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### Fisher Strong

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## “Fisher Strong”

Ranita Williams, 2020 Senior Class President

Saturday, May 9, 2020

Class of 2020 Undergraduate Graduation Virtual Speech

Good morning St. John Fisher College, family, and friends. And good morning to the esteemed guests of honor, my classmates--- the class of 2020. My name is Ranita Williams and since 2016, I have had the honor of being the President for this graduating class. First let me introduce the senior class cabinet members: Vice President, Liam Wicks; class treasurer, Katie Smith; and class secretary, Dylan McQuoid. Also before I begin, let’s acknowledge all the mothers joining us today. To each of them, we offer our thanks, appreciation, and wish them a Happy Mother’s Day.

Classmates, as I stand speaking to you from the pulpit of my family’s church in Rochester, NY, it is not loss on me that this is not at all how we imagined celebrating our graduation. On this day, Fisher graduates usually walk into an arena full of proud people who love us and helped us arrive at this moment; however, sadly, we are not able to be dressed in regalia as we march into Blue Cross Arena to the sounds of “Pomp and Circumstance;” rather, we are dressed in the armor of survival--- masks covering our faces; gloves protecting our hands; antibacterial wipes killing deadly droplets, as we stand six feet apart guarding our future against COVID-19. But we will *not* let this day end; we will *not just* shelter in place. We will; we must-- - acknowledge and even celebrate the sweat, the tears, and the challenges of these last four years. In fact, Classmates, right now just take a minute, close your eyes, and think about those marvelous moments you spent throughout your four years at Fisher. Think about your first experience as a student on campus at Great Beginnings; think about the first time you wore cardinal red and gold; think about move-in day and Freshman Orientation; Wait! Is that you eating hot wings on Wednesdays, dancing your feet away at Teddi Dance for Love; cheering on the football team at Courage Bowl? Or maybe you are reminiscing about one of the events that

highlight cultures and traditions on campus--- for example, the Afro-Latino dinner, Day of Celebration, or the annual Blackout event where we draw attention to inequality by walking in unity. Whatever you are remembering right now, just hold on to the love and laughs you felt. Hold on to the passion and joy inside because that is what makes us, the class of 2020. As our Alma Mater predicts, we are the ones who will “dedicate our very lives to God, to Truth, to Right.”

Class of 2020 we are history--- not just because we are graduating during this unprecedented time of shelter-in-place--- but because we are living through this storm; we are serving; we are surviving; we are persevering; we are fighting; we are overcoming because we are resilient. WE are Fisher Strong. We have come together like never before. We are on the front lines: we are grocery store clerks and managers; we are Zoom teachers and students; we are private care givers for the elderly. We are hospital support staffers, volunteer firefighters, EMT workers. We are the masks wearers and the mask makers. We are drying our tears, confronting our fears because we are Fisher Strong. We have “goodness, discipline, and knowledge.” We have respect, open-mindedness, and integrity. We exemplify diversity, responsibility, education, leadership, and growth. We are Fisher Strong. We worked hard for this day and no person, no obstacle, no pandemic can steal it from us. All those tears and sleepless nights made us who we are. Martin Luther King Jr’s words reminds us to keep on keeping on in the face of adversity, when he said, “If you can’t fly--- then run, if you can’t run--- then walk, if you can’t walk--- then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward.” Class of 2020 keep moving forward and remain Fisher Strong!

Poet Maya Angelou wrote that we did not make it out here on our own. So thank you President Rooney and Mrs. Rooney; Dr. Matha Thornton and the Student Engagement and Inclusion team; the Alumni Office; and the Office of Marketing and Communication. I also want to acknowledge the School of Education, Department of American Studies, and the Service

Scholar Program, along with my academic mentors, Dr. Arlette and Dr. Rossi; my parents, Rasheed and Bonita Williams, and other family members. They all equipped me with the tools needed to become both a scholar and a teacher. And as a class, we remember those who started out with us but have passed on: our loved ones, friends, faculty and staff members. Although we miss them, we know their joy is with us this morning.

The familiar African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” reminds us, the class of 2020, to take time to recognize and thank our collective villages; therefore, we congratulate our parents, grandparents, family, friends, Fisher faculty and staff, as well as our respective faith communities and organizations such as the Conkey Cruisers, Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives, and Camp Good Days. Thank you all for believing in us, encouraging us, *PAYING* .... Oops! Our apologies: we meant *PRAYING* for us. We are forever grateful to each of you. Class of 2020, it has been an honor to serve as your President. I am; we are truly FISHER STRONG!

Finally, let’s end with a virtual affirmation. Class of 2020; calling the class of 2020! Please repeat after me... are you ready? Okay, repeat these words: I AM AN OVERCOMER (Repeat): EACH DAY I RISE (Repeat): EXPECTING THE IMPOSSIBLE (Repeat), FEELING THE INTANGIBLE (Repeat), AND SEEING THE INVISIBLE (Repeat). THIS IS MY HOPE (Repeat). THIS IS OUR HOPE (Repeat). THIS IS... AMERICA’S HOPE (Repeat).

To each of you from the Class of 2020: Thank you. Stay safe; Stay healthy and God bless you and yours.