



Dear Class of 2020:

As I write this, I am reflecting on the 2018 Winter Olympics. I remember being impressed by the vignettes highlighting the personal sacrifice and commitment that led some of the most admired and talented athletes in the world to the medal stand. Those traits – sacrifice and commitment – came to mind when I thought about your graduating class of more than 3500 students.

Though you did not have the privilege those Olympic athletes enjoyed to devote themselves completely to just one thing, you have shown, especially in the months leading up to this moment, that you share the same kind of commitment and sacrifices needed to help you take your place among champions.

While studying, many of you have worked several part-time jobs, caring for children and relatives, commuting many hours to and from classes. Without the benefit of a financial safety net, you have also now managed to complete the disrupted term of spring term, often with inadequate internet access and with multiple challenges compounded by stay-at-home restrictions.

What you have achieved would be admirable in any context but in the context of 2020, it is phenomenal. Nearly 40 percent of you have lost your jobs and critical income this spring. Some of you have battled COVID-19 yourselves, and far too many of you have friends and loved ones coping with COVID-19. It grieves me to say that at least two of your peers lost the fight with coronavirus, with the Bronx being one of the counties hardest-hit by the pandemic in the country.

Yet you have succeeded and often excelled academically, and like the many Lehman graduates before you, you will go on to productive professional careers. Though you are not likely to receive the international attention of an Olympic medalist, I hope you understand that your accomplishment is no less impressive, and you deserve the same acknowledgement. To me, Lehman Class of 2020, you are all Olympians!

You have been Olympians against all odds, in the most demanding environment in the history of Lehman College. And you have done it with grace and perseverance. Enjoy your time on the medal stand as you celebrate this major achievement. Once you've been able to celebrate and maybe get some rest, the next part begins: Putting your Lehman College education to good use.

Your resilience, your insight, your learning; your dedication and your heart – these are exactly what the world needs at this very moment. I am confident that because you have stayed the course, you will be able to translate what you have learned and experienced at Lehman College into a career that will be beneficial for you, this community, and the world.

The Lehman College Class of 2020 is special. You have something in common with the many great leaders in our country, including thousands of alumni: They are leaders who have been shaped for the better by the most demanding events of their times. I believe you will be no different.

Congratulations, Class of 2020.

Sincerely,

Daniel Lemons
President