an Honors College senator and as vice president for our Student Government Association, Chiara dedicated her undergraduate career to enhancing her leadership skills on behalf of her classmates. Among her

greatest accomplishments has been the partnership she fostered between SGA and Dining Services, which resulted in the creation of the Ball State Dining Student Advisory Board—a board that is encouraging more sustainable practices in our campus dining facilities.

Beyond Chiara's leadership in student government, she has served as a student orientation leader, a role for which she adapted to work completely remote during the pandemic. She has been an active member of her sorority, Alpha Omicron Pi, and she served a term on the executive board for the PanHellenic Association.

As a Whitinger Scholar, Chiara has been a peer mentor for the Honors College, and she completed her senior honors thesis by developing the website, Good for the Sole, a consumer's guide to sustainability in the footwear industry.

Chiara, thank you for your leadership on behalf of our University and your commitment to academic excellence. Congratulations. [LEAD APPLAUSE]

[DR. MARRI LEADS ROTC COMMISSIONING; CALLS FOR DEGREE CANDIDATES TO STAND, PRESENTS THEM TO YOU.]

**MEARNS:**

Upon the recommendation of the faculty that you have completed all the requirements for graduation and by the authority vested in me by the Board of Trustees of Ball State University, I confer upon you your respective bachelor's or associate degrees with all rights, honors, privileges, and obligations thereunto pertaining. The diploma of our university shall forever be the testimony of your accomplishments.

With pleasure, I admit you into the company of educated men and women. You may now move your mortar board tassels from the right to the left. [PAUSE FOR THEM TO DO SO. LEAD APPLAUSE.]

Congratulations to all the members of our graduating class of 2023.

Before I share some closing remarks, I want to take a moment to recognize a graduate who has been of great service to our University.

For the past two years, Amy Wyse has served on our Board of Trustees. It is an honor to personally recognize Amy's academic achievements and her dedicated service to Ball State.

Amy, please join me at the podium.

[YOU PRESENT AMY WITH HER DIPLOMA COVER. POSE FOR PHOTOGRAPH BEFORE PROCEEDING.]

Congratulations Amy. And congratulations again to all of our 2023 graduates.

It is also an honor to have with us today Mike Early [PAUSE FOR MIKE TO STAND], chair of the Alumni Council, representing our Ball State University Alumni Association.

Mike, here are the newest members of the Ball State University Alumni Association.

**[Closing Remarks ]**

Commencement is a celebration—a celebration of the achievements of our students, who will now begin the next stage of their life journeys. But before I offer them a few words of advice and encouragement, I want to acknowledge a colleague who is concluding his service at our University this year.

John Emert, thank you for your service as dean of our Honors College. Your service to our University is not yet complete. But today, you are deserving of our sincere appreciation for your many contributions to

the success of our Honors College and to the success of our students.

Thank you, John.

[PAUSE]

And now to you, our graduates. You are the reason we are here today.

We are here to celebrate you.

But as you know, your academic success is not just the product of your individual effort. Rather, it is the result of the sustained and collective commitment of many people, some of whom are here today.

At Ball State, we have hundreds of distinguished faculty who are dedicated to teaching and to scholarship, and they engage our students as partners in the quest for knowledge and greater understanding. Some of our faculty members are here this morning wearing academic regalia.

This tradition symbolizes their commitment to sharing their knowledge with others, while they continue the search for truth and wisdom.

We also have thousands of talented, supportive staff members who are equally dedicated to your accomplishments. We don't make them dress in caps and gowns, but we know and appreciate their contributions to you and to our University.

Pause for just a moment to look across this beautiful lawn. It is just one example of the many ways that these women and these men have contributed to creating an environment that has enabled your achievements.

And we have trustees who care deeply about your success. Their commitment to our mission is a source of strength for all of us.

Now, to another special group of people who deserve recognition: your family and friends. These are the women and men who have guided

you. They have been there to support you with enthusiastic encouragement, with good advice, and with unconditional love.

