

For Deerfield Academy's Class of 2020:

I want to start by saying what an honor it is to have been asked to address Deerfield Academy's class of 2020. It might not feel like the celebration any of you expected, but it is still a tremendous and hard-earned accomplishment. You should all be incredibly proud of yourselves.

When Dr. Austin first contacted me at the beginning of this year, I imagined speaking to you *at* Deerfield. I imagined talking to you about privilege, the necessity of public service, and the need to pay forward in any way possible the advantages of the education afforded to us by this incredible institution. Instead, I'm recording this speech on my iPhone, in my kitchen in Lexington, Kentucky, where I happen to be waiting on the results of a Covid-19 test.

Here's what I can tell you: the world didn't change in 1997 when I graduated from Deerfield. But it did change four years later, on 9/11, just after I graduated from college. And so I'm speaking to you as somebody who understands what it is to begin her life as an adult with radically altered expectations of the world. Now, of course, 19 years later, it's nearly impossible for me to imagine what life might have looked like if the events of that day had never occurred. Whereas a pre-pandemic world is all too easy for us to remember, too easy for us to want back.

But here's the thing: here's what we all know: we can't have it back. We can only move forward.

And one way we will do that is with you, with your help.

Something that's become abundantly clear over the past several months is that we – the people you've likely been thinking of as being in charge of the world for the past 18 years – your teachers, parents, politicians – we don't have all the answers, not even close.

But that doesn't mean there aren't answers. It doesn't mean there aren't solutions. It does mean that we need you – the newly minted adults of the class of 2020 – to help us see the world in new and different ways. You're adults now, but you're also closer to childhood than we are, which means you still have access to that part of your brain that is capable of imagining fantastical worlds. I am asking you to imagine us a new and fantastical world. I'm asking you to be part of the solution, even while I'm not able to say or hypothesize what that solution might look like.

Don't be limited by the boundaries of the world as we've known it. Now is the chance to change the future and to make the world better, more livable for everyone.

Your brains, your imaginations, your ambition – these things are more essential to our prospects than ever. And because of that, in spite of whatever minor or very likely major setbacks and disappointments this global pandemic has presented for you or your family personally, now isn't the time to be cynical. Now is the time to be open to new ideas, to be capable of being surprised – by you, by your family, by the world around you – and to use that surprise and wonderment and

openness as a means to generate new ideas, new possibilities, new expectations.

Congratulations, Class of 2020. Help us make the world better.

I am,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hannah Pittard".

**Hannah Pittard**

Professor | MFA Program in Creative Writing

Department of English

University of Kentucky

1269 Patterson Office Tower | Lexington, KY 40506-002

[www.hannahpittard.com](http://www.hannahpittard.com)

