

RESPONSE FROM THE CLASS OF 2017

President Daniels:

I am pleased to introduce Jasmine Linabary, who was selected to be this morning's student responder in recognition of her leadership in many student and campus organizations.

Jasmine is receiving a Doctorate of Philosophy in Communication today. Upon graduation, she will remain at Purdue as the associate director of research and operations for the Purdue Peace Project.

Please welcome Jasmine Linabary.

Dr. Jasmine Linabary:

Thank you, President Daniels, for that introduction and the opportunity to speak on behalf of graduating students today.

At Purdue, we are often reminded that we stand on the shoulders of giants – giants like astronaut Neil Armstrong, Civil Rights activist Helen Bass Williams, Academy Award-winning screenwriter Callie Khouri, and our speaker today, Brian Lamb, founder of CSPAN. But those are not the only shoulders on which we stand. My story is not just my story, but one of the generations, particularly of women, who came before me.

I would like to use my speech today to encourage us to reflect on those who came before us, because knowing where we came from is key to knowing where we are going next.

I come from a long line of strong and persistent frontier women who were educators, storytellers, and community-builders. Each of them has transformed the lives of those around them for the better. All were bright women who recognized the value of education, though were not always able to pursue it.

My great-grandmother, Ruth, graduated valedictorian from her high school in Nebraska at the age of 15 and received a scholarship to go to business school, but her family had no money to send her. Both of my great-grandmothers – Ruth and Bertha – moved West to Montana with their families based on promises of land and a better life, enduring the Great Depression, droughts, and frigid winters, in which they did not have money to buy coal or wood to keep warm. They labored, alongside their husbands and children, to farm untilled soil, run dairies, feed their families, and build community in their small towns.

My grandmother, Pat, who is in the audience today, was also valedictorian at her high school but unable to afford college at the time. She has always had a strong

desire for learning, so after retirement she has taken some college courses. Both of my grandmothers are and were equally bright and persistent – Pat, who carried the load of her family during her husband’s military service and then later worked for a newspaper and then as an office manager at an irrigation district, and Paulette, a school teacher, columnist for her community newspaper, and single-mother. Both became highly active in their communities, finding ways to make the world better for those around them.

My own mother, Jill, graduated from high school on the honor roll, but despite being on the dean’s list, dropped out of college to marry my father. She later attended night classes to finish her degree while working and raising two young girls as a single-mother. She worked hard to make ends meet, not having the luxury of seeking a career path she was passionate about. Now that her daughters are grown, I stand in awe of the ways she seeks to engage in work she finds meaningful and that impacts her community.

Today, I am the first woman in my extended family to earn a PhD. It is the often-unrecognized labor and resilience of the women who came before me that made possible the path I am on, a path I imagine none of them thought possible. This path has taken me from graduating with honors from high school and college to working as a reporter and managing editor for newspapers, to attending graduate school, where I have had opportunities to travel nationally and internationally and to engage in research and teaching that makes a difference in the world. I really can’t imagine that either of my great-grandmothers, while trying simply to survive on the Western frontier, could have ever imagined that their great-granddaughter would have the opportunity, for example, to travel to West Africa to help prevent political violence, work I engage in as part of the Purdue Peace Project.

By looking back at how far we’ve come, it helps us to see where we are going and the legacy we someday want to have. Reflections on the women who came before me encourage me to seek to make the world better, to persist when times are trying, and, hopefully, to pave a path that enables future generations to go where not even I thought possible. Today, I thank the women who came before me. This achievement is as much theirs as it is mine. I call on each of you to reflect on the legacies of those who came before you and on whose shoulders we all stand – thank them, learn from them, and then set out into the world to make your own mark, charting paths that were previously unimaginable and paving the way for those who come after.

Thank you.