Graduates, please join me in a round of applause for your families and friends. [P A U S E]

In a few minutes, we will hear a performance from graduating students in our cabaret class—a class that showcases the talent of the students who are studying in our outstanding Department of Theatre and Dance.

But before these graduates sing for us, I want to tell you about a moment I shared with them two months ago.

This moment happened during their cabaret performance in New York City.

In their closing number, these students sang about the joys of their undergraduate experience—about how, during the first semester of



their first year in Fall 2019, they bonded over bus ride serenades and at the department's annual holiday party.

Then, in the middle of the Spring semester, just as they were hoping for their chance to perform in a Ball State production—they ... well, they stopped singing.

The performers were silent—then one of the students somberly began to read: “I write to inform you of the additional steps that Ball State is taking to respond to COVID-19 ...”

I recognized those words. They were the words I had written in an email I sent to the University community on March 11, 2020, informing everyone that we had to suspend all on-campus instruction and on-campus activities for the remainder of the semester.

One by one, the student performers began to describe where they were when they read my email that day—in rehearsal, in the dining hall, sitting with their roommates in their dorm rooms.

[PAUSE]

In that moment, I was reminded again that this email was a watershed moment in all of our lives. “I’ll remember it forever,” the students sang.

Then, with voices rising in an arrangement that captured the uncertainty and anxiety of those early days of the pandemic, the students sang how they felt as if “something just broke ... something they wished they hadn’t heard ... something bewildering that had occurred.”

“Fix it all fast,” they sang in unison. “Please.”

[PAUSE]

In the days and months that followed, none of us were able to “fix it all fast.”

And none of us could have predicted just how long we would have to endure the challenges of the pandemic.

But what we all know now is that the pandemic did not stop any of you from persisting in the pursuit of earning your Ball State diploma.

And now, I can say with confidence that you are stronger and more resilient for having experienced this historic challenge.

[PAUSE]

And today, as you leave our campus to join the ranks of the more than 200,000 living graduates of our University—graduates who, at one time, sat right where you are—I ask you to remember that professional success and career fulfillment are not the same. People generally

equate success with financial rewards, with impressive titles, and with notoriety or fame. Those are external indicators of success, and I fear that you may very well find that they are temporary and hollow.

Instead, I encourage you to seek fulfillment. Set professional goals that will make you and your families and your friends proud of your professional contributions—because your contributions have improved the lives of other people. That impact is enduring.

I also encourage you to pursue a life of meaning. Life is a gift—a precious gift. And to lead a meaningful life, you should share that gift with people who need you.

To lead a meaningful life, you must also embody certain core values, such as the enduring values articulated in the Beneficence Pledge.

Be sincere, and speak the truth.

Model integrity, and value integrity in others.

Be grateful, and demonstrate your gratitude through your actions.

Through your character and commitment, please help us create a world that is more peaceful and more just. We believe in that brighter future, because we believe in you.

[P A U S E]

A Commencement ceremony is also about celebrating traditions—  
together.

It is now my pleasure to continue a tradition we introduced to this ceremony a few years ago—a tradition that involves inviting some of those same graduates I spoke about earlier to perform a song for us.

This song—our “We Fly” anthem—contains lyrics that communicate a few key aspects of our fundamental mission.

The lyrics remind us that our faculty, staff, and students are given the freedom and flexibility to collaborate as learning partners.

The words demonstrate that we provide a transformative educational experience to our students.

And the lyrics prove that our history and our future are guided by our sustained commitment to the enduring values represented by Beneficence—whom our students affectionately call “Benny.”

I hope that, as you listen to this performance, you take a final opportunity to cherish this moment.

[YOU RETURN TO SEAT. RETURN TO PODIUM AFTER PERFORMANCE.]

Please join me in another round of applause for our graduates.

[PAUSE FOR APPLAUSE.]

These graduates represent the talent—and the great potential—that permeates the Class of 2023. Talent and potential that spreads across this lawn and as far as my eyes can see. I hope that all of you share my passion and my pride in our exceptional University.

Good luck. And god speed.

[YOU RETURN TO SEAT. DR. MARRI RETURNS TO PODIUM.]