

Preuss Commencement  
EH Simmons  
June 25, 2018

Today, I participated in one of the most moving Commencement ceremonies of my life. As a parent, professor, and academic administrator, I have attended at least two such events annually for the last 25 years, including at public and private universities, liberal arts colleges, and public, private, and charter schools.

The graduation rites at the Preuss School, UC San Diego were typical in many ways: Faculty and platform party members robed in academic regalia processed into the gathering to the strains of *Pomp and Circumstance*. Students, administrators, trustees, and alumni spoke from the podium. Graduates walked across the stage as their names were announced and each was photographed shaking the hand of the Principal as their friends and families cheered.

What made the event so moving was the graduates. Hailing from low-income families in the San Diego area, each student will be the first in their family to attend college – and every single one has been accepted to matriculate at a 4-year institution of higher education this fall. Entering the Preuss School initially as strangers from different neighborhoods or elementary schools, these students have clearly bonded with one another during their seven years at Preuss. Everything from the loud cheers greeting each new graduate to the many common experiences the salutatorian and valedictorian mentioned in their addresses bespoke this closeness. They had also formed warm, appreciative relationships with their teachers and advisors, as shown by the hugs and handshakes they exchanged during the emotional walk across the stage.

Some of the most special moments came during the address by the Alumni Speaker, a young man raised by a single mother who knew how vital education was for her son's future. Currently a doctoral student at Stanford, he recalled how hard he had to work on studying during his years at Preuss – even though he now realizes others may have thought academics came easily to him. He charged the graduates to maintain their focus during college, and not to be fooled if others *appear* not to succeed effortlessly. An absolutely stellar role model himself, he asked the seniors to come back to the school, on occasion, to show the younger students what they can aspire to accomplish.

Midway through his speech, the Alumni Speaker referred to the school tradition of having students memorize the prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*... in Middle English. In response, they spontaneously began to recite it *en masse*, drawing on one another's memories as the words progressed. Their evident joy at having mastered this piece and made it their own was stunning.

Sitting on the platform, waiting for the honor of shaking their hands in congratulations, I could only marvel at the power of a school that welcomes students whom our society does not

expect to succeed academically and that actively helps them take up the torch of scholarship to enlighten their lives.

UC San Diego celebrates the 2018 graduates of the Preuss School and will be exceedingly proud to welcome over two dozen of them as new Triton first-year students in the fall.