

Freshman Convocation Ceremony Speech

Class of 2019



Challenges Are Opportunities

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**21st President of The University of New Mexico
Freshman Convocation Ceremony - Class of 2019**

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Welcome to the University of New Mexico, Class of 2019! You are part of the Lobo family now, my family. Long before I became president of UNM, I was a student here. This is where I received my undergraduate degree. It was a great experience but it wasn't always easy.

For the first time in my life, I was on my own. It was a big adjustment, because I was very close to my family, and 18-year-old boys usually don't go around talking about being homesick.

I was an athlete back then, a swimmer. I had to be at the pool by six a.m., practice for two hours, go to classes, study, eat, get enough rest to stay awake in classes, and find some time for a social life.

As the academic volume gets turned up in college, and it's a real balancing act. It may take awhile to get into the rhythm of things, but your Lobo experience has just begun and it's well worth it.

One of the great things about college is that it's a testing ground for your future, and a place to try new things, things that may be outside of your comfort zone. How good or not so good you are at the beginning doesn't tell you how good you can get. Don't be afraid of mistakes, and don't be afraid to try.



Most of you know who Michael Jordan is. But did you know that the best basketball player of all time missed more than 9,000 shots and lost nearly 300 games over the course of his career? Twenty six times, with hundreds of spectators sitting at the edge of their seats, he missed the winning shot. The guy failed over and over and over again. But here's how he thought about it. That's why I succeeded. In the face of obstacles and challenges, perseverance is key.

Nobody knows that better than a young man by the name of Lamek "Humble" Lukanga, a two-time Lobo degree holder who is a remarkable and inspiring young man. Shortly after I was appointed president, my son Daniel, who knew Humble through his work with professional athletes, came to me and said "Dad, Humble is the type of Lobo everybody at UNM should hear about." So I met Humble, as many of his friends call him, and learned his story.

He was born in a hut in Uganda, where he spent the first 11 years of his life in poverty, surrounded by civil unrest. His family was forced to leave Uganda and came to the United States for political asylum. He earned an academic scholarship to UNM, and went on to earn a bachelor's degree in Business Management and then a graduate degree in business. With his love for people, passion for business, and a relentless work ethic, he has become a highly successful entrepreneur in Beverly Hills, California.

This young man overcame so much, yet as his name implies, he is unpretentious and giving in nature. Moreover, meeting Humble reminded me of the power of a UNM degree. Just last year he delivered, undoubtedly, one of the best commencement addresses, urging the class of 2014 to measure their lives in the gratitude they experience.

The truth is, every one of you faces challenges, not just in college but throughout your life. Challenges often lead to a better place; they're stepping-stones to a greater experience.

As freshmen, some of you may be a little homesick and feel that you're alone, but you're not. You're a Lobo, you're part of the pack. You'll make friends, and your new UNM family . . . professors, advisors, my office...we're here for you every step of the way. We all want you to succeed. That's why we're here today, to take this first step in your journey together.

Humble's attitude can work for all of us. At its simplest: get up every day and keep going, and be grateful for the opportunities that come your way. Look for those opportunities, because they abound. UNM is filled with people who want to help you along your path. Find them, let them help you.

You chose to come here and be a Lobo, and we chose you because we believe in you and we want you to be part of the pack. You have many opportunities and many choices ahead of you. Choose as well as you can, but don't be afraid of making a mistake. You have a great future ahead of you.

Go lobos!

Robert G. Frank